



Time to leave handouts behind

Editorial Comment

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There has been some anger expressed during the past week over Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand's decision to vote against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

The declaration was supported by 143 countries.

Whether the Conservative Government changes its mind and supports the declaration will not change the reasoning behind its original vote.

And that reasoning has far more to do with cost than it does with respecting human rights.

Whether they admit it publicly or not, their fear is that the declaration will open the doors to more lawsuits, and fuel demands for increased federal funding to aboriginal people.

That cry for increased federal funding is being issued again and again in Nunavut.

And, in almost every instance, it's a cry for help that translates into a plea for further social dependence.

It is a symptom of the disease itself -- federal handouts that ease the strain of a present situation, but come with a vision for the future that leads to self-dependency.

It's an insidious trap known all too well by First Nations people across Canada, and one Nunavut could find itself hopelessly snared in if our leaders aren't careful.

There is plenty of blame to go around for the state of Canada's aboriginal people, but the time for pointing the finger to acquire more federal funding out of shame and guilt has past. The time has come for a banner of Just Do It to be flown over the quest for aboriginal independence.

The bearer of that banner may well be one of the most articulate, intelligent and thought-provoking aboriginal voices to emerge in Canada in quite some time.

Calvin Helin is an aboriginal lawyer, businessman and author of the book, Dances with Dependency.

A book which should be mandatory reading for every government personality and aboriginal student in Canada.

Helin, while not granting absolution to anyone for the mistakes of the past, puts economic independence at the top of the aboriginal priority list.

He sees the coming strain on Canada's social programs with millions of Canadians set to retire during the next few years, and realizes the government will not be able to sustain current funding to an aboriginal population growing at seven times the national rate.

In fact, Helin has had harsh words for aboriginal leaders who focus on nothing more than keeping the federal handouts coming.

He sees the keys being a return to the traditional value of self-reliance, and a renewed and vigorous focus on education, training, and economic development.

To Helin, federally funded self-governance is a meaningless mirage.

Federal handouts are about to come crashing down and aboriginal leaders must help their people become economically dependant.

If not, not only will they watch their own societies tumble, they may drag down Canada's economy too.

Helin's message should be heard by every Canadian -- and it's one we hope is heard in Nunavut so our future will be part of the solution, not the problem.