

INDIAN SUMMER

If the natives are restless, the non-natives are, too. More Caledonias and demands for compensation won't help

Spring is here, summer's nigh, and our Indian brethren are on the warpath again. Sigh. Idle hands make the devil's work and with a good number of those living on Canada's 633 reserves unemployed, the manpower is certainly available. Assembly of First Nations' grand poobah Phil Fontaine, 62, the picturesque Ottawa Indian who collects a couple of hundred thousand tax-free taxpayer dollars a year by clamouring for more "funding," isn't actually encouraging the blockading of highways and byways on the "Day of Action" set for June 29. Fontaine told Canwest columnist Don Martin he'd prefer just a soupçon of "civil disobedience."

In light of the recent Ipperwash Inquiry report (which assigned no blame whatsoever to the Ojibwa heavies whose violent and illegal behavior spurred the Ontario Provincial Police to shoot Dudley George back in 1995), and the continuance of the Caledonia occupation (where Mohawk bros occupy private land with impunity), the public at large may be starting to weary of all the crap. Fontaine's strategy is to avoid public ill-will, to make nice with Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice—the Calgary lawyer who once made a tidy living arguing land claims cases—to somehow get back the \$5.1 billion in cash promised by the Liberals at the signing of the Kelowna agreement in 2005, and to stay friendly with the chiefs in the AFN. "The kind of transformative change we are seeking will only be achieved with a lot of Canadians behind us," Phil told Don, adhering to briefing notes instructing him to accentuate the positive. "This is an attempt on our part to reach out to

Canadians. And reaching out to Canadians is best done by giving them a sense of comfort we're not about to cause anyone harm."

Diplomatically put, but unless Prentice comes up with a swack of cash to expedite land claims settlements—the putative reason for the June 29 protest—hotter and less nicely coifed heads than Fontaine's might err on the side of harm. Manitoba chief Terry Nelson, who favours ballcaps, dark glasses and plaid shirts, is calling for something a little more Ipperwashian. The chief of the 1,560-member Roseau River reserve, south of Winnipeg near the U.S. border, is planning a rail blockade and is encouraging other chiefs with unsettled land claims—and there are more unsettled claims than there are reserves—to take similar measures. "There are only two ways of dealing with the white man," was the much publicized quote Nelson delivered on CTV,

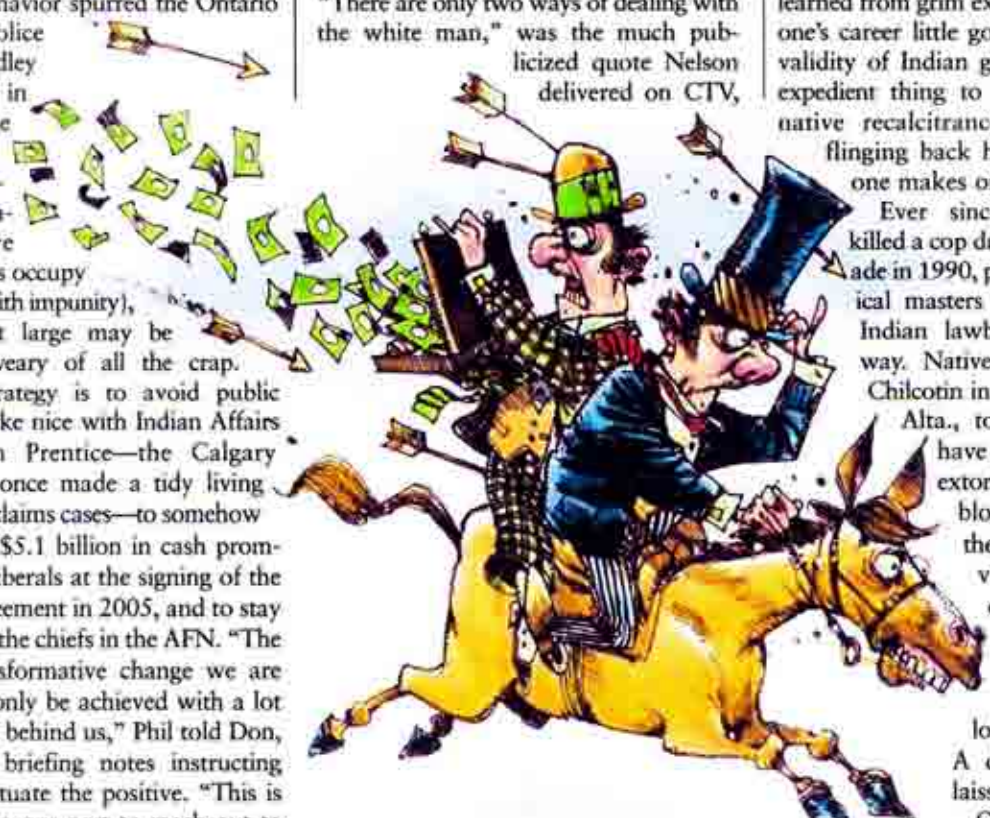
May 17. "One, either you pick up a gun, or you stand between the white man and his money."

