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Public Education: Building Awareness and Understanding

Public education is essential in confronting the problems posed by ignorance and misconceptions regarding our place in Canadian history and the nature of our rights. All Canadians should have the knowledge required to understand our situation, as well as the knowledge that what we have sought all along is mutual respect and coexistence.

Robert Debassige
Tribal Chairman and Executive Director
United Chiefs and Councils of Manitoulin
Toronto, Ontario 18 November 1993

The Métis voice has been silent for far too long. Our non-representation or misrepresentation in mainstream media must be countered by effective and ongoing communication of our realities, both to our own people and to non-Aboriginal people of this country...[I]f the rate of growth of Native development and awareness is not increased dramatically, then the probability of [our] people assuming their rightful place in society in the future is very low.

Gerald Thom
President, Metis Nation of Alberta
Ottawa, Ontario 4 November 1993

There is a whole lot of misinterpretation as well as misconceptions about Native people. People who may live right next to an Indian reserve will not have the slightest idea of what Native people are all about and that is very sad. It is only through education that both cultures can overcome this barrier.

Sheena Jackson
Lethbridge, Alberta
24 May 1993

FROM THE COMMISSION'S FIRST DAYS, we have been reminded repeatedly of the limited understanding of Aboriginal issues among non-Aboriginal Canadians and of the obstacles this presents to achieving reconciliation and a new relationship. As one intervener described it, there is a "vacuum of consciousness" among non-Aboriginal people. We would go further to suggest a pervasive lack of knowledge and perhaps even of interest.

Most Canadians still give low priority to the issues of importance to Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal people in Canada continue to suffer the damaging effects of bias and racism at the hands of other Canadians. The news media generally devote little effort to providing information on Aboriginal issues. Very few institutions try to bridge the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people or between different Aboriginal peoples.

Without accurate knowledge it is all too easy for negative stereotypes and simple ignorance to strangle communication. As François Trudel, a Laval university anthropologist, told us,

The first principle [of cultural accommodation] is knowledge of the other...I believe that it is the most fundamental principle in any human relationship, whether between individuals or between groups, and that so long as there is a lack of knowledge of the other, any prospect for establishing or re-establishing the ethnic and social relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal may be illusory, if not utopian. [translation]

François Trudel
Head, Department of Anthropology, Laval University
Wendake, Quebec, 17 November 1992

Yet knowledge alone is insufficient to change fundamental attitudes. Despite an overlay of concern, it does not take much provocation to uncover prejudiced attitudes and deep-seated hostility among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike. Sound information is an important element in overcoming this hostility. But also needed are opportunities for meaningful interaction as well as strong public role-modelling by leaders of both sectors — and not only the political leadership. Finally, ways need to be found to make discriminatory and racist behaviour unacceptable in private as well as public circles. The building of an open and inclusive society is a complex process that extends well beyond what is commonly understood as public education.

Brian Dickson, the former chief justice of Canada appointed to advise the prime minister on the Commission's mandate, emphasized the importance of public education. He saw the Commission itself as a vehicle for increasing public awareness of Aboriginal issues. Acting on his advice, we conducted extensive public hearings and round table consultations and published commentaries, discussion papers, special reports, and research studies. Special initiatives have included information videos, a telephone hot-line in Aboriginal languages as well as in English and French, and the CD-ROM version of our final and special reports, public hearings transcripts, and some of our research studies.

In this chapter, our purpose is to address the practical question of how to approach public education and the changing of public attitudes in a period of tight budgets and limited attention spans. If a major and sustained effort in public education is required, as we believe it is, where and how should it begin?

By public education we mean activities that can help increase public awareness of Aboriginal issues and contribute to reconciliation and understanding. They include news coverage and media activity of all sorts; conferences and seminars; awareness activities

in schools, workplaces and communities and in local and national organizations; the use of symbols and cultural activities; and special initiatives such as exchanges between families, communities and associations and twinning between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities or organizations.

Ultimately the kinds of activities we are advocating will influence social change, affecting people's behaviour and attitudes. They need to be undertaken as a long-term endeavour, for it will take time to change biased perceptions that have developed over generations. Innovative techniques will be required to break through the veil of indifference among non-Aboriginal Canadians and create opportunities for direct contacts between people.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike have a common interest in creating a new relationship based on mutual respect and reconciliation. The benefits to Aboriginal people and their communities are obvious, whether measured in terms of autonomy, healing, cultural recognition or economic development. For non-Aboriginal people, the benefit lies in the opportunity for Canadians to move beyond policies that are the failed relics of colonialism. This will change Canada's reputation abroad and people's self-respect at home, as Nora Dewar Allingham commented in an essay on racism submitted at our public hearings by the Canadian Teachers' Federation:

If I work to maintain the power of the dominant White group, I can continue to participate in the privilege that power confers. If I work to empower others, I am unlikely to be a direct recipient of any privilege that they may gain. I will, however, be a member of a society for which I feel less shame and anger and in which I may be able to participate more equally and more richly. I fear a social order which diminishes groups and individuals — I am equally diminished.¹

Public education should be interactive and promote dialogue, balance, and a sense of sharing. Many of the successful examples of public education involve local consultation, face-to-face contact and collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on a basis of equality. Direct personal contact works to dispel stereotypes and lower barriers to co-operation.

A number of corporations and governments have been successful in developing a focus on Aboriginal issues, through approaches such as affirmative action, cross-cultural training, and the appointment of Aboriginal people to boards of directors, senior executive positions, and government agencies and commissions.

Our public hearings stimulated a number of non-Aboriginal organizations to establish internal task forces and mechanisms to ensure they are sensitive to Aboriginal issues. These pioneering initiatives have not yet become common, but they are valuable precedents for the future.

Recommendation

The Commission recommends that

5.4.1

Public education on Aboriginal issues be based on the following principles:

(a) Building public awareness and understanding should become an integral and continuing part of every endeavour and every initiative in which Aboriginal people, their organizations and governments are involved and in which non-Aboriginal governments and stakeholders have a part.

