

Why did Charlie Wenjack Die?

By Ian Adams

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The life expectancy of a Canadian Indian woman is twenty-five years; for a man, it is thirty-five. The infant mortality rate among Eskimos is 293 deaths per thousand, more than ten times the infant death rate for the population as a whole. The Economic Council of Canada has avoided making statements that racial discrimination is a cause of poverty, but there is no doubt that the poorest of the poor in this country are the Indians, the Eskimos, and the Metis.

There are now approximately 29,000 Eskimos, 60,000 Metis, and, by the 1965 census, 218,000 Indians. In that same year, the Indian Affairs branch made a survey which showed that 78.5 per cent of Indian households had incomes of less than \$3,000 a year, 54.5 per cent less than \$2,000, and 28.2 per cent less than \$1,000. When Buffy Ste. Marie sings, "My country 'tis of thy people, you're dying," she is singing about right now.

It is possible that during his short and disturbed life someone may have taken a snapshot of Charlie Wenjack -- one of those laughing, open-faced, blurred pictures one so often sees of children. But if one was taken, nobody knows where it is now.

There are five police pictures of Charlie, though. They are large, 8-by-10 prints, grey and underexposed, showing the thin, crumpled body of a twelve-year-old boy with a sharp-featured face. He is lying on his back, and his thin cotton clothing is obviously soaked. His feet, encased in ankle-high leather boots, are oddly turned inward. In one of the photographs, an Ontario Provincial Police sergeant is pointing down at Charlie's body where it lies beside the C.N.R. track. It is the exact spot where Charlie collapsed and died from exposure and starvation on a cold, wet night-just four-and-a-half feet from the trains that carry the white world by in warm and well-fed comfort. When they found Charlie, he didn't have any identification. All they got out of his pockets was a glass jar with a screw top. Inside were half a dozen wooden matches. They were all dry. And that's all he had.

Charlie Wenjack was an Ojibway attending Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Kenora, Ontario. He became lonely and ran away. He died trying to walk 400 miles home to his father, who lives and works on an isolated reserve in northern Ontario. It is unlikely that Charlie ever understood why he had to go to school and why it had to be such a long way from home. It is doubtful that his father really understood either.

It's not so unusual that Indian children run away from the residential schools they are sent to. They do it all the time, and they lose their toes and their fingers to frost-bite. Sometimes they lose a leg or an arm trying to climb aboard freight trains. Occasionally, one of them dies. And perhaps because they are Indians, no one seems to care very much. So this is the story of how a little boy met a terrible and lonely death, of the handful of people who became involved, of a town that hardly noticed.

Even before Charlie ran away from the school, he was

already running hard just to keep pace with the bewildering white world he had suddenly been thrust into. He didn't start school until he was nine. The village he came from, Ogoki Post on the Martin Falls reservation, didn't have a day school. So Charlie was sent to the Cecilia Jeffrey School, which is run by the Presbyterian Church and paid for by the federal government. Some 150 Indian children live at the school but are integrated into the local school systems. Consequently, Cecilia Jeffrey is, for ten months in the year, nothing more than an enormous dormitory. And Charlie, who understood hardly any English, spent his third year in what is called a junior opportunity class. That means he was a slow learner and had to be given special instruction in English and arithmetic. In his fourth year, he wasn't quite good enough to go back into the grade system, so he was placed in what is called a senior opportunity class. But there was nothing stupid about Charlie. The principal during his last year, Velda MacMillan, believed she got to know him well. "The thing we remember most about him was his sense of humour. If the teacher in the class made a joke, a play on words, he was always the first to catch on."

Charlie wasn't a strong boy. In fact, he was thin and sickly. He carried an enormous, livid scar that ran in a loop from high on his right chest, down and up over his back. It meant that in early childhood his chest had been opened. Nobody knows exactly when or why. "Indian children's early medical records are practically impossible to track down," Kenora's public-health doctor, P. F. Playfair, later explained. The post-mortem that was later performed on Charlie by Dr. Peter Pan of Kenora showed that his lungs were seriously infected at the time of his death.

On a Sunday afternoon, when Charlie had only another week to live, he was playing on the Cecilia Jeffrey grounds

with two friends, Ralph and Jackie MacDonald. Ralph, thirteen, was always running away -- three times since the school term had started that fall. Jackie, only eleven, often played hooky. (In the three years he had been at the school, Charlie had never run away. But he had played hooky one afternoon just a week earlier, and for that he had been spanked by the principal, Colin Wasacase.)

