

"QUIT STEALING OUR KIDS!"

White Child Welfare and Red Children

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A crowd of more than 700 people is gathered on Beverley Crescent, an attractive curvature of real estate nestled in Vancouver's Shaughnessy district. Shaughnessy is a quiet residential area which locals describe as 'older', affluent and *very* respectable.

Beverley Crescent is surely not a street where you'd expect to find a restive crowd of demonstrators; it is a tranquil habitat. Yet here, as a warm autumn sun shines through a moderate cloud cover from over the Pacific, on to Shaughnessy's manicured lawns, matured trees, lush shrubbery and impressive homes, a restive crowd of demonstrators is gathered. They are listening to the recounting of a bitter, personal tale.

It is Tuesday, October 14, 1980.

"I was taken away from my parents when I was nine years old," the speaker is saying to them. "I know the pain that I suffered during the time that I was away from my people."

Not surprisingly, the 'people' the speaker identifies with and speaks for are not the homeowners of Beverley Crescent.

The speaker is Marcelline Manual, a grandmother and member of the Neskainlith Indian Band from Chase, B.C. Along with hundreds of other Indians, the woman joined what is described as the Indian Child Caravan a few days ago. Staged to protest the province's policy of placing Indian children in White foster homes, the caravan started in Chase, which is about 500 kilometres north of Vancouver, gathering more participants as they proceeded on their trek.

The members of the caravan have come into Shaughnessy to get a hearing from one of the district's most eminent residents. They have come calling on the province's Minister of Human Resources, Mary McCarthy, who is also British

Columbia's deputy premier.

It was Marcelline Manuel who made the symbolic gesture of knocking on McCarthy's door and it was Marcelline Manuel who, despite herself, wept when she received no reply.

One suspects that the sixty-year old grandmother is, normally, quiet-spoken. Today, however, Marcelline Manuel's speech is not quiet; her words are impassioned and her emotions are wholly convincing.

"I know the little ones lose their identity when they are put in foster homes," the Neskainlith grandmother is saying. "When children are taken away from their families and their communities, they become weakened. They no longer know who they are.

"I know the pain I suffered and so I know how other Indian children feel today who have lost their identity," Manuel says.

A White child welfare worker who will later hear parts of Marcelline Manuel's address replayed on a radio newscast and read newspaper reconstructions of the rally will claim to be "jarred into enlightenment."

"I used to react to those kind of accusations personally," the social worker will tell me. "And that was kind of stupid. When Indians accused the provincial government of stealing Indian kids I felt like telling them that I was not a thief, that if they'd take better care of their children I wouldn't have to do the messy work I do.

"I mean, I consider myself a pretty conscientious child care worker. I know it sounds corny, but I see myself as a person who really does give a damn about the families and kids I try to help. A lot of those families and kids are Natives.

"But after thinking a little about what a lot of Native people are saying, I came to see the larger implications of what they are getting at. They're not blaming me, but blaming a system that is much bigger than me and much bigger than social services.

"The whole child apprehension thing is like holding up the Indian community to ransom. We're saying: 'You act like us, think like us, treat your kids like we would have you do or we'll take your children away from you.'

"It's a pretty pathetic kidnapping operation though, isn't it. I mean an intelligent kidnapper — even a less than astute one — knows that you hold people up to ransom who can afford to pay you handsomely," said the social worker, a

woman in her mid-thirties. "And the kids we take into care, for the most part, come from families that are miserably poor.

"But I don't know of anything other than tackling their poverty that offers any real solution. Stopgaps won't work. My experience is that foster placements in Native homes are really hard to come by, so we have to turn to White homes."

The choice seems a cruel one, but the social worker stands by it, feeling, all the same that the moral ground she stands on is just a little shaky.

Marcelline Manuel and other speakers accuse the Whites of stealing Indian land, fish, fur, language and culture. The stealing of Indian children, they argue, is the ultimate insult, a sacrilege, a final blow that cannot be tolerated.

All agree that it is time to fight back.

For about an hour, the Indians parade in a circle in front of Mary McCarthy's home. Drum beating and traditional chants provide an eery, menacing relief to the stolid backdrop of Shaughnessy. Finally, realizing that McCarthy will give them no reception today, the protesters depart to a nearby park where the rally re-convenes.

Beverley Crescent's tranquility is restored. An eminent cabinet minister can now return, without fuss, to her comfortable home.

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Wayne Christian, the determined young Chief of British Columbia's Spallumcheen Indian Band, wasn't mincing his words. Addressing what was billed as a "Native Child Apprehensions Conference" in Saskatoon in September, 1981, he urged his (mostly) Indian and Metis audience to take over their own child welfare services. The present system, said Christian, is an agency of cultural genocide directed against Native people.

A casual observer might have found the Chief's comments uh, well ... let's say, *excessive*. Not so for the Native delegates. There was nothing shrill or overstated in what the Spallumcheen Chief was saying. He was merely restating the assembly's basic themes.

But Wayne Christian hadn't been invited to come all the way to Saskatoon from British Columbia simply to reiterate what others had said. Wayne Christian was a special guest because he was a doer. He was invited because he and his band had matched their rhetoric with their deeds when, in 1980, they passed a bylaw and signed an agreement with B.C.'s Human Resources ministry giving the

Spallumcheen band council exclusive jurisdiction in child custody matters.

The Band members believed that child welfare authorities were treating a symptom (child neglect), not the *real* problem: the poverty that was so common to Indian families; the poverty that wrapped its ugly tentacles around Indian parents and squeezed them dry of their good intentions and their energies and their skills.

According to Christian, the band had taken the initiative in despair after realizing they had "lost an entire generation to provincial child welfare authorities." From 1951 to 1977, Christian says, 150 Spallumcheen children had been removed from their natural families and their community by child welfare authorities — most of them "placed" in the care of non-Indian families.

That's a lot of kids! Especially when you consider that the entire population of the Spallumcheen Band is only about three hundred.

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The delegates at the conference did not view the Spallumcheen situation Christian referred to as an isolated one, nor do Indian leaders generally dissent from the B.C. band's view. Next to aboriginal land claims alone, child welfare has emerged in the past two years as the most volatile issue on a troubled agenda of dealings between governments and people of Native ancestry in Canada.

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Native people and their leaders are not alone in expressing concern about the interface of the child welfare system with children of aboriginal ancestry — Indian, Metis and Inuit. At a major national social policy conference* held in St. John's, Newfoundland, in June of 1980, experts in the child welfare field — including social workers, administrators and academics — were asked to prioritize the major problems confronting child welfare in the 1980s. Unanimously, the specialists topped their list with the "plight" of Native children.

Despite their diminutive share of Canada's total juvenile population, Native youngsters have become the most over-represented clientele of child welfare agencies in the country. The motives of budget-conscious administrators and human rights' advocates may differ, but both are describing the situation as "alarming."