(b) Public education should involve both the sharing of information and a process of interaction, leading in time to a shared sense of advocacy and of public support.

(c) Non-Aboriginal organizations and corporations should establish internal mechanisms to make themselves aware of the distinctive needs of Aboriginal people whom they serve or employ and to ensure that they respond to those needs.

1. Making Public Education a Reality

1.1 Creating Dialogue

We turn now to specific suggestions and ideas that can contribute to raising public awareness. One of the priorities brought to our attention is the need for personal contact and interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, both individually and in groups. A number of interveners spoke of the need for bridging, for opportunities for dialogue. One was an ad hoc group of 22 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people, formed with the support of Quebec's youth advisory committee (Comité permanent de la jeunesse). The other, the Forum paritaire (Quebec Equality Forum), brought together Aboriginal leaders with leaders of non-Aboriginal unions and other groups to seek common ground on the future of Aboriginal people in Quebec.

Another group, the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (ARC, initially known as Project North), acts as a collective voice on Aboriginal issues for Canada's churches and has attempted to perform a bridging role. Its membership includes some Aboriginal representatives. ARC has been effective in many of its efforts in public education, notably during the time of the northern pipeline inquiry, when the question of developing a pipeline on the Mackenzie River was opened to direct input from the communities concerned. Project North helped to make northern development an issue across the country by bringing Aboriginal speakers from the North to town meetings and public forums in southern Canada.

Some organizations have already shown a capacity to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people — notably a few municipal governments serving a significant Aboriginal population; some churches; some trade unions; a number of educational institutions at every level; friendship centres; and, on occasion, federal, provincial and

territorial governments. Together, these institutions have the potential to touch the lives of most Canadians. They present a fertile field for action, and there are many precedents on which to build.

1.2 Cross-Cultural Communication

The goal of cross-cultural training is to sensitize persons whose work brings them into contact with people of another culture to the others' characteristics and needs. Some employers have begun to provide such training in the workplace. B.C. Hydro provides cross-cultural training workshops for its employees across the province. Hydro-Québec has a similar program for employees whose work involves Aboriginal people or communities. In Ontario, the provincial government supported an initiative of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union that has taken more than 300 of its leaders and senior staff through cross-cultural training schools held on Aboriginal territory.²

Many opportunities exist for cross-cultural communication. There is a tremendous need for accessible materials that can be used in schools, in adult education and by community organizations. The abridged version of this report and the CD-ROM version (which is accompanied by a guide for educators) are intended to help fill that need, as are certain key chapters from this report itself, such as the chapters on the Aboriginal dimension of Canadian history in Volume 1 and the treaty relationship in Volume 2.

Cross-cultural education can take place through the print and broadcast media and through community conferences, workshops and task forces. Quebec has shown a particular aptitude for bringing diverse groups together through the use of tables de concertation, a form of round table or task force involving community leaders meeting regularly for a period of several weeks or months.

Aboriginal communities can open their doors to visitors from surrounding areas as well as to eco-tourists from abroad and create jobs in the process. Friendship centres and communities can help bring the Aboriginal past to life by producing information profiles on local Aboriginal history. The potential exists almost everywhere for exchange visits, participation in ceremonies and festivals, work placements, and various forms of twinning to encourage communication between cultures.

Australia has taken several initiatives in recent years aimed at creating a new relationship with its Aboriginal population. These include the very successful use of a network of hundreds of community-based reconciliation study circles, which are linked with other activities such as public meetings with Aboriginal speakers and projects to identify Aboriginal sacred sites. The Australian government produced 4,000 local history kits to assist the efforts of parents' committees and Aboriginal organizations to promote learning about local indigenous history.

In 1990 Australia established a national Council on Aboriginal Reconciliation with a distinguished Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal membership. Its mandate includes educating non-Aboriginal Australians about Aboriginal history and cultures and

developing proposals for a treaty or some other form of national reconciliation. It has produced an impressive series of booklets outlining major issues and calling for public response. Similar initiatives would be of benefit in Canada. We have recommended the creation of a major project to develop a general history of Aboriginal peoples (see Volume 1, Chapter 7) as well as agreements to identify and set aside sites that are sacred and of historical significance to Aboriginal peoples for Aboriginal management and, where appropriate, development of public information.

2. Stakeholder Groups

Two main groups of stakeholders can be distinguished for purposes of public education: those with a broad mandate and a constituency that includes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and those with particular interests that may be affected by changes in Aboriginal communities and by the exercise of Aboriginal rights. Religious institutions, municipalities, and the education sector belong to the first group. Those with particular interests include service providers, people with environmental concerns, resource users such as hunters and outfitters, and a range of business organizations and companies. The labour movement has a foot in each camp.

2.1 Religious Institutions

Of all the non-governmental institutions in Canadian society, religious institutions have perhaps the greatest potential to foster awareness and understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. This potential exists even though the Christian churches' historical role was often that of supporting the dominant society and contributing to the marginalization of Aboriginal people.

Religious institutions can make a unique contribution today and in the future for several reasons. They are physically present in most communities across the country; through their organizational structures they can participate in public discussions at every level of Canadian society, from the neighbourhood to the national scene. Churches have had a long, albeit problematic, historical association with Aboriginal people. Some also have a track record in promoting public awareness of Aboriginal concerns. This is evident in activities such as the Aboriginal Rights Coalition and in internal restructuring to encourage greater Aboriginal involvement in church affairs, such as the All Native Circle of the United Church of Canada.

These institutions can provide a channel for distributing accurate information about Aboriginal culture and society along with the facilities to encourage public discussion of issues as they emerge. They have the capacity to facilitate interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people not only at worship, but through the wide range of related service clubs and other organizations serving all ages that are found in most congregations.