The three made a spontaneous decision right there on the playground to run away. It was a sunny October afternoon, and they were wearing only light clothing. If they had planned it a little better, they could have taken along their parkas and overshoes. That might have saved Charlie's life.

Slipping away was simple. The school, a bleak institutional building, stands on a few acres on the north-east outskirts of Kenora. For the 150 boys and girls, there are only six supervisors. At that time, the staff were all new and still trying to match names to faces. (That same day, nine other children ran away. All were brought back within twenty-four hours.)

As soon as they were clear of the school, the three hit that strange running walk with which young Indian boys can cover ten miles in an hour. They circled the Kenora airfield and struck out north through the bush over a "secret trail" that children at the school like to use. The boys were heading for Redditt, a desolate railroad stop on the C.N.R. line, twenty miles north of Kenora and thirty miles east of the Manitoba border. Because Charlie wasn't as strong as the others, they had to wait often while he rested and regained his strength. It was on the last part of this walk, probably by the tracks, that Charlie picked up a C.N.R. schedule with a route map in it. In the following days of loneliness, that map was to become the focus of his longing to get back to his father. But in reality

the map would never be more than a symbol, because Charlie didn't know enough English to read it.

It was late at night when the three boys got to Redditt; it had taken them more than eight hours. They went to the house of a white man the MacDonald brothers knew as "Mister Benson." Benson took the exhausted boys in, gave them something to eat, and let them sleep that night on the floor.

Early the next morning, the boys walked another half mile to the cabin of Charles Kelly. The MacDonald boys are orphans -- their parents were killed in a train accident in 1965. Kelly is their uncle and favourite relative. Kelly is a small man in his fifties. When he talks, he has a nervous habit of raking his fingers through his grey, shoulder-length hair. Like most of the Indians in the area, he leads a hard life and is often desperately hungry. It's obvious he cares about his nephews. "I told the boys they would have to go back to school. They said if I sent them back they would run away again. I didn't know what to do. They won't stay at school. I couldn't let them run around in the bush. So I let them stay. It was a terrible mistake."

That same morning, Charlie's best friend, Eddie Cameron, showed up at the Kelly cabin. He, too, had run away from the school. Eddie is also one of Kelly's nephews. This gathering of relations subtly put Charlie Wenjack out in the cold. The Kellys had two teenage daughters to feed in addition to their nephews, and Kelly, who survives on a marginal income from welfare and trapping, probably began to wonder exactly what his responsibility to Charlie was. He said later that he and his wife, Clara, would refer to Charlie as "the stranger." The Kellys also had no idea where Charlie's reserve was or how to get there.

"He was always looking at this map," said Mrs. Kelly,

"and you couldn't get nothing out of him. I never seen a kid before who was so quiet like that."

Nobody told Charlie to go. Nobody told him to stay, either. But as the days passed, Charlie got the message. So, in what must have been a defiant attempt to assert his own frail existence, he would take out his map and show it to his friend Eddie Cameron, and together they would try to make sense out of it. And Charlie would tell Eddie that he was going to leave soon to go home to his father. But as Eddie remembers, Charlie only knew "his dad lived a long way away. And it was beside a lot of water."

On Thursday morning, Kelly decided he would take his three nephews by canoe up to his trapline at Mud Lake, three miles north of Redditt. "It was too dangerous for five in the canoe," said Kelly, "so I told the stranger he would have to stay behind."

Charlie silently played outside the cabin for a while by himself, then he came in and told Mrs. Kelly he was leaving; he asked for some matches. Nobody goes into the bush without matches. If the worst comes to the worst, you can always light a fire to keep warm. Mrs. Kelly gave him some wooden matches and put them in a little glass jar with a screw cap so they would keep dry. She also gave him a plateful of fried potatoes mixed with strips of bacon. Then he left. "I never seed him again," said Clara Kelly.

Nobody will know whether Charlie changed his mind about leaving or whether, out of loneliness and despair, he decided he wanted to see his friends one last time. Because instead of striking out east along the railroad tracks, he walked three miles north through the bush to Mud Lake. He must have really pushed himself, because he arrived at the cabin by the trapline before the surprised Kelly and his nephews got there in the canoe. All they had to eat that night

was two potatoes. Kelly cooked them and divided them among the four boys. He didn't eat anything himself, but he drank some tea. In the morning, there was only more tea. Kelly told Charlie he would have to walk back to Redditt; there was no room in the canoe. Charlie replied that he was leaving to go home to his father. "I never said nothing to that," Kelly said later. "I showed him a good trail down to the railroad tracks. I told him to ask the sectionmen along the way for some food."