*The issue was raised at the 26th biennial Canadian Conference on Social Development.

The statistical picture has been painted by Philip Hepworth in a recent book — entitled *Foster Care and Adoption in Canada* — that devoted a special chapter to Natives. A compilation of federal and provincial government data, the study showed that, in 1977, 15,500 Native children were in care. That's 20 per cent of the country's total of children in the care of child welfare officials or permanently placed apart from their original families. Relative to the Canadian average, a Native child is from three to four times as likely to be in the care of child welfare authorities.

Figures from Western Canada are especially dramatic, moving, proportionally steadily upward as you move eastward from B.C. to Manitoba. In 1976-77, according to Hepworth's study, Native children comprised 39 per cent of all children in the care of B.C.'s child welfare authorities or in adoption homes. In Alberta, the equivalent figure rises to 44 per cent (the same year); Saskatchewan: 51.5 per cent (now an estimated 64%); in Manitoba, in 1976-77 it was 60 per cent.

Hepworth also reported that the Indian share of child welfare caseloads has been *rising* since 1962.

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Why are so many Native children taken into custody by the child welfare agencies?

It depends who you ask.

The official reason is "protection," a term used by social workers to denote the need for supervising a child who is "out of the parents' control" or who is in need of being shielded from abusive, incompetent or negligent parents. The most frequent official reason is neglect.

The official reasons are the same for all children taken into care — no matter what their ethnic origins.

Many Native people suspect, however, that "unofficial" reasons account for a goodly share of Native child apprehensions.

Hepworth's data indicate that, once apprehended, Native children are less likely to be returned to their natural parents or to their original communities than are non-Native children; if very young, they are likely to be adopted by non-Native families; if not adopted, apprehended Native children are more likely than non-Native children to grow up in several foster homes rather than one or in institutions run by substitute parents who, again, are unlikely to be of Indian ancestry.

Native people frequently argue that social workers are often too ready to apprehend their children. The indiscriminate application of White, middle-class child care standards to Native families that fail to account for cultural distinctions and the realities of poverty are suspected.

Even when abuse or neglect of children on the part of Native parents is fairly reported and removal from the home clearly warranted, Indian critics charge that, often the alternatives may be no improvement upon the quality of nurture provided in the child's own home — sometimes worse!

It depends who you ask.

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Most Native people are poor; we all know that. Journalists with a penchant for the kind of verbal provocation that sells magazine articles have long described Native poverty as a "national disgrace." When government spokesmen criticize foreign governments for their violations of international human rights principles, their posture of indignation is routinely foiled by pointed reminders of the ill-treatment of the Indians in their own back yard.

Native people live in a "Fourth World;" they are a population with "Third World" social and economic characteristics living amidst the affluent society.

When muckraking journalists who write those 'socially-concerned' pieces on Indians have sold their articles, they must turn to other subjects to earn their keep. Politicians with good intentions to "solve" the "Indian problem" come and go. Academics construct elaborate, often convincing, theories to explain Native 'oppression' and 'marginality,' perhaps getting tenure or promotion for their efforts. The "national disgrace," however, does not go away.

There are approximately 300,000 Status Indians in Canada. "Status" is a legal designation for a person who qualifies for specific benefits and rights under the Indian Act. When passed, that act included — within its definition of Indian — any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band (and made sure they registered as such), any child of a registered Indian, and any woman legally married to a man with Indian status.

The Indian Act served to fragment the Indian population legally and divide them socially by excluding many under its terms. Consequently, there are approximately 500,000 full-blooded Indians not legally recognized as Indians and who are thus disqualified from receiving benefits of the act. Children born out of wedlock were often excluded and women marrying non-Indians were (and are)

excluded, as are their offspring. There are also, in addition to 'status' and 'non-status' Indians, approximately half a million Metis (mixed-white blood) in Canada. In other words, there are well over three times as many people in this country of aboriginal ancestry who are not legally recognized as Indians as there are Indians — legally, that is.

The effect of these legal divisions has been to seriously diminish the capacity of Native people to mobilize as a unified interest group to advance their collective cause. The sheer force of numbers alone would surely be of benefit to their common cause.

An ancient precept: Divide and conquer!

In stark relief to the legislative partitioning of the Native population, the grim common denominators of poverty, discrimination and exclusion from the mainstream of Canadian society do impose a sort of unity on most Native people — status, non-status, Metis or Inuit.

In late June of 1980, the federal Indian Affairs department released a report dealing with social, economic and political changes since 1960 amongst the status Indian population, both on and off reserves. You wouldn't call the study a 'progress report'; indeed, the findings were a testimony to the department's ineffectiveness.

The report blamed unemployment and poor living conditions for the "breakdown" of Indian family life.

The Indian Affairs report said that 20 per cent of reserve houses contain two families, while more than 50 per cent have no running water or sewage disposal. An urgent need for 11,000 new housing units was identified.

Suicides by status Indians aged 15-24 are three times the national average, according to the report. Death rates among young and middle-aged Indians are two to four times greater than the national average. Violent deaths were also much more frequent amongst Indians than they were amongst non-Indians.

The percentage of Indians in Canada's prisons is much higher than the national average, and juvenile delinquency amongst the Indian population is almost three times the national average.

The federal Indian Affairs report also suggested that the health status of Indians is substantially inferior to that of the general population, implying that, again, the differences are poverty-related. As a recent study by Paul Brady, a Saskatoon sociologist, concluded of the health of Saskatchewan Indians:

"The Registered Indian population ... suffers from distinctly different leading causes of death ... (both being the consequences of) ... social, political and economic inequality." Many of the causes of death amongst Saskatchewan's Indian population ceased to be among the leading killers of the non-Indian population four decades ago, says Brady. FOUR DECADES!!!

According to the federal Indian Affairs report, the incidence of tuberculosis has dropped dramatically since 1960 amongst the status Indian population, yet it remains much higher than amongst non-Indians. A high incidence of respiratory ailments and parasitic and digestive diseases (preventable ills) probably reflect unsanitary housing and living conditions generally, according to the report.

Native people share with Third World peoples certain diseases that are rarely found amongst the non-Native population of North America — including beriberi, a vitamin deficiency disease, and diseases associated with malnutrition generally, such as trachoma, kwashiorkor, and marasmus.

Indian babies between the ages of four weeks and one year die at twice the national average. The Indian Affairs report attributed much of this difference to infections related to poor housing, lack of sewage disposal, and the absence of running water in homes.

Native people, whatever their legal designation, have been migrating in ever-greater numbers from the reserves and rural settlements to the cities. The urbanizing population trend is, of course, a general one; the Native urban shift is only more recent.

Why are they moving to the cities? And what are they finding when they get there?

