

## NATIONAL DAY OF PROTEST

## Natives risk derailing their own interests

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Last December, the Assembly of First Nations voted to make June 29 a national day of peaceful protest. Now Chief Terry Nelson of the Roseau River First Nation is threatening to kick off the Canada Day long weekend by blocking a CN rail line, and encouraging other chiefs to do likewise.

Mr. Nelson was one of the few native leaders to stand up for David Ahenakew after the latter's notorious anti-Semitic remarks in 2002. He later went on the attack against Winnipeg broadcaster Charles Adler, as well as against the Asper family's CanWest media empire: "The Jewish silence is deafening. It is not just one article, there are thousands of articles and stories carried by

Jewish controlled media that are evidence of hatred against recognized races of people." He played another race card this week: "There are only two ways of dealing with the white man. One, either you pick up a gun, or you stand between the white man and his money."

Mr. Nelson has encouraged young Indians to get military training in the U.S. and bring their skills back to Canada. "At least 10 Roseau River youth should join the U.S. Army in the next five years. If 633 first nations did the same, in less than 10 years, Canadian Indians will have over 6,000 trained soldiers." Indeed, 6,000 army veterans would be handy for blocking rail tracks.

Let's hope governments and police forces do their job on Canada Day weekend, tearing down any barricades as soon as they are put up and laying charges against anyone who breaks the law. With such lavish forewarning, there's no excuse not to be prepared; this is

no Caledonia-style surprise.

Effective law enforcement is crucial. Canada is huge, with innumerable roads, rail lines, and utility corridors crossing Indian reserves or other lands subject to native claims. Even if no one gets hurt in the standoffs, a series of blockades could do serious damage to the economy. But law enforcement is not enough. Native leaders are going to have to declare open support for the rule of law and repudiate people like Mr. Nelson.

The national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine, says he doesn't support such tactics - but neither does he condemn Mr. Nelson outright. That's not good enough.

There is a lot at stake here because we are entering a new age of aboriginal entrepreneurship in Canada. Provincial governments have created a new, highly lucrative aboriginal industry by licensing on-reserve casino gambling, and

revenue-sharing plans mean the benefits need not be confined to the host reserves.

High prices for natural resources are increasing the potential wealth of first nations that own oil and gas, diamonds and other minerals, and timber. Other first nations who do not actually own such resources are located close enough that they can benefit from the economic spillovers of resource exploitation.

Canada's steady population growth is also a factor. As our cities keep expanding, Indian reserves that used to be rural exclaves have become prime suburban or even urban real estate, offering profitable opportunities for developing golf courses, shopping centres, business parks, and residential housing. Other reserves, remote from urban centres, have economic potential in ecotourism, as well as old-fashioned hunting and fishing.

Perhaps bigger than all of these is the simple demand for

labour. As Tsimshian businessman Calvin Helin has detailed in *Dances with Dependency*, Canada is an aging society - except for aboriginal people, who have the country's highest birth rates. Labour shortages are starting to show themselves; aboriginal people should play an important part in filling them.

But none of these optimistic scenarios can be played out without adherence to the rule of law. Investors won't put their money into aboriginal projects, nor will employers seek out aboriginal workers, if roads and railways are liable to erratic blockades over issues that have nothing to do with their business concerns.

A special chiefs meeting of the AFN is scheduled for next week: Let's hope the chiefs take that opportunity to send Terry Nelson and his racist rant back to the 1960s. If they allow his Roseau River radicalism to spread, a lot of projects will be put on hold.

## Blossoming temple squabble



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Val Ross reported last Saturday on a fiery controversy at Toronto's oldest Jewish congregation, Holy Blossom Temple, about - wait for it - turning around the direction of worship in the 80-year-old "sanctuary." Post-9/11, in a world convulsed with deadly conflict, much of it religious and much of that between co-religionists, I find the squabble refreshing.

Jewish worshippers traditionally face east, toward Jerusalem and the site of the original Temple, the one described in the Bible, where priests sacrificed, destroyed by Rome in 70 A.D. It is a sign of