But Charlie didn't ask anyone for anything. And though he stayed alive for the next thirty-six hours, nobody saw him alive again.

When he left Kelly and his nephews and started out to walk home to his father, Charlie had more than half of northern Ontario to cross, over 400 miles. There are few areas in the country more foreboding. The bush spreads away from the railroad tracks like a bleak and desolate carpet. The wind whines through the jackpines and spruce, knocking down rotten branches in sudden crashes. The earth and rocks are cold brown and black. The crushed-rock ballast, so hard to walk on, is a pale yellow ribbon supporting the dark steel tracks. Close to the tracks, tall firs feather against the grey sky. And when a snow squall comes funnelling through a rock cut, it blots out everything in a blur of whiteness. The sudden drop in temperature can leave a man in a warm parka shaking with cold.

All Charlie had was a cotton windbreaker. And during the thirty-six hours that Charlie walked, there were frequent 'snow squalls and gusts of freezing rain. The temperature was between twenty and thirty degrees. It is not hard to imagine the hopelessness of his thoughts. He must have stumbled along the tracks at a painfully slow pace- in the end, he had covered only a little more than twelve miles. He probably spent hours

huddled behind rocks to escape the wind, gazing at the railroad tracks. Somewhere along the track he lost his map or threw it away. Charlie must have fallen several times; bruises were later found on his shins, his forehead, and over his left eye. And then at some point on Saturday night, Charlie fell backward in a faint and never got up again. That's the position they found him in.

At 11: 20 A.M. on Sunday, October 23, engineer Elwood McIvor was bringing a freight train west through the rock cut near Farlane, twelve-and-a-half miles east of Redditt. He saw Charlie's body lying beside the track. An hour later, a section crew and two police officers went out to bring Charlie's body back.

The section foreman, Ed Beaudry, was angry and bitter. "We tell this man he has to send his son to one of our schools, then we bring his boy back on a luggage car."

On the Sunday they went to pick up Charlie's body, intermittent snow and sleet blew through Kenora's streets. The church services were over, and the congregations from Knox United Church and the First Presbyterian Church, which face each other at Second Street and Fifth Avenue, were spilling out onto the sidewalks. Just two blocks west, at Second and Matheson, I walked into a hamburger joint called the Salisbury House. An Indian woman in an alcoholic stupor was on her hands and knees on the floor, trying to get out the door. None of the half-dozen whites sitting at the counter even looked at her. A young, well-dressed Indian girl came in and, with a mask-like face, walked around the woman on the floor. The girl bought a pack of cigarettes and then on the way out held the door open for the woman, who crawled out on her hands and knees and collapsed on the sidewalk.

One man at the counter turned and looked at the woman.

"That's what they do to themselves," he said in a tone of amused contempt.

The kid behind the counter suddenly turned, white-faced and angry. "No, we did," he said.

"We? No, it was the higher-ups, the government," replied the man.

"No," insisted the kid, "it was you, me, and everybody else. We made them that way."

The men at the counter looked at the kid with closed, sullen faces. Later, I tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't give me his name. "I just work here part-time," he said. "I work for the highways department.... I guess I'll have to learn to keep my mouth shut. Because nothing ever really changes around here."

Charlie Wenjack finally did go home -- the Indian Affairs Department saw to that. They put him in a coffin and took him back to Redditt and put him on the train with his three little sisters, who were also at the Cecilia Jeffrey School. Colin Wasacase, the principal, went along with them too. Wasacase, in his early thirties, is a Cree from Broadview, Saskatchewan. He knows what Indian residential schools are all about. He has lived in them since he was a child and taught in them. He was at one such school at the age of six when he broke his left arm. The arm turned gangrenous and had to be amputated.

At Sioux Lookout, on the way home, the little party picked up Charlie's mother. She was taking tests for a suspected case of tuberculosis. From Nakina, they all flew 110 miles north to Ogoki. It's the only way to get to Charlie's home.