Robert Stevenson, an Indian legal services aide in Regina responds: "There's nothing on the reserves but welfare, so they come to the city, but for most, there's nothing but welfare here, either."

Stevenson isn't far off the mark. The economic base of the reserves and rural settlements is simply too narrow to support a population that is growing at a rate between two and three times the national average. So the labour market of the cities acts as a carrot; the lack of work on the reserves and settlements acts as a stick.

As Stevenson implies, Native dreams are more often broken than fulfilled in the cities. National estimates of unemployment on reserves vary between 40

per cent and 80 per cent of the employable population. Surveys show that, in Regina, for example, about half the Native population is jobless — about twelve times the city's overall unemployment rate.

A visit to Winnipeg confirms that Regina is not a uniquely unreceptive habitat for urban Natives. From the corner of Porgage and Main, along past Winnipeg's city hall, far into the city's North end, a virtual Native ghetto has sprung up. A 1978 consultant's report prepared for the city council bluntly stated that the ghetto was threatening to become a crime-ridden wasteland — unless major and effective policy responses to the unemployment and poverty of the area's denizens were forthcoming from government.

Native people are now crowding into the blighted areas of Canada's cities, into those districts long since abandoned by people who have choices in the matter. There's maybe 15,000 in Montreal, 30,000 in Toronto, 40,000 in Winnipeg, 18,000 in Regina, 20,000 or more in Vancouver. Nobody has confidence in the counting. Native people are notoriously difficult subjects for census-takers and population estimators.

Native people in the cities call themselves refugees in their own land. Many of them have traded the poverty of their reserves and settlements for urban poverty. Many bring their children to the cities. Many have children in the cities. Many, many of the Native children in the cities are cared for by single parents. Many of those single parents are young, very young; they are virtually children themselves. And most of them are poor!

Social scientists who have studied Indian child welfare have linked the widespread incidence of unemployment, poverty and poor education to the development of a sense of powerlessness, despair, alcoholism, family violence and child neglect. Nothing profound about their conclusions, but it's worth noting them, if only to underscore the point for those who find the argument suspect when Indians make it themselves.

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A disquieting journey back through my file of press clippings reminds me why Native people suspect the quality of substitute care provided by social service departments. The incidents reported are selective, of course, screened through the sensationalizing biases that editorial minds use to separate the newsworthy from the mundane. But still, they don't reassure, especially if you have ample reason to be skeptical in the first place.

- * In June of 1981, an Alberta Ombudsman's report documented several cases of child abuse and the deaths of three children who were in the care of the province's Department of Social Services. The Ombudsman, Dr. Randall Ivany, shocked Albertans with the strength of his indictment of provincial child welfare practices, saying that the department had "failed to grasp the meaning of its responsibilities in protecting children."

The report said that the department's child abuse registry was woefully inadequate, in worse shape than when Ivany had examined it in 1976.

Ivany noted that foster parent applicants were scrutinized less carefully than applicants for bank loans that the department's social workers were overworked, and that when things go wrong, department officials tend to "cover their tracks" rather than face up to their responsibilities.

- * The Ivany inquiry was conducted after press reports based on an earlier, "leaked" internal government document revealed that, of 615 child abuse and neglect reports to the Alberta department in October, 1980, only 52.8 per cent were investigated within the three days stipulated by government policy. And 48 reports were never investigated.
- * In the Winter, 1981, edition of the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers' (SASW) newsletter, Ken Collier, a social worker and educator wrote the following of the Saskatchewan situation:

"1976 was not a good year for children in care. Late that year, among other incidents, two children in a northern camp died - one by suicide, one by exposure in the bush after running away. His body was never found.

"1977 wasn't so good either. Another northern camp was found to use physical punishment as a way of controlling behaviour. Protests, from native, parents' and professional organizations met first with government resistance, then with official acquiescence ... By setting up the Maher Inquiry in 1978 (into reports of physical punishment and bizarre forms of disciplinary degradation, including a child being forced to eat his own vomit), protests were calmed, but child care facilities were able to respond and get the soothing decision from the judge that, legalistically, it was not a "crime" to beat children to control behaviour."

- * On September 5, 1981, the Saskatchewan Association of Social

Workers criticized the provincial government's "half-hearted" response to recommendations for improving child care services made by a committee appointed by the government itself. The committee which had made the recommendations had been established after a public inquiry (the Maher Inquiry) in 1978 into alleged incidents of child abuse in the northern wilderness camp for boys.

In a news release, the SASW said that the relevant ministries — the province's Department of Social Services and Department of Northern Saskatchewan — had ignored the committee's recommendations for the input of line social workers into the setting and monitoring of standards. It also expressed concern that recommendations for staff training and recruitment were being ignored, and that more funding for services was urgently required. The Association would like to see an investigation into child care similar to the Ivany study in Alberta. More money was subsequently allocated to child welfare and family service programs in Alberta after the Ombudsman's report was made public.

The SASW news release also said that the committee's strong recommendations for funding native groups to study services for native children "has been virtually shelved."

- * In October of 1981, three British Columbia ministry of human resources social workers announced they were resigning from their jobs working with "troubled teenagers." Two of the three, John Turvey and Bob Gilson, said in an interview with a Vancouver Sun reporter, that "they were resigning because the B.C. government is as negligent in its care of children as the unfit parents whose children are apprehended in court."

Both social workers said that social services are deteriorating while overworked social workers apply band-aid solutions to problems caused by the province's inadequate resources.

Turvey, who was involved as a child welfare worker for twelve years, accused the Human Resources ministry of reducing spending by \$4 million that fiscal year.

"Five staff positions to deal with the much publicized problem of child prostitution were actually created by staff transfers from other regions in Vancouver rather than through funding new positions," Turvey told the Sun.

Six of Turvey's young teenage clients involved in what he called "the downtown prostitution scene" were living in hotels and, as Turvey put it, "got babysat by a television and a telephone."

Turvey said that, despite the stated policy of developing "life plans" for children to prevent repeated moves from foster and group homes, he "had kids who had 38 to 40 placements in two years."

* The "human face" of Quebec's social-democratic 'P.Q.' government is also being doubted by child welfare workers in province. In November of 1981, the Shawbridge Youth Centre the only residential institution in the province for "troubled" and delinquent English-speaking juveniles in care — marked its 75th anniversary. As a report by the Canadian Press said of the anniversary thoughts of the centre's staff, there was "pride in past accomplishments but concern about the future." The source of concern was that the government's stated intention to cut back \$245 million from social services spending would force the centre to "go begging" to the voluntary sector for funding. They had learned that they should expect a reduced budget from the province.

The themes are common: overworked social workers unable to do their jobs the way they believe they should be done because they are exhausted by oversized caseloads; restraint or cutbacks in public sector budgetting; administrators who seem to think that child welfare is an easy portfolio to save money in; victimized kids who are clearly placed at greater risk than would be necessary if public priorities were ordered differently.