In Ontario, regional chief Angus Toulouse, whose own reserve is near Thunder Bay, suggested his confreres to the south blockade Highway 401, Canada's busiest road, on the eve of the July 1 weekend. "Sometimes blockades, sometimes this kind of action, is what draws the attention of governments, and it's sad to have to go there. It really is," said Toulouse.

All bathos aside, these illegal acts of trespass, intimidation and extortion have not been without success. You and I might believe that this Indian land claims business is but a racket to provide lawyers with assured incomes and Indian chiefs with more excuses for failing their tribes. You and I might shake our heads when comparing the percentage of Canadian territory already given over to Indians in reserves (13 per cent) with the percentage of the population who are treaty Indians (2.3 per cent). We might even question the validity of the 1,354 land claims filed since 1973 (282 settled) and the \$12 billion that Fontaine and others in the Indian industry claim it will take to settle them all. But Canadian governments and their agents in the courts, the police forces and the media have learned from grim experience that it does one's career little good to challenge the validity of Indian grievance. The most expedient thing to do in the face of native recalcitrance is to turn tail, flinging back handfuls of cash as one makes one's escape.

Ever since Mohawk thugs killed a cop during the Oka blockade in 1990, police and their political masters have tended to let Indian lawbreakers have their way. Native activists from the Chilcotin in B.C. to Slave Lake, Alta., to Miramichi, N.B., have learned that a bit of extortion in the form of a blockade, along with the implicit threat of violence, will win one anything from land to trees to a competitive advantage in the lobster fishery.

A departure from this laissez-faire approach in Ontario's Ipperwash



THE COLONIES

Provincial Park in 1995 underlined the downside of taking a hard line with Indian activists. The shooting death of Dudley George in the heat of a battle with an OPP Tac Team, made a martyr out of the dead Ojibway. It also politically damaged then premier Mike Harris, whose resolve to remove the outlaws from the park was widely portrayed in the media as racist fascism, and whose successor Dalton McGuinty nicely played the Ipperwash Inquiry card to help him get elected in 2003.

Today, the Six Nations activists in the Caledonia area west of Niagara Falls, together with that tribe of Mohawks up near Belleville, Ont., who blocked the CN mainline for 30 hours in April, continue to agitate and occupy and generally prevent law-abiding residents from going about their business. McGuinty is keeping the OPP in check, lest another Ipperwash erupt. The premier's line has been that the disputes are not Ontario's concern, and that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Minister Prentice ought to clean things up.

Prentice attempted to do just that in Caledonia by offering the Six Nations \$125 million as compensation for a land claim that the government's own lawyers had declared to have no grounds. Don't insult us with your chump change, said the Six Nations, who remain camped on the housing estate on the Grand River and are chasing other developers from adjacent land.

The OPP did make one arrest—he was a white nutbar called Gary McHale who'd had the temerity to fly the Canadian flag from a power pole adjacent to the occupied land. The cops put McHale in jail for the night for disturbing the peace, but he is out and continues to bellyache about the "two-tier justice" practised by the OPP.

Opposition leader John Tory—whose chances of beating McGuinty in the October election are looking better these days—claims the provincial government has spent more than \$55 million policing and otherwise maintaining the situation at Caledonia. This sum includes the \$1,300 a day paid to former federal Liberal Jane Stewart to negotiate on behalf of Ontario with the Indians whom Ontario had said were Ottawa's concern. You may remember Jane. A good pal of Jean Chrétien, she was briefly the Indian Affairs minister, but, more famously, looked after the Human Resources and Social Development Canada portfolio when a billion dollars of unaccounted-for contracts occurred. From unaccounted-for contracts to dubious land claims is not such a stretch.

Where is it all leading? If it's leading anywhere, it's not towards any sort of détente between the aboriginals and the public at large. Listening to Dave Rutherford's radio show the other week on the topic of the day of action, I was surprised at the level of vitriol expressed towards the Phil Fontaines and the Terry Nelsons in particular, and the Indian industry in general. If the natives are restless, the non-natives are, too, and more Caledonias and Bellevilles are not going to help the mood.

But neither is continuing clamour from Phil and the boys for more loot. The situation among Canada's on- and off-reserve Indians has never been demonstrably improved by additional land or additional "funding." Unemployment and substance abuse levels remain as high as ever, and the gangsta ethos now prevalent among the youth can only increase the disproportionate crime levels in Indian Country. The constant massaging of past wrongs—the latest thing is a \$60-million "truth and reconciliation commission" to further institutionalize the highly exaggerated scars from residential schools—seems designed to exacerbate the defeatist resignation that is the root of all the problems.

Simply put, the whole mentality has to change. That will not come from the Ottawadians in the Assembly of First Nations, nor from Indian Affairs functionaries, craven politicians or the bubble-headed social workers and other publicly provided wet nurses with livelihoods dependant on the care and feeding of the status quo. A change in attitude will come from the Indians on the front lines—those like Chief Clarence Louie, whose Osoyoos Indian Band in southern B.C. has become an economic force and a beacon for natives sick of a century of defeatism. Chief Louie has no truck with those he terms "the industry of misery." Leading by example, he has become the voice of change, and as recently appointed chairman of the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board, has a voice that may be heard. We will visit this refreshing chap in our next column. **WS**