Canada's religious bodies bring an ethical framework to issues of community and interpersonal relations, both nationally and locally. They are perceived as carrying moral

authority and the capacity to exert leadership in their communities. This is a valuable resource, for the work of reconciliation has just begun, and they have a vital role in this process.

They can also engage in advocacy at the local level, particularly in cases where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are becoming polarized around conflicts relating to lands or resources. Local bodies often have the stature to step in and help moderate such conflicts. Better still, they can try to anticipate situations of this kind and to help develop strategies to avoid polarization.

2.2 Municipalities

In Volume 4, Chapter 7 we offered several recommendations that address the relationship of Aboriginal people to municipal governments and mainstream institutions in urban centres. These included the creation of designated positions for Aboriginal representatives on local agencies, boards and commissions and the creation of Aboriginal affairs committees to advise city councils and school boards.

Like the religious institutions, municipal governments have enormous potential to promote public education and to contribute to constructive interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. There is some form of local government in every corner of Canada. Mayors and local councillors hold positions of respect and can use their influence to fight racism and to bring communities closer together. Local governments have the capacity to organize forums, festivals, and cultural events that give Aboriginal people and issues a higher profile. Town halls, public libraries and community centres have the physical facilities to host displays on Aboriginal history and culture and events aimed at promoting understanding. Initiatives like Calgary's annual Native Awareness Week provide models that could be emulated in every city across Canada.

Municipalities should be leaders in ensuring that police and other employees receive regular cross-cultural training. They should be addressing practices that have tended to restrict the access of Aboriginal people to municipal employment in many communities. If a municipality supports community economic development or provides grants for groups involved in the arts and social services, it should give Aboriginal groups the same consideration as other citizens.

In its submission to the Commission, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) cited a number of promising innovations through which local governments are building links with Aboriginal populations and creating awareness in the process. The FCM called for a joint strategy to strengthen ties between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Their recommendations reflect a spirit that we wholeheartedly support:

Municipal leaders must combine efforts with Aboriginal leaders, both nationally and locally, to identify barriers of mistrust, misperception, racism and systemic discrimination....Municipalities must be proactive and supportive [in achieving

successful relations with Aboriginal people]...Improved Aboriginal political participation and managerial representation at the municipal level must be pursued.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Montreal, Quebec
1 December 1993

2.3 Educational Institutions

Since formal education is examined at length in Volume 3, our concern here is how the education system can contribute to building awareness and understanding of Aboriginal issues outside regular classroom instruction. Like municipalities, school boards have an obligation to Aboriginal constituents that is often not fulfilled. They too have the physical facilities and the resources to organize programs and events that reach out to inform the non-Aboriginal population and promote interaction.

Community colleges (CEGEPs in Quebec) and universities are similarly endowed. They can organize continuing education programs on a collaborative basis with Aboriginal communities and organizations. They have the skills to work with students and outside bodies to develop a knowledge of local Aboriginal history and to make it known throughout the community. They have the capacity to prepare discussion guides and information kits on Aboriginal issues and to assist people to organize study groups in the community. They can bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with common interests together through conferences and workshops, particularly when there are contentious issues — such as British Columbia's treaty process — that need to be better understood. We also hope that these institutions will be catalysts for discussion of our report and recommendations.

Post-secondary institutions can give their students direct experience of Aboriginal communities by organizing work placements. The recent emergence of Aboriginal student centres and resource centres at several universities is an important development, both for the support they provide to Aboriginal students and for their contribution to understanding of Aboriginal issues among non-Aboriginal students.

2.4 Labour Unions

Although unions have a significant number of Aboriginal members, they have only recently begun to acknowledge Aboriginal people as a constituency and to address their concerns. Unions have traditionally supported the cause of Aboriginal rights but have not devoted much time to exploring how the exercise of those rights may affect their current members. Some Aboriginal people have risen to senior positions within the labour movement, including Ethel LaValley, who was elected to the newly created position of Aboriginal vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) in 1994.

Clearly there are still many problems in the relationship between Aboriginal people and unions. Rules designed to protect the job security of unionized workers can serve as obstacles to Aboriginal people seeking to be hired or trained. The union may be blamed if

an employer decides not to take on Aboriginal workers. When jobs are scarce, as is the case in most northern areas, these problems are inevitably more acute. This can be particularly difficult as Aboriginal communities seek to increase the number of Aboriginal people working in fields such as education, child welfare and other social outreach activities where cultural awareness and understanding have a high importance.

At our hearings, the CLC put forward a comprehensive program to develop awareness of Aboriginal issues at all levels of the labour movement, using resources such as union newspapers, videos, and training programs. It said that unions should reach out to Aboriginal students and communities in an effort to counter the negative perceptions of unions among Aboriginal people. It proposed that employers agree to collaborative employment equity programs in the workplace and allow Aboriginal awareness and anti-racism training to be provided during working hours.

We welcome the approach taken by the CLC, as well as other signs that the labour movement is taking constructive steps to reach out to Aboriginal people. Unions have a history of commitment to social justice and have established programs to train and educate their members. These assets can and should be used to help raise awareness and understanding of Aboriginal issues. At the same time there is a need to develop more creative and flexible solutions to practical problems in relations between Aboriginal people and unions, especially at the local level.

2.5 Professional Organizations

Our hearings indicated that many professional bodies are beginning to look at the concerns of their Aboriginal membership or the need for greater awareness and understanding of Aboriginal issues. Two examples illustrate the progress being made. Beginning in 1990, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) established a two-year working group on Aboriginal health; brought an Aboriginal physician onto its staff through an executive interchange with Health Canada; held a conference to examine Aboriginal health issues; and developed a series of proposals dealing with government policy and the CMA's own activities. It also supported the development of the Native Physicians' Association, which operates independently but has become a strong influence on Aboriginal health issues within the CMA.