Conscientious social workers right across the country *are* now complaining angrily about caseload sizes far greater than professional standards would dictate. Many accuse other agencies, particularly the schools and the courts, of treating child welfare agencies as dumping grounds for a host of problems they are not equipped to deal with. Overwhelmed by high caseloads, crisis situations, and the continual expectations of clients, other agencies, and their own management, workers in social agencies now lay claim to their own occupational syndrome: "burnout", they call it — and many are being treated for it. Ritualistically going through the motions of work without having anything left to give in situations that require a great deal of giving, the 'burned-out' worker often turns his or her half-interested but potentially damaging anger on clients, blaming them for their own problems.

The fact that many Native people are pointing an accusative finger at them, calling them 'kidnappers' and worse, is hardly comforting for the line staff of child protection agencies. But they have few public defenders; for social workers — members of what has been described as the "unloved profession" — have long been viewed as "cold snoopers" by unhappy clients, written off as "agents of social control" by freshmen radicals, and regarded half-contemptuously by a skeptical public as "paid charity workers."

Public sector labour analyst, Richard Deaton, *does* come to the defence of social workers. He sums up their situation pretty well when he writes: "Many

types of public employees have become ... 'dirty workers!' As social problems multiply, society indifferently leaves in the hands of others a sort of mandate to deal with these problems without wanting to know how. (Social workers and other public employees are) ... caught between the silent middle class which wants them to do the dirty work and be quiet about it, fiscal strangulation, and the objects of that dirty work who refuse any longer to tolerate mistreatment."

Union leaders in the public sector are now encouraging social workers to become active in their unions and to negotiate aggressively for conditions of work that would mutually benefit both themselves and their clients — like more reasonable caseload sizes.

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Native leaders may or may not appreciate the pressures placed on child care workers, but clearly they have an articulate and convincing case to make for Native-controlled services. In developing their positions, Canadian Native leaders have been strongly influenced by both Indian politics and independent research conducted south of the border.

For four years, American Indians, led by the American Association on Indian Affairs (AAIA), waged a congressional lobbying campaign against existing child welfare practices in the United States. The campaign was successful, culminating, on November 8, 1978, in the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act. The U.S. act gave Indian tribal courts the mandate to handle all child custody cases involving Indian children whose families are members of a tribe.

While Indian courts, semi-autonomous tribunals that operate on reservations, had already been operative in many areas, in some states non-Indian courts heard Indian child custody cases. Even in some areas where Indian tribunals had handled such cases, it was not uncommon to routinely shift custodial hearings to state courts.

The 1978 Act, in Item 4 of Section 2 of the introduction, states, in full accord with the claims of the Indian lobby, that, an "... alarmingly high percentage of Indian families are broken up by the removal — often unwarranted, of their children from them by nontribal public and private agencies ...". Clearly, American Indian leaders have tended to view the passage of the 1978 act as a major victory for their cause.

In a report to the U.S. Congress, William Byler, Executive Director of the AAIA, cited cases in which destitute Indian mothers were coerced into giving up their children as a condition of receiving welfare assistance.

Byler indicated that AAIA-sponsored research found that 99 per cent of cases of Indian child apprehension were made on grounds of neglect rather than abuse. Yet frequently in cases of alleged neglect, "many social workers, ignorant of Indian cultural values and social norms, make decisions that are totally inappropriate in the context of family life," he argued. The result, claimed Byler, was that social workers, "frequently discover neglect or abandonment when none exists," thus inflating the child neglect statistics amongst the Indian population.

The crux of the problem, according to Byler and the AAIA, was that social workers failed to appreciate distinctions of family structure and housing standards prevalent on reserves.

The American Indian lobbyists emphasized (accurately) that, in tribal society, responsibility for parenting is a much more communal affair than it is in the dominant society. Responsibility for the care of children in tribal communities extends well beyond the nuclear family, embracing older siblings and cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles, as well as friends in tribal communities. So when White child welfare workers investigated parents on suspicion of child neglect, they would often assume a child to be abandoned or unsupervised when they were actually in the secure care of relatives or other members of the tribe.

To tackle the issue of "inappropriate" standards for assessing neglect, the American act of 1978 introduced fairly uniform guidelines designed to take (what the act itself describes as) the "unique values of Indian culture" into account.

Regina Superneau, a staff lawyer for the National American Indian Court Judges Association, believes that the introduction of guidelines sensitized to the reserve environment are the most important aspect of the new legislation. Cultural differences between child welfare authorities and Indian people may be a primary cause of the disproportionate level of Indian child apprehensions in the United States, Superneau told a reporter for the Montreal Gazette in 1979.

A lack of suitable housing is, in fact, a frequent reason for removing American Indian children from their families and reservations.

Superneau thinks that the new law should help clear up these misconceptions. She also believes that a significant reduction in the volume of unwarranted child apprehensions should follow the implementation of the law.

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The belief that the alternative care provided through the child welfare system is itself of dubious value for Native children has also been nourished by American research and the AAIA lobby.

In its campaign leading up to the 1978 act of congress, the AAIA charged that placing Indian children away from their homes and communities often left the children with permanent psychological scars.

The experience of being nurtured in non-Native foster or adoption homes *can* precipitate distinctive troubles for a Native person, particularly as the child approaches adulthood.

Dr. Joseph Westermeyer, a psychiatrist and professor at the University of Minnesota, has reported research findings that shed some light on the nature of these problems.

The Minnesota doctor has diagnosed specific psychiatric problems that afflict an American Indian raised by Anglo parents when he or she realizes that "passing" is impossible. Westermeyer has attached these problems with a label, the "Apple Syndrome" - "White" on the inside, "Red" on the outside.

Westermeyer reports that many of the Indians who have come into his care during adolescence had actually been "socially adjusted" to their foster homes and adoptive homes as children. They did not experience disabling psychiatric problems until their mid-teens and early twenties when, according to Westermeyer, "a variety of difficulties ensued, including alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide attempts, chronic anxiety; panic attacks, depression, and legal and behavioural problems."

Westermeyer argues that his patients experienced severe emotional and behavioural problems *because* the identity confusion typical of adolescent years in the general population was acutely intensified for Indian children raised in White homes. As children their identities merged with the identity of the White family that was raising them. But as adulthood approached and they sought to gain independence from their foster or adoptive families, the subjects of Westermeyer's study found they could not "pass" as Whites because of an unwritten racial bar. Not accepted as whites, but with no reference points in an

Indian culture, the Indian adolescents who were raised in White homes were left in a sort of cultural limbo. Westermeyer found himself treating the effects of such unresolved identity crises resulting from what he calls a "racial-ethnic discontinuity."

The Minnesota psychiatrist's conclusions are similar to those of Dr. Martin Topper, a psychiatrist employed on the Navajo reservation in Arizona.

