

Status quo is 'the enemy'

THE
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Writer stirs up controversy with new book urging Natives to stop pointing the finger

"One who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes meet with defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated in every engagement."

— SUN-TZU
The Art of War

Thus starts the remarkable and often irreverent book, *Dances with Dependency: Indigenous success through self-reliance*, by aboriginal lawyer and entrepreneur Calvin Helin.

Helin, 47, a true Renaissance man who hails from B.C., admits his book is "politically incorrect."

Yet, unlike other politically incorrect tomes, this one is not sneeringly so. Indeed, this 300-plus page book is filled with hope and written out of deep love and concern for aboriginal people.

Just how politically incorrect?

In his book, Helin recounts a joke told by a well-known aboriginal comedian.

The comedian says the minister of Indian Affairs slipped and fell on the stairs and

landed on his backside.

"He said: 'You know what happened when he landed? He broke the noses of seven Indian chiefs!'"

Despite the harsh criticisms Helin levels against chiefs in general, he says he has been called by many, who congratulate him for speaking the truth.

In the book, Helin sugarcoats nothing. While he recognizes and acknowledges the historical reasons and complexities behind the numerous social dys-

functions in Canada's aboriginal communities — including massive unemployment, high incarceration rates, epidemic suicide rates, rampant addictions and tragic rates of child abuse and neglect — Helin says none of that will change until Natives stop pointing the finger of blame at others and start to take responsibility for their own futures.

"It's going to require an entire change of attitude and that's perhaps the toughest thing of all to do," he admits, "but we've taken the first step

because most of us agree we cannot continue with the status quo and I think this book gives our people permission to speak frankly."

At that, Helin refers to a quote from the great children's book, *Alice in Wonderland* that he's included in his book, a national bestseller.

"Cheshire Puss,' ... (Alice) began, rather timidly... 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to

get to,' said the Cat.

'I don't much care where,' said Alice.

'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat."

Native people, points out Helin, are at least in a better position than Alice.

"We know that the welfare trap is one path we shouldn't continue to take, that the status quo has to change," he writes.

"The system of welfare and transfer payments have literally rotted the souls of many

and damaged their families beyond measure."

Helin points out that for 9,600 years, Canadian aboriginals were completely self-reliant. That started to change in the last 150 years or so.

"There's a quote in the book by Quebecois singer Felix Leclerc that says: 'The best way to kill a man is to pay him to do nothing,'" adds Helin, who visited Calgary recently to promote his book, which is causing ripples throughout the aboriginal community and beyond.

Former prime minister Paul Martin has met with Helin after reading the book and vows to get copies of it into the hands of his former Liberal colleagues.

Helin says aboriginal programming expenditures in 2005-2006 were around \$9 billion with 88% of federal government spending going to reserves, where only 29% of Aboriginals live, and yet living conditions are on par with the Third World.

Helin says as one-third of the Canadian population reaches retirement age, Native communities are having more babies and have the youngest population in the country.

That's a reality he calls a



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JIM WELLS/SUN MEDIA

Politically incorrect author Calvin Helin

"demographic tsunami."

"To those that might defend the status quo," writes Helin, "I would suggest they look carefully at the wholesale misery and poverty that the welfare trap is delivering now."

Helin says the time has come for all Natives to elect their national leaders rather than have chiefs — many of whom are corrupt and want to continue riding their own

personal gravy train — do it for them.

"The book acknowledges our past but looks forward, not backward," says Helin.

The time has come, he adds, "to recognize that the status quo and our acceptance of that is our enemy. We must slay that enemy if we are to have a decent future."

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