The organization of Quebec lawyers, the Barreau du Québec, has also taken steps that promise a continuing focus on Aboriginal issues. It created a standing committee on Aboriginal law in 1993 and established a program of information and training on Aboriginal issues for Quebec jurists in 1994. At our hearings the organization undertook to designate members who could assist in providing information to the public and to Aboriginal communities with respect to Aboriginal rights. It expressed particular interest in learning from Aboriginal people about non-judicial means of dispute settlement.

Professional bodies are generally seen as credible by their members, and they have mechanisms to provide education and training. These bodies can have a substantial influence if they decide to make Aboriginal issues a priority.

2.6 Other Stakeholders

Many other stakeholders are potentially affected by changes in Aboriginal communities and by the development of Aboriginal rights. Their diversity is reflected, for example, in the broad range of third-party interests represented on the treaty advisory committee established as part of the British Columbia treaty process.

These other stakeholders sometimes raise obstacles to the exercise of Aboriginal rights, but many are also in a position to help the non-Aboriginal population gain a greater understanding of Aboriginal issues. A number of national associations have established task forces or special committees, for example, to focus their members' attention on Aboriginal issues.

As the economic strength of Aboriginal people increases, corporations and financial institutions have begun to focus on Aboriginal issues by establishing Aboriginal business units and moving Aboriginal people into senior executive positions. The Bank of Montreal, the Royal Bank, the Toronto Dominion Bank and certain provincial utilities are examples. Syncrude, a large producer of synthetic oil in Alberta, has linked awareness activities and cross-cultural training with recruitment of Aboriginal workers and programs to support the development of Aboriginal communities and businesses.³ For business, the value of these initiatives can be measured not just in goodwill but in opening doors for profitable collaboration in Aboriginal economic development.

Recommendation

The Commission recommends that

5.4.2

Bodies that represent or serve both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people

- (a) be proactive and innovative in promoting understanding of Aboriginal issues; and
- (b) review their own activities to ensure that they contribute to cross-cultural understanding and enhance relations with Aboriginal people.

3. Aboriginal Organizations

Aboriginal people and their organizations have a critical role to play. National Chief Ovide Mercredi of the Assembly of First Nations made this point to an Australian conference in 1993. He warned that Indigenous peoples need to act and went on to offer this counsel:

[Y]our strongest ally in the end will be public opinion. Not the government's but public opinion. You have to organize to shape it. You have to organize so that they become your

friends, your supporters....You have to focus on the conduct of their governments and you make their governments the issue, not the people whose support you need.⁴

Aboriginal people living in Canada have many agendas. For some the priority is self-government and control of their own territory; for others, notably in urban areas, it is how to maintain a distinct culture in a context of continuing interdependence. Whatever the issues, it is critical that Aboriginal people reach out for support to advance their cause. The need for networks and linkages to non-Aboriginal organizations must be recognized even if the cause being advanced is greater autonomy.

Aboriginal organizations can be the key to creating opportunities for interpersonal contact. Visits to reserves to meet with elders, educators and leaders should be encouraged; Aboriginal speakers could be made available for public forums where they can explain issues and respond to questions; pow wows and other events should encourage access by people from surrounding non-Aboriginal communities. The content of these encounters does not have to be political; understanding can develop through visits of youth groups or sports teams or through exchanges between school classes.

Aboriginal organizations can also be agents of change, prodding and lobbying society's institutions to examine how they can respond better to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities. These initiatives can provide graphic illustration of the problems facing Aboriginal people, as, for example, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs did in its mass filing of employment equity complaints in 1991 involving discrimination against Aboriginal workers.

We heard statements at our hearings, mainly in Quebec, about the reluctance of Aboriginal leaders and governments to accept invitations to speak or to establish advisory links with neighbouring municipalities. People in Quebec also asked that Aboriginal leaders in that province be prepared to communicate in French as well as in English, as a sign of mutual respect. These concerns should be addressed.

Aboriginal youth should be singled out for attention, in particular those growing up in urban areas away from direct contact with their home territories. In Volume 4, Chapter 7, we commended friendship centres for their work in providing a social and cultural focus for urban Aboriginal people as well as a point of contact with the non-Aboriginal population. We proposed the creation of urban cultural education programs that would extend services to Aboriginal people and allow for more outreach to non-Aboriginal residents.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that

5.4.3

Aboriginal people and organizations participate in the process of public education through direct involvement, by creating opportunities for interpersonal contact and by acting as agents of change in Canadian society.

5.4.4

Aboriginal organizations and governments include their own members and citizens in efforts to build greater public understanding of Aboriginal issues and the changes now affecting Aboriginal communities.

4. The Media

Most of the information Canadians acquire about Aboriginal people and societies comes from the news and entertainment media. (See Volume 3, Chapter 6, for a more detailed discussion.) When the media address Aboriginal issues, the impressions they convey are often distorted. As the Assembly of First Nations put it in its submission at our hearings:

Many Canadians have little, if any interaction with First Nations peoples in their daily lives and are likely to develop images and perceptions from newspaper articles, television programs, and commercials. Too many of those still perpetuate stereotypes which foster racism and discriminatory practices....

The tendency of the media is to emphasize conflict, differences, violence, death and destruction. The media pay less attention to harmony, consensus, peace, life and growth. The media's insistence on the immediacy of news accelerates public discussion and heightens tension. It...is at odds with the more leisurely pace of life in First Nations communities.

Assembly of First Nations
Ottawa, Ontario 5 November 1993

The Canadian Association of Journalists was equally critical:

Canada's Aboriginal peoples are, in general, badly served by national and local media, whether Native or not. The country's large newspapers, TV and radio news shows often contain misinformation, sweeping generalizations and galling stereotypes about Natives and Native affairs. Their stories are usually presented by journalists with little background knowledge or understanding of Aboriginals and their communities.

The large media outlets include shamefully few Aboriginals either on their staffs or among their freelance journalists. As well, very few so-called mainstream media consider Aboriginal affairs to be a subject worthy of regular attention....The result is that most Canadians have little real knowledge of the country's Native peoples, or of the issues which affect them.