Topper collected data over a ten-year period on Navajo children who had been placed with Mormon families. The children in his study had been reared to age six in Indian families, subsequently apprehended after reported parental neglect, and placed in substitute care homes.

The Arizona psychiatrist found that most of the children in his study developed serious problems later in life, including alcoholism and severe identity crises.

It is a temptation, of course, to argue that foster home rearing is generally inadequate, predicatably inferior to the nurture provided by parents to their own offspring. Such an argument would dispute the thesis of the AAIA, Westermeyer and Topper, suggesting instead that, rather than a "racial-ethnic discontinuity" of identity, it is the inevitable inferiority of substitute care that is to blame. There is evidence, however, that foster care — typically suspected of being second-rate care — may be an unfairly maligned mode of nurture. A five-year review of studies in the social services conducted by Henry Moss for the National Association of Social Workers (U.S.) has challenged the conventional wisdom in this matter. Moss reports that the "psycho-social development" of children in foster homes is *not* substantially different from that of other children.

Research conducted on the effects of this identity crisis is not available for Canada. Racial prejudice, however, does not magically disappear at the border, so it is unreasonable to assume that the 'apple syndrome' is not present in this country as well. Native people don't believe it, nor do thoughtful Whites. A recently published academic article in the journal of the Canadian Association of Social Work, *The Social Worker*, written by Brad McKenzie and Pete Hudson, both of the University of Manitoba, put it this way:

... the myriad of case reports indicate that a native child is much more likely than his white counterpart to experience frequent movement from one placement to another, culminating in conflict with the law and institutional placement. Native children are placed primarily in white substitute care homes

or institutions, and one in care ... are less likely to be visited by parents, or returned home. There can be little doubt that such actions have reduced the likelihood of cultural reinforcement of the child's native identity, and have contributed to the negative outcomes ... associated with native children who graduate from the child care system.

One of the "negative outcomes" Hudson and McKenzie were referring to, of course, was imprisonment. Research has not been available to link Native adult crime to specific childhood or adolescent experiences of nurture. An as yet unpublished study in Saskatchewan may help to fill that gap.

At the same conference in Saskatoon at which Wayne Christian spoke of the Spallumcheen Band's child care service, Chief Sol Sanderson, President of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, shocked his audience with a disturbing piece of information. Sanderson told his audience that, in a preliminary reporting of a study conducted for the Federation, it was estimated that 85 per cent of Indian and Metis people in Saskatchewan's "correctional centers" were taken as children from their homes and placed in foster homes or adoption homes. It's not the kind of thing that should make child welfare authorities proud!

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Like the Spallumcheen Band, many Native organizations *are* now demanding control of child welfare services for Native children. Enough success has already been achieved that a nation-wide trend appears to be developing. Of this trend, Beth Cuthand, editor of *The Saskatchewan Indian*, herself an Indian whose experience of Native organizations spans B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan, says: "It is irreversible. Nothing can hold it back!"

In 1975, an agreement allowing employees of the Blackfoot Band Council in Southern Alberta to administer child welfare legislation was signed. The move was initiated by the band because Blackfoot leaders felt the security of some of their children was in jeopardy because of a jurisdictional dispute between federal and provincial agencies.

Provincial governments are responsible for the provision of child welfare services to all children within their province's borders. They have been reluctant, however, to extend those services — except in emergency situations or upon the request of families — to the reserves. Indian reserves are provided services under the Indian Act by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

(DIAND), but DIAND has tended to view child welfare as a provincial responsibility.

Blackfoot leaders complained that their children were not receiving adequate protection services. Consequently, to find a way around the jurisdictional dispute, the band established their own service.

It was the publicity surrounding the American Indian Child Welfare Act, however, that seems to have given focus to the broader cultural issue. The Spallumcheen bylaw in 1980 established the beachhead for the trend.

In Saskatchewan the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (FSI) is currently developing a plan to establish an agency that would take over adoption and foster care services for treaty and registered Indians from the province's Department of Social Services. Under the FSI program, tribunals of Indian elders would assume responsibility now vested in civil courts for deciding whether allegedly neglected or abused children should be taken from their parents. The FSI would also deliver services to registered Indians living away from the reserves through administrative offices established in the cities.

In Manitoba, the authority for providing child welfare services to the 8,500 members of eight Indian bands in the southern part of the province was transferred to the newly-created Dakota-Ojibway Child and Family Service on July 1, 1981. Children's Aid Societies in three different regions had previously provided services on behalf of the government to the tribes.

In Ontario, the Tripartite Task Group on Social services submitted a report last year entitled Community Care: Toward Indian Control of Social Services. In the report, six transitional steps that would lead to Indian-controlled social services, including child welfare, are described.

Similar developments may be on the agenda for Quebec and Newfoundland.

At present, Native control of child welfare services remains a limited arrangement. Most Native organizations, however, do have the issue on the discussion table.

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Many social workers will tell you that they are haunted by memories of taking children away from their parents. "It's a painful experience," says Bob Pringle, a child welfare supervisor in Saskatoon, who has worked in the field for over a decade. "It's not something that you harden to. Most social workers don't toughen to the act of apprehending children, they just move on to other, less heart-breaking caseloads or move up, to administration."

Social workers will also tell you, however, that there are many situations ...

which there is no other reasonable choice but to remove children from their parents' guardianship. And, yes, they will tell you, Native children are often implicated in such "no choice" situations.

"Removing Native children from their homes is a particular source of anxiety for social workers," says Pringle, who is the former President of the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers. "We know that we lack a lot of understanding of Native culture and that child neglect amongst Natives is typically associated with their poverty — as it is with Whites."

There are social workers who are concerned that the creation of Native-controlled services might simply create an 'easy out' for governments. A lengthy series of complicated jurisdictional negotiations and conflicts dealing with the issue appears to be inevitable in upcoming years. Might shrewd administrations simply respond expediently, rapidly turning child care services over to Bands and other Native organizations without providing the adequate funding and support necessary to develop the new agencies and practices?

It's a touchy issue that White social workers are unwilling to raise publicly, or to be quoted on. There are those who fear, however, that child protection standards may well be sacrificed during the transition period associated with a rapid transfer, making Native children the victims. Some social workers also question whether, in the short-run, the potential supply of new Native foster and adoption homes is large enough to significantly reduce the proportion of placements in non-Indian homes.

"It's a poverty problem, and you don't solve a poverty problem by treating it as a cultural problem," a Manitoba social worker who asked not to be identified said to me. "It takes a lot of time to build up a store of trained workers, to design distinctive policies, to develop a large supply of new foster homes," the worker said. "The transfer — if done as it should be done — would be a complex and lengthy process, and I don't know of any government in the country that is prepared to be accommodative enough to do the job the way it should be done, at least in the near future."