Charlie's father, grief-stricken, was bewildered and angry. In his fifties, he is known as a good man who doesn't drink and provides well for his family. He dug the grave and buried

Charlie, his only son, in the tiny cemetery on the north shore of the Albany River. He has decided not to send his daughters to school but to keep them at home. Wasacase understands that, too. His own parents kept him out of school for two years because another boy in the family had died in much the same way as Charlie.

There's not much else to say about Charlie Wenjack, except that on November 17 an inquest was held in the Kenora Magistrate's Court. Most of the people who have been mentioned in this story were there. The coroner, Dr. R. G. Davidson, a thin-lipped and testy man, mumbled his own evidence when he read the pathologist's report, then kept telling the boys who ran away with Charlie to speak up when answering the Crown Attorney's questions. When Eddie Cameron, Charlie's best friend, entered the witness box, Davidson unnerved Eddie with warnings about telling the truth and swearing on the Bible. "If you swear on that book to tell the truth, and you tell lies, you will be punished." Which seemed unnecessary because, as Crown Attorney E. C. Burton pointed out, a juvenile doesn't have to be sworn in at an inquest. Eddie later broke down on the stand and had to be excused. Davidson let Burton deal with the boys after that. Burton was gentle enough, but the boys were withdrawn and, for the most part, monosyllabic in their answers.

"Why did Charlie run away?"

Silence.

"Do you think it was because he wanted to see his parents?"

"Yeah."

"Do you like school?"

"No."

"Would you rather be in the bush?"

"Yeah."

"Do you like trapping?"

"Yeah."

Before the boys were questioned, the constable in charge of the investigation, Gerald Lucas, had given the jury a matter-of-fact account of finding Charlie's body. In telling it simply, he had underlined the stark grimness of Charlie's death. But it was now, through the stumbling testimony of the boys and in the bewildered silences behind those soft, one-word answers, that the full horror began to come out. No, they didn't understand why they had to be at the school. No, they didn't understand why they couldn't be with their relatives. Yes, they were lonesome. Would they run away again? Silence. And the jury was obviously moved. When Eddie Cameron began to cry on the stand, the jury foreman, J. R. Robinson, said later, "I wanted to go and put my arms around that little boy and hold him and tell him not to cry."

There were no Indians on the jury. There were two housewives, a railroad worker, a service-station operator, and Robinson, who is a teacher at the Beaverbrae School in Kenora. In their own way, they tried to do their duty. After spending more than two hours deliberating, they produced a written verdict and recommendations that covered one long, closely written page of the official form. The jury found that "the Indian education system causes tremendous emotional and adjustment problems." They suggested that the school be adequately staffed, so that the children could develop personal relationships with their instructors, and that more effort be given to boarding children in private homes.

But the most poignant suggestion was the one that reflected their own bewilderment: "A study be made of the present Indian Affairs' education system and philosophy. Is it right?"

Charlie Wenjack died on the night of October 22, 1966. More than two years later, on Saturday, June 21, 1969, the Toronto Star carried a front-page report on the living conditions of Indians in and around Kenora. Written by staff reporter Glen Allen, it showed that almost nothing had changed. And the fact is that over the past four years there have probably been more marches, more protests, more investigating experts of all kinds, more over-all exposure by the mass media of conditions in Kenora than any other area in this country; yet, as the kid in the hamburger joint said, nothing really changes. I found some depressing echoes in Mr. Allen's report. He quoted a local lawyer, Jack Doner, who said that despite all the discussions and public alarms, the only solution really being considered "is a bigger and better jail." Mr. Doner said the same thing to me when I did the first story on Kenora for Weekend Magazine in July, 1965. It's obvious that provincial and local action hasn't gone very far, either in thought or deed. And the ancient punitive solutions are the only ones held on to. At Armstrong, Ontario, just 240 miles north-east of Kenora, the local school board will not allow Indian children to attend the local school, contending that the Indian parents are not taxpayers but squatters on crown land. So the children, like Charlie Wenjack, are separated from their parents for ten months in the year by being sent to residential schools hundreds of miles from their homes.

But the first part of 1969 gave no brighter promise than previous years to Indians across the country. Ottawa raised taxes and cut back public spending to curb inflation. Provincial and federal budgets were trimmed, and the first to feel the effects of all this were, of course, the poor, in this case the Indians. Around the Lesser Slave Lake area of Saskatchewan, some 3000 Indians and Metis continued to exist at a marginal

level of subsistence -- even as Premier Ross Thatcher promised yet another war on Indian poverty. And across the rural ghettos of northern Ontario, the Indian bands fed bitterly off their own despair, all the while listening to the Ottawa and Ontario governments wrangle about who had constitutional jurisdiction over their lives. Early in May, Chief Wilmer Nadjiwon, president of the Union of Ontario Indians, resigned from the Indian Advisory Council of the Ontario government's Indian Development Branch. He did so, he said, because he was "convinced that the government was not sincere" in its program to help Indians overcome poverty.