Charles Bury
Chair, Canadian Association of Journalists
Ottawa, Ontario, 15 November 1993

There are only a handful of Aboriginal people among the 2,600 journalists working at major newspapers across Canada. The situation is not much better in radio and television, apart from the vigorous, but poorly funded, Aboriginal broadcast media serving northern Canada. For the past decade there have been very few regular Aboriginal programs on the major television networks (a subject considered at greater length in Volume 3, Chapter 6). The popular CBC production, “North of 60”, demonstrates the potential for quality treatment of Aboriginal themes.

The best way for news media to convey a more accurate understanding of Aboriginal issues is to include Aboriginal journalists on their staffs. This is more than a matter of waiting to be asked for a job:

It is no longer acceptable for the mainstream media to use the excuse that Native people don’t apply for jobs on their newspapers, radio stations or television stations. The mainstream media owe it to their communities to reflect their cities, towns and rural areas by making their newsrooms as diverse as their communities. They have to actively pursue Native journalists to fill those voids in their newsrooms and to enhance and reflect the coverage of Native issues.

Lynda Powless
Native Journalists Association
London, Ontario, 11 May 1993

Aboriginal people are becoming a significant element in the audience of the major media, particularly in urban centres in western Canada. It is time for the media to recognize their presence by hiring Aboriginal journalists and broadcasters and by reporting on the achievements of Aboriginal communities, not just the problems. Some media outlets have begun to acknowledge this responsibility, for example, by providing background reports about complex issues such as treaty negotiations. This commitment should become the norm.

In Volume 3 we noted the contribution of Aboriginal media to public education in Aboriginal communities. Despite severe cutbacks in funding, Aboriginal communications societies continue to share in a national Aboriginal television service, Television Northern Canada (TVNC), as well as providing extensive community and regional radio programming. These services are not available in most southern cities, and there are no plans to provide an Aboriginal channel on cable TV. The absence of such services is unfortunate for urban Aboriginal people; it is also a serious loss for the non-Aboriginal population.

TVNC is already transmitted by satellite while continuing to serve the North; it could provide a foundation for regular Aboriginal programming that could reach the majority of Canadians in urban areas via cable. This would be an important instrument for popular education directed to the mainstream population and an important resource to support education about Aboriginal issues in the schools. A comparable service in French and Aboriginal languages should be available in Quebec.

Aboriginal performers such as Tom Jackson, Susan Aglukark and Robbie Robertson and groups like Kashtin have become increasingly prominent in popular entertainment. In recognition, the music industry has established a special Aboriginal category in the annual Juno awards. Lawrence Martin was the first winner of the award in 1994, followed by Susan Aglukark in 1995. The same year singer and songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie was named to the Canadian Music Hall of Fame for her contribution to greater international recognition of Canadian artists and music.

In drama, the flavour of life in Aboriginal communities has been conveyed with humour and understanding in productions such as “North of 60” and “The Rez”, in Tomson Highway’s plays, and in the work of writer/performers like Margo Kane. These breakthroughs build Aboriginal pride and erase stereotypical images among the mainstream population.

In 1993 the Canadian Native Arts Foundation launched the first annual Aboriginal Achievement Awards to honour Aboriginal people for cultural achievements and other contributions to the community. Many other opportunities exist to give visible recognition to the achievements of Aboriginal people; the creation of one or more Governor General’s Awards for Aboriginal literature might be a good place to start.

A number of alternative media have begun to emerge that have significant potential to broaden public understanding of Aboriginal issues. These include the new speciality channels on cable television; data bases and interactive materials on CD-ROM; computer bulletin boards and the Internet; and a proliferation of new newspapers and magazines. Alternative media are hungry for material and are attracting loyal audiences, in part because of their capacity to respond to audience needs through their formats and the communication medium chosen.

Outside major cities it is difficult for journalists, researchers and policy analysts to obtain information on Aboriginal issues. New technology can be of particular use in this area. The cost of maintaining a computerized data bank on Aboriginal issues, with access via the Internet, would be low relative to the number of potential users and the amount of information available. An institution like the proposed Aboriginal Peoples International University would be an obvious candidate to provide this kind of resource. In Volume 3, Chapter 5, we recommend the creation of such an electronic clearinghouse.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that

5.4.5

Canadian media reflect the growing presence of Aboriginal people in their audience or readership by hiring Aboriginal journalists and broadcasters and by giving greater priority to coverage of Aboriginal issues and communities.

5.4.6

Aboriginal radio and television programming be available to all Canadians via cable TV, building on the service of TV Northern Canada and the radio services of Aboriginal communications societies.

5. Symbols and Special Occasions

We have already mentioned the successful evolution of Calgary's Native Awareness Week, a mid-summer celebration that now includes participation by elders, Aboriginal art and film exhibitions, drama and variety shows, a pow wow, and a conference on doing business with Aboriginal people. Originally a collaboration between the Calgary Friendship Centre and the city's Chamber of Commerce, the week is now organized by a board with equal representation from the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

Marlena Dolan of the Calgary Aboriginal Awareness Society told us of the need for sharing and awareness that inspired the foundation of Calgary's celebration:

An accumulation of misconceptions and stereotypical branding has manifested an ignorance of Native people and elements of their culture. Native Awareness Week has helped clarify some of these misconceptions by providing an opportunity for the community at large to get involved and, in some situations, break the silence that has perpetuated the obvious fear of the unknown culture.