Such fears and warnings are not simply conservative objections to change, even if they might reflect a certain edge of White paternalism. Warnings that Native-controlled child welfare services are no panacea have been expressed by Nancy Tuthill, an American Indian, who is the acting director of the American Law Centre at Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Tuthill, who has examined the implications of the American Indian Child Welfare Act in some detail since its passage, spoke at a Regina conference on Indian child welfare sponsored by the Canadian Indian Lawyers Association in March of 1980.

While describing the Indian Child Welfare Act in the U.S. as a "step in the right direction," her experience has tempered her enthusiasm. "It does protect the child as an Indian, not the child as a child," she told the Regina conference.

Tuthill says that federal appropriations to adequately support the implementation of the act have been far from adequate. "The tribes always have difficulty with not having enough money to implement certain fundamentals like foster payments," Tuthill said.

In the final analysis, Native people must do the major work themselves, not relying on government, Tuthill counselled. "The job is yours. You have to find Indian parents who want to adopt or be foster parents because the government is not going to do it for you," she told the delegates to the Regina conference.

Bob Pringle agrees with Tuthill that the onus of the response must be with the Native community itself. He challenges the skeptics, however, who think that any significant increase in Native substitute care homes in the near future is unrealistic. "In six months of concerted effort by one new Native employee, our office alone (the Saskatoon regional Department of Social Services office) was able to increase the availability of Native foster homes to meet twenty per cent of the need." Pringle adds: "Ultimately, the development of a completely Native-controlled, Native-operated service for Native children is desirable. But in the meantime, governments, Native organizations and the Native community can work together to build the bridge — an immediate expansion of Native substitute care homes."

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BUT ISN'T THE DEMAND FOR NATIVE-CONTROLLED CHILD CARE SERVICES PERHAPS JUST A MISGUIDED 'CULTURAL' CURE FOR AN ESSENTIALLY ECONOMIC PROBLEM — POVERTY?

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The high rate of apprehension of Native children, like the prevalence of Native alcoholism, is a source of embarrassment for many Indian and Metis people. It's not something that many of them will talk about publicly; in recent years

they've become far too politically astute to reveal those feelings to outsiders (i.e. Whites). "We get awful tired of being your damned 'bad statistics,'" many will tell you. But privately they'll occasionally open up and admit to a profound sense of anger directed at those Native parents who do neglect their children.

There is nothing mysterious about this embarrassment. The North American Indian child occupies a central position in traditional tribal life; the child's innocence and security is, by moral custom, viewed as a sacred trust to be held by the adult population. Clearly, the protection and security of children is a priority on the hierarchy of traditional Native values. So if there is a high incidence of child neglect in an Indian community, it is taken as a sign that the traditional culture has been eroded.

Displaying that disappointment openly, however, might be seen by unfriendly non-Natives as an admission of personal or group responsibility for their social ills. And there are few Native people today who do accept the view that aboriginal people in Canada have brought their current social malaise on themselves — nor should they!

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The history of contact between the Native peoples of this country and the encroaching European civilization has not been a happy one for Native people. That history must be understood if the importance of the demand for Native-controlled child care services is to be grasped.

The first continuous contact occurred on the shores of the fishing banks of Newfoundland and Labrador in the 16th century. Hostilities broke out when the Indians attempted to stop French fisherman from destroying their forests for the timber needed in the dry-curing of fish. The antagonisms led to violent conflict, resulting in the genocide of the Beothuk Indians.

Physical extermination — as the term "genocide" usually denotes — never did become an official policy of European or, later, Canadian officials. Such a policy would have simply been too costly. Indians, after all, had their uses. As imparters of wilderness knowledge and survival skills, as guides, as military allies in early wars, and as a source of labour and expertise in the fur trade, Indians played a vital role in the French and British settlement of those territories in North America now encompassed by Canada.

The importance of the Native population to European settlement was recognized in the eighteenth century. So was the ancient, aboriginal right to the use of the

land and its resources. On behalf of the British Crown, the Proclamation of 1763 stated that all legal title to lands (in what is now Canada) rests with the Native people unless it was formally surrendered through the voluntary signing of treaties.

Once the fur trade declined through the rapacious depletion of fur-bearing animal stocks, including, of course, the buffalo herds, the designs of government turned to minerals, timber and agricultural settlement. In these latter designs, the Native population's use to the Europeans was spent. No longer a convenience as Indians or Metis, the Native population was to be "absorbed" into the culture of the new British North American society.

Native people were thus either persuaded or coerced into yielding their ancient usage rights to most of the lands they alone had occupied prior to European contact. Indian titles were to be "extinguished" through treaty negotiations with the federal government in exchange for certain benefits, rights and reserve lands protected by the Canadian government on behalf of the British Crown.

The land reserves, however, were always viewed by the Canadian government as "half-way" stations on a road to cultural assimilation paved by a number of other federal Indian Affairs policies. As late as 1961, an official Indian branch publication concluded with confidence that, "the old Indian culture will inevitably be absorbed by ours." And as late as 1968 the "White Paper" on Indian policy, prepared by the Trudeau government, encouraged the elimination of special status for Indian people. If the paper's recommendations had been adopted, the federal government's historical and legal responsibility as Crown trustee empowered and obliged to ensure the continuance of aboriginal rights would have been rescinded. The paper advocated the repeal of the Indian Act and recommended the transfer of the functions of the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to the various provincial governments.

The position taken in the White Paper seemed innocent enough, even well-intentioned. As a recent book on Indian Affairs by J. Rick Ponting and Robert Gibbins suggests, the

Liberal government was imbued with a strong liberal ideology that stressed individualism and the protection of individual rights ... Trudeau's personal ideological beliefs and his deep antagonism to ethnic nationalism in Quebec ... (T)he government quickly adopted a new approach to Indian affairs that emphasized individual equality and de-emphasized collective ethnic survival.

The policy was defended by the government as a means of making Indian people full participants in Canadian society by removing legal discrimination inherent to the Indian Act.

The Indian community, however, would have none of it.

According to Harold Cardinal, the well-known Alberta Indian writer and activist, the doctrine was simply a means for the federal government to escape its moral and legal responsibilities to Indians, a way for it to "wash its hands of Indians entirely, passing the buck to provincial governments." The doctrine, according to Cardinal, assumed that, "The only good Indian is a non-Indian."

It was a mark of the growing political savvy of the Native population that they were so quick and unanimous in their rejection of the White Paper. As most Canadians will now be aware, there are still many aboriginal claims that have never been settled. The White Paper's recommendations, if followed, would have probably ensured that many of those claims *never* would have been honoured.

Despite the long-term intentions of governments to "absorb" the Indian population, for a variety of reasons — not the least of which has been the prevalence of White racism — Indians have proven a very difficult group to assimilate.