A few days later, the entire seven-man executive staff of the Ontario government's Indian Development Branch resigned, including the director, Joseph Dufour. Premier John Robarts' first reaction was that the men had resigned only because they had been looking for an excuse to do so. It was a weak defence, especially as it had been revealed earlier in the legislature's debate on spending estimates that the responsible minister, John Yaremko, had spent only \$400,000 of the \$1.4 million he had been given to spend for Indian development during the previous year. (See Chapter 7, "Keeping the Poor That Way.")

And across the country, the white man continued to bring his legal and political machinery into play whenever he wanted one more piece of land from the Indians in the name of progress, whenever he sought to impose his own kind of moral law on the native people. For example, in Manitoba, the former Conservative government of Walter Weir, despite the outcry of the public and of experts, proceeded with plans to allow Manitoba Hydro to divert the Churchill River in constructing a \$1-billion power project that would result in high-level flooding of South Indian Lake. The flooding

would wipe out two prosperous and self-supporting Indian and Metis communities of some 600 people who had never known the misery of having to depend on the white man's welfare handouts.

On June 20, 1969, a New Brunswick county court judge, in a bewildering display of judicial legerdemain, ruled that Indian rights granted in treaties dating from as early as 1725 were annulled by the Fisheries Act. The case went back to September, 1966, when Martin Francis, a sixty-six-year-old Micmac of the Big Cove Reserve, was convicted of fishing in Richibucto River with a net and without a licence, breaking a New Brunswick Fisheries regulation and the Fisheries Act of Canada. At his trial in January, 1968, before Judge Eric P. Richard, Francis maintained it was his right to fish in the Richibucto-free of any of the white man's laws. Furthermore, this right had been guaranteed by the white man himself in a treaty drawn with the Micmacs in 1725.

Judge Richard found Francis guilty, ruling that Parliament and the provincial legislatures were not bound by the terms of any treaty made before Confederation. Justice having been meted out, Judge Richard totally confused the Micmac by saying that he well understood why the Indians say "the white man speaks with forked tongue." The judge then proceeded to lash out against what he called "the ceaseless encroachment by the white man on the Indians' rights and privileges."

The farce didn't end there. Francis decided to appeal the conviction. The appeal was denied by Kent County Court Judge Claudius Leger, who actually read from the pertinent passage in the treaty "that the said Indians and their constituents shall remain in the districts before mentioned, quiet and free from any molestation of His Majesty's troops or his other good subjects in their hunting and fishing."

There was no doubt, said Leger, that the Indians of the Big Cove Reserve "were solemnly guaranteed by treaty or proclamation the right to hunt and to fish." However, he went on to say, under powers granted to the Government of Canada by Section 91 of the British North America Act, "Parliament has the right to enact legislation which infringes on the treaty rights granted to the Indians." In this case, the legislation was the fishing regulations. The most ironic fact about all these legal manoeuvres was that Francis had made his appeal with federal financial aid supplied by the Department of Indian Affairs.

But what was probably the most bizarre display of symbolic justice took place in April, 1969, at Pond Inlet in the Northwest Territories. Bizarre because of the pseudo-formal ceremony erected around the pathetic suffering of a young Eskimo girl, who unwittingly became the vehicle for the first criminal trial ever held in Pond Inlet and the investiture of Justice Minister John Turner as "the first Canadian to be admitted to the bar north of the Arctic Circle."

Pond Inlet is on the north shore of Baffin Island, 2,000 miles north of Ottawa and 430 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The accused was a seventeen-year-old Eskimo girl who came from a tiny Eskimo community near Pond Inlet. In August, 1968, she had given birth alone to a dead child. It is a criminal offence not to seek aid in giving birth to a child. In this case, it was obviously an unwanted pregnancy; the girl managed to conceal both the pregnancy and the birth from her parents. She hid the body of her baby in a box; two days later, she threw it from some nearby cliffs overlooking Eclipse Sound. Some passing hunters discovered the body a week later and handed it over to the R.C.M.P. detachment. A doctor on board the federal icebreaker *C.D. Howe*, which supplies settlements during the summer break-up, performed

an autopsy; papers were passed back and forth in Ottawa, the R.C.M.P. were ordered to investigate, and the seventeen-year-old girl was charged.