Marlena Dolan
Calgary Aboriginal Awareness Society
Calgary, Alberta, 26 May 1993

Similar success has been achieved by the three major Aboriginal organizations in Nova Scotia, which set out to establish a Treaty Day tradition in Nova Scotia after the 1752 treaty between the Mi'kmaq Nation and the British Crown was declared valid in court a decade ago. The celebration, established by the Union of Nova Scotia Indians, the Mi'kmaq Grand Council and the Native Council of Nova Scotia, has grown into an event that now involves the provincial government, municipalities, businesses, and the non-Aboriginal community. In 1994 the Nova Scotia government sent a video explaining the significance of Treaty Day to schools across the province and formally declared October to be Mi'kmaq History Month across the province. Ceremonies that had been confined to Halifax are now spreading to include the whole province. A similar evolution could occur in Manitoba with the annual Métis commemoration of Louis Riel Day on November 16th. The 1994 celebration included a reception hosted by the Honourable Yvon Dumont, Canada's first Métis lieutenant governor.

Events such as these provide an occasion to focus attention on the history and achievements of Aboriginal people and on the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. Care should be taken to ensure that these events are part of an evolving relationship and are not merely symbolic.

The Assembly of First Nations and some other Aboriginal organizations designate June 21st as a National Day of Solidarity for Aboriginal People across Canada.⁵ The Quebec National Assembly has also designated a National Day of Aboriginal Peoples on the same date, which marks the summer solstice.⁶ This concept of a national day should be extended to all Aboriginal peoples, on a date designated jointly by Parliament and the national Aboriginal organizations. This date could also mark the formal acceptance by Canada and by First Peoples of the new Royal Proclamation we recommended in Volume 2, Chapter 2.

The designation of a national First Peoples Day should not exclude continuing to celebrate Louis Riel Day and treaty days for their intrinsic value and as instruments of public education. Beginning in 1995, the United Nations designated 9 August as the International Day of Indigenous Peoples; it should also be honoured as part of Canada's commitment to the United Nations Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that

5.4.7

Parliament and the national Aboriginal organizations jointly designate a national First Peoples Day to coincide with the issuing of a new Royal Proclamation and to be celebrated annually across Canada.

5.4.8

Special events such as Aboriginal Awareness Weeks be organized under joint Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal direction in all municipalities with a substantial Aboriginal population.

5.4.9

The commemoration of important occurrences in Aboriginal history through events such as treaty days and Louis Riel Day be expanded as a means of building solidarity and a vehicle for public education.

Aboriginal people have a powerful understanding of the importance of symbols. Symbols demonstrate the uniqueness of a place, a group, or an idea. They are a vehicle for public awareness and popular education. This significance is not lost on other Canadians; the federal government highlights Canada's Aboriginal heritage in projecting this country's image abroad. A striking example is the monumental sculpture by the Haida artist, Bill Reid, the focal point of Canada's embassy in Washington, D.C.

At home in Canada, there could be more such symbols and monuments to demonstrate the importance of Aboriginal people in Canada's history and to bring more Aboriginal

content into the daily lives of Canadians. Many opportunities exist. An excellent example is the strong Aboriginal influence in the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec, by architect Douglas Cardinal.

Systematic efforts could be made to choose or restore Aboriginal names for communities and for geographic features such as lakes, rivers, and mountains. This approach has been implemented in a systematic way in the Northwest Territories and in Northern Quebec, where places like Iqaluit (formerly Frobisher Bay) and Kuujuaq (formerly Fort Chimo) have become household names.

Dual naming has become an accepted practice in Australia, allowing both the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal name to be used for some geographic features and place names. This practice could be used in Canada to remind people living in cities of the Aboriginal origin of their communities. City street names often honour leaders and heroes; more of those honoured should be Aboriginal people.

Other opportunities that should be considered include the following:

- Aboriginal leaders and elders could be called upon to say prayers or to celebrate their ceremonies at the opening proceedings of Parliament and other elected bodies, citizenship courts, and important meetings and conventions. This is already a practice in some segments of the labour movement. The Commonwealth Games, held in Victoria in 1994, and the summit of the G-7 nations in Halifax in 1995 were opened with traditional ceremonies of welcome by the Aboriginal nations on whose territory the meetings were held.
- One or more Aboriginal languages could be used alongside English and French in important public documents such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the oath of citizenship to make new citizens more aware of the role of Aboriginal people in Canadian society.
- Aboriginal meeting places and sacred sites could be designated in cities or towns and used for ceremonies, for community events, and perhaps as sites for meetings and study groups aimed at broadening awareness and understanding of Aboriginal issues.
- Important events and sites in Aboriginal history could be marked by plaques, sculptures and museums, in the same way we now commemorate important non-Aboriginal historical events.
- Ceremonies that recall Canada's colonial history, such as the changing of the guard on the lawns of Parliament, could be complemented by events marking Aboriginal history and culture.
- Highway signs could mark the boundaries of traditional Aboriginal territories, just as they are now used to mark municipal and county boundaries. Municipalities could fly the Aboriginal flag for their territory as well as their own municipal emblem.

- Libraries and museums could emphasize the history, culture and current presence of Aboriginal people through regular displays and exhibitions. Similar exhibits could be located in public spaces such as shopping centres, corporate offices and city halls.

Recommendation

The Commission recommends that

5.4.10

Canadian governments recognize Aboriginal people's contribution to Canada through much greater use of Aboriginal place names, languages, ceremonies and exhibits and by honouring Aboriginal meeting places and historic sites.

6. Federal and Provincial Governments

Governments have an obvious responsibility to foster greater understanding because of their role in national and provincial life, the extent of their involvement with Aboriginal communities, and the resources they command.

The federal government should commit itself to making public education an integral part of all federal programs that affect Aboriginal people. Departments and agencies should be directed to explain how their activities affect Aboriginal people. Some of this information should be in popular form. Some should address myths and misconceptions about Aboriginal people and set the record straight.

Recent initiatives in public education involving governments and First Peoples are valuable precedents to be emulated. One example is the formation of a Tripartite Public Education Committee bringing Aboriginal people together with provincial and federal government representatives as part of the treaty process in British Columbia. Members of the committee have co-operated in preparing material and in organizing public meetings in areas where a treaty claim is being submitted. The three parties are to be involved in establishing local consultation committees in these areas, representing a broad range of community interests.