"Traditionally, our view has always been that native peoples must play our game, essentially by the same rules, with some help from us but on a gratuitous basis," Lloyd Barber, Canada's former Indian Claims Commissioner told a meeting in Yellowknife in 1974. "I think there was a time I held this view myself," Barber admitted. After becoming claims commissioner and studying the question, however, Barber said that Native people "... are saying to us ... they have an ownership and right to direct participation in resource development and a high degree of political autonomy within the larger society."

"They are saying that they are a distinct and in some ways, separate people who must have a special status within our country," Barber said.

"When you study the history of native affairs in Canada," the former claims commissioner added, "it becomes quite apparent that this position has been held from the start and has merely been dormant, waiting for articulate political leadership."

Many of the "articulate political leaders" Barber must have had in mind now refer to the goal of assimilation as equivalent to a policy of 'cultural genocide' — and they don't intend to let that happen!

Obviously, being viewed as a "social problem" population has not been a source of pride to Native people. That embarrassment, however, is rapidly fading, replaced

by a much more productive sentiment — a collective anger that has turned outward; the anger that is the source, once tapped, of all political movements successfully striving for fundamental social change.

It is the Native voluntary organizations at the National level such as the National Indian brotherhood, the Native Council of Canada and the Inuit Tapirisat that are channelling that collective anger towards productive, political ends. It is also the provincial organizations, such as the Association of Metis and Non-status Indians in Saskatchewan and the Indian Association of Alberta that is shaping the Native political struggle. In pursuit of a variety of goals and employing many strategies, these organizations are all attempting to escape the colonial bonds that have long constrained their constituents.

To the settlement of outstanding land claims, the struggle around the constitution, and attempts to secure training and jobs for their outrageously underemployed population, these voluntary organizations are now actively pushing for increased autonomy over their political, social and cultural institutions. In this struggle, everything from separate Indian states to a new political party, is being entertained — and entertained seriously.

The Native struggle for Native-controlled child care services must be seen in this overall context, as part of a general struggle to decolonize, as one arena in that battle.

Eradicating Native poverty may be the ultimate solution to the Native child care crisis, but the only groups that really seem to be interested in achieving that goal are the Native organizations themselves. Those organizations do have a strategy to achieve that ultimate goal; part of it involves taking control of social services that are provided to Native people. Native leaders view the current situation as one of colonialism, and colonialism is definitely *not* associated with development — cultural, political or economic!

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All Canadians concerned with the rights and security of children could take a leaf from the militant chapter in child care history now being written by Native Canadians. The Native struggle is giving focus to questions, urgent for the posing by all Canadians; their answers are challenging the very foundation upon which Canada's child welfare system has been built.

Most importantly, the maldistribution of income and job opportunities that makes parenting for Canada's poor an often unbearable burden is at issue. It

should not be forgotten that a central argument advanced by Native people for Native-controlled child welfare services is that existing public programs deal primarily with the effects of poverty on parenting, not with poverty itself. They're not alone in making such claims, but they're now making them more loudly than anyone else is. And in times of social welfare budget cutbacks and conservative economic policies, it takes a *very* amplified political sound to draw *any* serious attention to the social services.

Since its course beginnings in charitable orphanages run by religious organizations, industrial training schools, apprenticeship programs and boarding homes, Canada's child welfare system has come a long way. It's a big industry now, employing a bewildering array of different kinds of expertise and experts. Foster homes, adoption homes and residential "treatment" centres for "disturbed" and delinquent juveniles are buttressed by such supportive services as social casework, clinical psychology, psychiatry, visiting homemakers and family counselling services. But just exactly what is being supported, in a general sense, is suspect.

As a report by the National Council of Welfare suggests, the "homes for foundlings and wayward boys and girls" of the last century seem 'quaint and rudimentary' by comparison with the contemporary system." Abruptly dampening the reader's smugness, however, the report advises that one fundamental characteristic of the child welfare system has not changed: "Its clients are still overwhelmingly drawn from the ranks of Canada's poor."

It would really be more accurate to say that there are two child welfare systems operative in Canada — one for low-income families and another for the remainder of Canadian families. If you wanted to be more precise, you'd probably have to say that there are many child welfare systems, with the limits to access being set largely by a family's disposable income.

In an ideal sense, "child welfare" should encompass every effort made by a nation on behalf of its children. The concept should embrace policies which ensure that parents are provided with the esteem and material rewards through employment that will allow them to be effective parents. Child welfare should mean the education system, day care, flexible work schedules, and a host of other supports for children and parents. In reality, the term has come to encompass something much narrower — the limited array of social services provided for children by society after they have been neglected or abused. The term refers to services focused on the placement of children away from their parents when their families

break down.

It is low-income people that must rely upon that system which most of us view as child welfare. That system, says Philip Hepworth, is largely "a crisis and rescue" operation. He's right! It is a system that generally comes into play *after* the good intentions of parents have succumbed to the stresses on the family associated with poverty, yielding to inaction that can easily be branded "neglect" or to reaction that is clearly abusive to children — whether involving physical assault, verbal harassment or other forms of mental cruelty. Hepworth advises a fundamental shift away from the crisis focus to a developmental focus, geared to the prevention of poverty and family stress that so frequently results in neglect, abuse and child apprehension.

While low-income families have only the 'crisis and rescue' services at their disposal, middle-income and upper-income families face a different reality. Says the National Welfare Council, they, "can afford to buy into a very different network for dealing with their problems — a private, confidential and higher quality system of family services." The Council's report was referring to everything from private psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists to paid housekeepers and "Nannies," winter vacations for beleaguered parents and summer camps for kids. "All of these are preventive services in the full meaning of the term: they provide a safety valve to ease tension between parents and children, or allow parents to spend more leisure time with their kids."

At surface, parental inability to care for children is the reason for placing children in care. And the state can only intervene when certain admittedly reasonable standards of care are not being met — when parents are adjudged unwilling or unable to provide adequate care. As the National Council of Welfare states, however, "What is often forgotten ... is that the term 'unable or unwilling to provide care' is nothing more than a convenient administrative label lumping together a wide variety of family problems, many of which stem from inadequate income, unemployment and other factors that cannot fairly be blamed on their victims."

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Changing Canada's entire employment and income distribution system, however, is not a target that is in close range, even if it is the essential solution in the bulk of current child protection cases.

Native leaders and conscientious social workers alike are saying that, yes,

there are more immediate solutions. "It's a good thing to know how the system is so stacked against poor kids," a Native social worker I know told me. "But it doesn't help those kids a damned bit to sit around philosphizing about a revolution. And waiting for a revolution is not a luxury your emotions can afford when you have to deal with those kids on a regular basis."

So what are some of the reforms that Native people and people who work with disadvantaged children envision?