Now, nine months later, the accused is standing in an elementary school classroom that has been turned into a makeshift court. Presiding is Mr. Justice W. G. Morrow, judge of the Northwest Territories, who has flown 600 miles from Frobisher Bay to hear the case. Also flown in for the case were the defence lawyer, David Searle, and the crown prosecutor, Orval Troy. In attendance is Justice Minister Turner and his entourage, who have joined the court's circuit of the eastern Arctic to witness justice being done. The accused has pleaded guilty. She doesn't speak any English, so proceedings are conducted through a local twenty-one-year-old Eskimo. Consequently, it is possible that much of the majesty of the occasion is lost upon the prisoner. At any rate, it is apparent later that she has understood little. Mr. Justice Morrow gives her a two-month suspended sentence under bond of \$20, and she retires nervously to stand alone at the back of the classroom. Mr. Justice Morrow now presents Justice Minister Turner with a soapstone carving of the Canadian coat-of-arms and admits the minister to the bar. Turner pays tribute to the sacrifices made by Mr. Justice Morrow, Mr. Searle, Mr. Troy, and other territorial lawyers. "I think the people of Canada," says Mr. Turner, "can be assured their law does travel to the Pole."

About this time, someone discovers the criminal still standing around at the back of the classroom, uncertain of whether more is wanted of her. So the interpreter gently leads her from the room, telling her, yes, she can go now. A little later, the white men climb into their planes and flyaway.

Over the past ten years, Indians in this country have been trying to escape from the ghettos that many of their reserves

have become-according to the E.C.C., only one-third of the 2,200 reserves in Canada have the economic potential of supporting their present population-but they have found only ready-made ghettos in the cities.

Winnipeg is now silently and desperately struggling with the problems that an influx of 20,000 Indians and Metis has brought to the city. With few skills and fewer resources to deal with white society, they have become trapped in the bureaucracy of welfare and the tenements of slum landlords, who operate on what is known as Cockroach Capitalism. One Winnipeg alderman privately admits that if the city were to enforce its health and housing by-laws properly, thousands of Metis and Indians would be thrown out on the street.

The late Winnipeg Magistrate Isaac Rice saw the same people as the source of much of the petty crime he had to deal with in his court. And in February, 1969, on the C.B.C. television program *The Public Eye*, he bluntly suggested that sterilization was the logical social solution. Later on in the program, a group of Winnipeg aldermen matter-of-factly discussed the advantages of a sterilization program. Magistrate Rice and the aldermen were ordinary people, and they used ordinary words to express themselves. But behind that commonness was the horrifying reality that they were seriously considering the use of such a repressive solution against a class of people who, at the bottom of the ladder, were already defenceless. And whose advantage would such a sterilization program serve? Certainly not the Indians! The only conclusion to be drawn is that it is really the affluent in our society who want to be protected from the demands of, and relieved of their responsibility to, the people who originally owned this country.

It was against this backdrop of despair and bitterness that

Jean Chretien, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, unfolded another sweeping new policy for Indians at the end of June, 1969. Briefly, the new plan would end the federal trusteeship of Indian lands. The reserves would be returned to the bands to be disposed of as they saw fit. All Indian and federal government agreements would be annulled, the Indian Act repealed, and the Department of Indian Affairs phased out of existence. The Indians would then become the responsibility of the provincial governments.

The new policy was supposedly built upon recommendations that had come out of many lengthy consultations Chretien and federal officials had held with Indian leaders during the previous year. But the reaction of those Indian leaders was swift and bitter. Chief Wilmer Nadjiwon of the Ontario Union of Indians labelled Chretien's policy "cultural genocide." Chief Harold Sault of the Union of Northwestern Ontario Native Organizations said, "The white man has done what he has always done; he has listened but he has not heard us." And in Alberta, Harold Cardinal, president of the Indian Association of Alberta, threatened civil servants with violence if they came to the reserves to discuss implementation of the new policy before the Indians were ready to. "Our advice to bands in this province," said Mr. Cardinal, "is to physically escort federal commissioners off the reserves, and, if necessary, forcibly evict them." In its own way, the statement was an accurate appraisal of how much the Indian people trusted the federal government in 1969.