In Manitoba, communications and consultation with First Nations were made a priority as part of the recent agreement between the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. One of the first steps was to second the Assembly's director of communications to work from the department's regional office to provide information to Manitoba First Nations. In Ontario, a series of tripartite open houses helped to defuse initial resistance from the non-Aboriginal community to the announcement of a land claim by the Algonquins of Golden Lake.

6.1 Federal Departments and Agencies

The federal government should ensure its departments, agencies and commissions live up to the standards it advocates for the private sector in hiring Aboriginal people and in responding to Aboriginal needs. This requires regular review of federal programs for their content and relevance to Aboriginal people and the formation of Aboriginal advisory bodies to offer independent advice.

Cross-cultural training must become a requirement for all employees who work with Aboriginal clients or communities or who develop policies that affect Aboriginal people. Public servants should be exposed to different aspects of Aboriginal life through work assignments with Aboriginal communities or organizations. Aboriginal people should be seconded to work in the federal public service, both to raise awareness and to acquire experience in administering programs that will eventually come under Aboriginal control.

We are concerned about the lack of federal commitment to inform immigrants and people becoming citizens about Aboriginal people and their rights. The printed material that Canada offers to newcomers pays almost no attention to Aboriginal people and treats them as relics of the past. People can qualify for Canadian citizenship even if they have no knowledge of Canada's Aboriginal heritage.

Federal agencies can be powerful vehicles for public education and for advocacy and should be encouraged to use this potential. New institutions set up by governments to respond to Aboriginal needs — including the Aboriginal Peoples Review Commission that we propose in Chapter 1 of this volume to monitor the implementation of our recommendations — should have a mandate and adequate resources to engage in public education.

The federal government spends many millions of dollars each year on advertising and other forms of direct communication with Canadians. Channels of communication such as monthly pension cheque mail-outs should be treated as an opportunity to raise awareness of Aboriginal issues. Government tourism advertising can also be used to emphasize the presence and contribution of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society. Every opportunity for public education should be exploited, such as the Nova Scotia government's practice of including information about Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, prepared by the province's Aboriginal organizations, with every hunting licence issued.

6.2 Parliament and the Legislatures

Members of Parliament and their counterparts in provincial legislatures help form public opinion. Legislative committees on Aboriginal affairs are particularly important vehicles for public education because they can monitor government activities and provide a forum for Aboriginal people and organizations. They can also be a vehicle for Aboriginal people to participate directly in legislative work that touches Aboriginal concerns.

One of the most effective such committees was the House of Commons special committee on Indian self-government of 1982-83, chaired by Keith Penner, M.P. Its

impact was attributable in part to close co-operation with representatives of Aboriginal people, including the appointment of Roberta Jamieson of the Assembly of First Nations, Bill Wilson of the Native Council of Canada (now the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples), and Sandra Isaac of the Native Women's Association of Canada to sit with the committee as non-voting members. This precedent should be adopted as a model for the future. Legislative committees dealing with Aboriginal issues should plan to meet regularly with members of the Aboriginal Parliament once this is established. Joint committees or commissions of inquiry with membership from the House of Commons and the Aboriginal Parliament should be considered when issues of mutual concern arise.

6.3 Provincial Governments

Provincial governments have compelling reasons for wanting to raise public awareness and understanding of Aboriginal issues. Many of their responsibilities touch directly on the daily lives of Aboriginal people in a way that federal programs do not. They are also keenly aware of the value of building social harmony at the community level. Provincial governments can do a great deal to encourage local initiatives to build bridges of understanding and co-operation, and their commitment to public education on Aboriginal issues should be no less significant than that of the federal government. Many of the suggestions made with respect to the federal government can be adapted for use by the provinces.

Meetings of first ministers and Aboriginal leaders to discuss issues of common concern have enormous symbolic importance, particularly when they are seen by people across Canada through television coverage. First ministers conferences have also proved effective as instruments of public education, helping Canadians become familiar with Aboriginal issues and with concepts such as the inherent right of self-government.

In Chapter 1 of this volume we called for a conference of first ministers and leaders of the national Aboriginal organizations to initiate a process of fundamental reform leading to a new royal proclamation and companion legislation and the creation of a forum to develop a Canada-wide framework agreement.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that

5.4.11

Federal, provincial and territorial governments make public education an integral part of all programs that affect Aboriginal people and ensure that it is delivered in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations.

5.4.12

The federal government ensure that the history and present circumstances of Aboriginal peoples are communicated to immigrants and to persons becoming Canadian citizens.

7. Resources

It is necessary to provide sufficient resources for First Nations to launch public education campaigns on all issues related to First Nations in schools and communities. This should be done on both the national and regional level. The products of the campaign must be made available as widely as possible, including to new immigrants and those wishing to emigrate to Canada.

Tobaonakwut kinew
Grand Chief, Treaty 3, Assembly of First Nations
Ottawa, Ontario, 5 November 1993

We have recommended as a basic principle that building public awareness and understanding of Aboriginal issues become an integral part of every endeavour and every initiative relating to Aboriginal people. If this principle is accepted, most of the necessary resources can come from existing programs and budgets.

Establishing internal task forces or executive positions to deal with Aboriginal issues in interest groups, corporations and non-governmental organizations is a matter of reordering existing budgets and priorities. As unions, municipalities and educational institutions make a commitment to address Aboriginal issues, they will increase public education activity without adding significantly to costs.

Some efforts to support public education and dialogue about Aboriginal people have also succeeded in attracting corporate support. Notable examples are the Canadian Native Arts Foundation, established by the Mohawk conductor, John Kim Bell, and the in-service training programs organized by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. As the economic importance of Aboriginal communities grows, the opportunities for attracting sponsorship for public education activities can be expected to increase.

An alternative source of support that should be explored by Aboriginal organizations is the resources of their constituent members. At present the major Aboriginal organizations have almost no funds to support public information activities; yet the value of programs now being delivered under Aboriginal control, primarily by First Nations community governments, has risen to more than \$3 billion per year. It is a difficult choice to divert funds from programs that are often overstretched. This may be an unavoidable alternative, however, if Aboriginal voices are to be heard in raising public awareness of Aboriginal concerns.