One reform that is being tossed about presently is a subsidized adoption program, a mechanism that would eliminate at least some of the income discrimination that makes it so difficult for the poor to become adoptive parents. Such a program would have an obvious impact on the availability of Native substitute care homes. Subsidizing adoption care would also give formal recognition and support to the many Native families which are, presently, assuming responsibility for the children of relatives who are unable to provide care for their children. And there are lots of them! Native parenting *is* more communal than non-Native parenting; Native parenting is shared extensively by relatives.

Another solution would involve making fostering more accessible by substantially increasing monthly foster payments. Contrary to popular belief, foster parenting is not a lucrative business; indeed, foster parents receive but a partial subsidy for their nurturat efforts.

While there are major variations amongst provinces in terms of monthly foster payment rates, foster care is now valued, on average, at about one hundred and twenty dollars for an infant or toddler. The rates go up with the age of a child, so that, again, roughly, two hundred and twenty dollars is paid for fostering a teenager.

The comparison may be wanting, but if I'm not mistaken, one day's stay in a hospital costs the public about the same as it costs to place a teenager in a foster home for an entire month. You may see an unintended parallel here that I do not intend. I'm not suggesting that foster children are patients to be "treated." It could be strongly argued, however, that at least in the initial months of a new foster placement, a child needs a greater quantity of time, energy and intelligent consideration from foster parents than the average patient is likely to receive in a hospital. And you don't expect *love* from a hospital staff. If you don't like that comparison, consider the fact that you'd be lucky to find a kennel to accommodate your pet cocker spaniel when you go on a month-long vacation for the rates that are paid for fostering younger children. For a St. Bernard?

Forget it!

Foster parenting, rather than being an easy way for low-income people to "set up a kiddy farm," is presently an enormous financial burden for any family not commanding at least above-average incomes.

And let's face it! Those skimpy foster care rates are yet another reflection of the limited value this society places on women's labour. Like parenting generally, foster care is largely a burden that is born by women.

Which makes me turn to the well-worn idea, but unworn practice, of home-makers' wages or at least a derivative of that idea. Many of the child neglect caseloads in this country are filled out with the children of young single-parent women living on subsistence welfare payments who simply cannot cope with the full responsibilities of motherhood on the meagre incomes they command — in the workplace or on welfare.

Presently, to be young but 'officially' adult and to be female and single is not a combination of circumstances that makes child-rearing an attractive career. For those who fit the description, a child is often more like a one-way ticket to a life-time of limited education and poverty — not to mention loneliness and heartache at the hands of casual (already married or marriage-shy) mates who 'jes' don't wanna be fenced in by a woman with another feller's offspring?

A guaranteed parental income for women with children (and yes, even single-parent men), perhaps tied to a qualifying procedure involving a parent-training and support program might go a long way to enable sole parents to fulfill their roles with more ease. The cries of outrage that such a program would be "licensing permissiveness" might be muted at least partially by the parent education qualifications. For those who would still keep shouting that single-parenthood would be encouraged by income-support rates above poverty levels, the National Council on Welfare has a response: "The reality is that there *are* single men and women with children to provide for. The reality is that most didn't *plan* to be single parents; circumstances along the way caused them to be widowed, divorced, or deserted ..."

Another solution to the disparities in nurture associated with income inequality would be the development of a comprehensive, tax-funded system of high quality day care services. Day care allows women to work outside of the home as well as parent; it allows single-parents to climb out of the perpetual, insured impoverishment of welfare dependency. Day care also provides relief for many of the tensions between parents and children that can culminate in neglect or abuse.

Studies of model centres show that good day care is also good for children — as good or better than the care that can be provided in the home. It provides a child with a constant supply of energetic playmates and a stimulating play and learning environment that few families could hope to match. *Good* day care, that is!

Presently, however, the type of day care that fits the guidelines advocated by child development researchers is very hard to come by — for many parents, impossible.

Unlike Europe (both Eastern and Western), Canada's day care system is presently only in its pioneering stages. While economic pressures on family budgets in recent years have forced increasing numbers of women with young children to work outside the home, the supply of day care has simply not arisen to meet the obvious need. And women with young children are indeed being virtually "forced" to work outside the home for economic reasons. Using federal statistics, day care advocates will quickly tell you that if married women with children did not take work outside the home as a second earner, an additional sixty per cent more families would fall below the poverty line.

The federal government's 1979 figures indicate that 721,000 children under six years have mothers in the labour force. That same year, only 86,780 of those children (about 12 per cent) were receiving care in government-approved day care spaces. Fewer than five per cent of the children under age two were receiving approved care.

What happens to the other 88 per cent?

The majority are cared for in unregulated child care — relatives, private babysitters, unlicensed centres.

Sometimes the alternatives are pretty good, sometimes not. Often it's a matter of luck. One thing is for certain, a good overall picture of the quality of care provided by relatives, babysitters and unlicensed day care homes cannot be painted. It's a private affair, generally free from any monitoring and out of the purview of parents who, after all, are at work.

Many experts, however, believe that there are a lot of pretty unpleasant stories to tell.

Howard Clifford, head of the National Day Care Information Centre in Ottawa, says that in his fifteen years working in the field he's heard "one horror story after another." As examples, he cites children being left

unattended, parents discovering their babysitters to be psychotic, extreme physical punishment, and common complaints that values at variance with those of parents are being imposed on children by babysitters.

Clifford would like to see a comprehensive universal system made available to all, like other services such as medicare and education. Both East Germany and France have such systems.

Affordable day care is just not available to most people in Canada. According to Howard Clifford, the alternatives are not only often devastating for kids, they are enormously expensive for society as a whole. "Even if ten per cent of the country's children are in damaging conditions — and that's a conservative estimate — over the next few years the consequences in terms of school, social and mental health problems would bankrupt us."

The fastest rate of growth in the labour market is amongst mothers who have children under age two — the very group for whom day care is least available. So it's no trivial issue.

Day care is a particularly pressing need of low-income working parents and single-parent families — for both parents and children. High quality day care has been shown to enhance children's intellectual development, thus better preparing them for effective performance in the school system. American psychologist Irving Lazar reports a major study of a pre-school project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, that followed low-income minority group children from an upgraded day care program through school to age fifteen. The children were matched with a control group that did not attend day care. The study found that the day care "grads" scored higher on reading, language and mathematics achievement tests. Fewer of the day care kids ended up in special classes and fewer had developed anti-social and delinquent tendencies.

Yes! There *are* reforms that can make a difference for children.

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The system of child welfare services in this country is failing Native children; it is also failing White children. In voicing their concerns about Native children and pressing their demands for change, Native people are speaking indirectly to us all on behalf of Canada's most precious resource — our children.

People like Bob Pringle, Howard Clifford, Wayne Christian and Marcelline Manuel believe that the children on Indian reserves and in urban slums, no matter what their ethnic origins or colour, are every bit as precious as the children of Shaughnessy.