The area of public education where new resources will be required is the extension of Aboriginal radio and television broadcasting to all areas of Canada as we suggest in Volume 3, Chapter 6. This would be a powerful initiative with value to the non-Aboriginal community as well as the large numbers of Aboriginal people now living in urban areas.

8. Immediate Steps

We conclude the chapter by turning to immediate issues. What can be done to ensure that the analysis and recommendations of this report are fully understood? What initial steps should be taken to start building the awareness needed for a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?

One of our priorities has been to help Canadians understand our findings and recommendations. To that end, we have produced an abridged version of our report, which will also be available in CD-ROM form. This electronic report is aimed at community groups, teachers, the media, researchers and students and includes a complete record of our hearings and special reports and much of our research. We hope it can be made available to students at every high school, college and university across Canada.

Our formal role as a Commission ends with the publication of this report. The task of turning its recommendations into reality rests with governments, with Aboriginal organizations, and with the stakeholders most directly involved. They will need to collaborate to build momentum for change and to overcome inertia and unfamiliarity.

This Commission conducted the most comprehensive review of issues affecting Aboriginal peoples ever undertaken in Canada and perhaps in the world. It will take time for interested parties, governments and the public to absorb our report and perhaps a generation to implement it.

We hope that our report will be studied by community groups, churches, schools, university and other stakeholder groups during the months after its release; that governments, corporations, and voluntary organizations will set up task forces to look at the report's implications for their mandates and activities; and that magazines and newspapers will publish excerpts from it and reviews from knowledgeable commentators.

We doubt whether a purely voluntary approach to following up on implementation of our recommendations will be adequate. Publication of the report will stimulate demands for information and explanations that neither governments nor Aboriginal organizations will be in a position to satisfy. Our experience also indicates that many non-Aboriginal organizations and associations will be more likely to devote time and resources to reviewing issues that affect their particular constituency if they are encouraged to do so.

A small task force working with interested parties, governments, Aboriginal organizations and the media could play a vital role in increasing awareness and understanding of the issues dealt with in this report. Its work would be most effective if carried out by a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sponsors, perhaps beginning with a core group of leaders working with the support of religious institutions, unions, corporations, and the national Aboriginal organizations. A task force sponsored only by government would not be appropriate for this task, although funding assistance from governments would be desirable.

In Chapter 1 we recommended establishment of a review commission — reporting to Parliament and funded by but independent of government — to monitor progress on many fronts, including the actions taken by governments and others to implement the recommendations in this report. We propose that the tabling of this commission’s annual report be the occasion for special debates on Aboriginal issues in Parliament and the provincial and territorial legislatures.

Governments have the greatest opportunity to place Aboriginal issues in the national spotlight and to initiate change. They should begin by focusing on this Commission’s report. We favour an early response from federal, provincial and territorial governments on the principles and overall approach of this report as well as on specific recommendations. This could be followed by a first ministers conference (FMC) with national Aboriginal organizations to begin a process of review and implementation. The FMC would be of enormous importance in terms of public education and as a symbol of the commitment of the parties to move to a new relationship. As we suggested in Chapter 1, the FMC could also be the instrument for establishing the administrative mechanisms of change.

Many of the recommendations for public education in this chapter are modest in cost, and most can be implemented relatively quickly. Some should be given priority. In the year after this report is published, for example,

- The House of Commons, the Senate, and provincial and territorial legislative assemblies could devote one or more days to debate on the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, then follow up with more detailed consideration by their respective Aboriginal affairs committees.
- Federal and provincial governments and Aboriginal organizations could agree to designate a national First Peoples Day.
- Through their national and provincial associations, municipalities could be encouraged to organize an Aboriginal Awareness Week as a regular annual event in all major cities in Canada.
- The media could be encouraged to give special attention to the achievements of Aboriginal people, with the CRTC in particular promoting greater visibility for Aboriginal people and issues through radio, television, and cable networks.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that

5.4.13

The CD-ROM version of the Commission's final report, research studies and public hearings be distributed by the government of Canada free of charge to every Canadian high school, college and university library.

5.4.14

A task force be established by a coalition of interested organizations and funded in part by the federal government to promote understanding and wide public discussion of the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples for at least the first year following publication of this report.

Notes:

* Transcripts of the Commission's hearings are cited with the speaker's name and affiliation, if any, and the location and date of the hearing. See A Note About Sources at the beginning of this volume for information about transcripts and other Commission publications.

1 Nora Dewar Allingham, "Anti-Racist Education and the Curriculum — A Privileged Perspective", in Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF), *Racism and Education: Different Perspectives and Experiences* (Ottawa: CTF, 1992), p. 1.

2 Hydro-Québec and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) described these initiatives at our public hearings in Montreal and Toronto. See Hydro-Québec, transcripts of the hearings of the Royal Commission Aboriginal Peoples (hereafter RCAP transcripts) Montreal, Quebec, 27 May 1993; and OPSEU, RCAP transcripts, Toronto, Ontario, 18 November 1993.

3 The Syncrude approach was described at the Commission's round table on Aboriginal economic development and resources and in the report on that round table, *Sharing the Harvest: The Road to Self-Reliance* (Ottawa: RCAP, 1993), pp. 318-319.

4 Chief Ovide Mercredi, "Self-Determination", in Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, "The Position of Indigenous People in National Constitutions: Speeches from the Conference" (Canberra, Australia: CAR, 1993), p. 66.

5 National Indian Brotherhood and Assembly of First Nations, National Day of Solidarity for Indian People, resolution 39 passed in Penticton, British Columbia, April 1982.

6 Quebec National Assembly, "Journée nationale des peuples autochtones", *Journal des débats*, 33/40 (17 June 1994), p. 2059.