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City's Liberals expect great things from leader Dion

Party faithful claim new national leader will resonate in northwestern B.C.

BY JAMES VASSALLO

The Daily News

The selection of Stéphane Dion as Liberal leader is good news for the region, say local Liberals.

Dion, who was supported widely by delegates from Skeena-Bulkley Valley at the recent leadership convention, is a strong environmentalist and nationalist who spent eight years

successfully bringing different levels of Canadian society together as inter-governmental affairs minister.

"For the riding, I think it's very, very positive," said Rhoda Witherly, who attended the convention as a Dion delegate. "He has a very clear view of what kinds of things he wants to see done. He thinks very carefully about issues before he leaps forward on them, and he's very committed on the environmental side.

"Because our whole riding has such a base in resource extraction ... that's really positive for us — it means when we do have developments go ahead, they're going to go ahead on a real sound environmental

basis and I think the rules will be very clear from the outset."

As Northerners, it's Dion's practicality and straightforwardness that may resonate with voters. For those in Skeena-Bulkley Valley, rarely ones to vote for a party that may form government, it may be his outsider status that appeals.

"If Skeena riding tends to be contrarian, Dion would be contrarian," said Gordon Stamp-Vincent, Skeena-Bulkley Valley Liberal candidate in the last election.

"He was certainly not the favourite child for coming to the fore as leader of the Liberal party.

"But I think people see a genuine

integrity and ethics that they didn't always see and that was what drew me right off the bat. He's what I call a quintessential Canadian — soft-spoken and polite, but firm. I think that's really refreshing."

The election of Dion as party leader is also a return of the party into the hands of grassroots members, he said.

"I think the Liberals were punished, and I was the front man here," said Stamp-Vincent. "It was a message that was delivered and heard I think loud and clear by members of the Liberal party."

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End this sad cycle of misery says local author

BY LEANNE RITCHIE

The Daily News

When Tsimshian author Calvin Helin looks at the current path of aboriginal people in Canada, it brings to his mind an old song by Quebec musician Felix Leclerc: "The fastest way to kill a man is by paying him to do nothing."

But there are ways to change this, said the lawyer and author of the new book, *Dances with Dependency: Indigenous Success through Self-Reliance*.

In *Dances with Dependency*, Helin looks at the history of aboriginal people, and compares that with their current state and then provides solutions to problems.

"It's really a universal message and



"One of the first steps that has to be taken if you are in this dependency mind-set situation, is you have to recognize that you are in it and you have to take ownership of your problems. At the end of the day, no matter what has happened to you, the only person that can get you out of the situation is you."

The specific message of the book is that there is a real solution to a problem that has perplexed everyone for 200 years — until now. There is a way forward, and there is hope to make the lives of ordinary indigenous people better.

Born in Lax Kw'alaams, Helin was sent outside of his community by his father and grandmother when he was 12 years old.

"I come from a family of hereditary chiefs that have a background in social activism and they wanted me to get an education and make a difference to the aboriginal people. After looking at the situation for over 30 years, the book is the result," said Helin.

The author will be in Prince Rupert with artist Bill Helin, who provided the artwork for the book, on Friday. There will be an author and artist signing at the Rupert Square Mall from noon until 4 p.m. and then at 7 p.m. there will be a feast to honour the author at the Nisga'a Hall. On Saturday, Helin will be available at Rainforest Books from 3 p.m. until 5 p.m.

Helin said that relying on various levels of government for support has been an absolute disaster for Canada's indigenous people and that the current system is causing enormous amounts of hardship and pain.

"The Department of Indian Affairs is probably the most inept bureaucracy in the history of civilization," he said.

"There is no way the current system can be defended. It is delivering so much misery and problems that I don't think you could seriously defend it in any way whatsoever."

AUTHOR cont'd from page 1

He said that what is happening with the system is it is particularly hard on aboriginal women and children.

"They are getting the heck beat out of them and it's literally killing native kids — this welfare crap syndrome," he said.

"There's a lot of reasons why it should be changed. But the basic most human reason is it is delivering incredible human misery."

He said that while aboriginal people make up 3.5 per cent of the Canadian population, they represent more than 30 per cent of the children in social welfare in Canada. And the rate of aboriginal children going in to social welfare care is increasing at an alarming rate. From 1996 to 2001, the number of aboriginal children in that system increased at a rate of 70 per cent.

"I've quoted a Supreme Court of Canada case in the book where ... the court was so appalled at the number of aboriginal people that are being warehoused in prisons, particularly women, that the super conservative Supreme Court of Canada who generally never opines on anything outside of the legal issues directly before them said that this is a national disgrace," he said

"What they were taking about was on the prairies an aboriginal woman is 131 times more likely to be incarcerated than a non aboriginal woman. For every non aboriginal woman in jail, you've got a 131 native women. It's shocking."

And because of the demographics of Canada's indigenous people, the challenges facing indigenous people are problems that all Canadians will have to face, he said.

"The real issue for Canada is what I call the 'demographic tsunami' and no one understands this in Canada. In this country, the aboriginal population is the fastest growing out of all the ethnic groups. Our birth rates are much higher than the mainstream population. The reason for that is the aboriginal baby boom occurred 10 years after the mainstream baby boom (in 1957)," he said.

"We have the youngest and fastest growing population in the country."

In Canada last year, for the 650,000 aboriginal and Inuit population, the federal government spent about nine billion dollars, said

Helin. Of that nine billion, almost 90 per cent went to the 30 per cent of those living in reserve communities.

"Only 30 per cent of the aboriginal people in Canada are living in reserve communities and what that says is 51 per cent or so voted with their feet on this Indian Act system. It's not providing them with anything. What they have to do to get better education and opportunities is they have to leave their communities," he said.

"There's a lot of reasons why [the welfare system] should be changed. But the basic most human reason is it is delivering incredible human misery,"

— Author Calvin Helin.

"Ninety per cent of the nine billion is going to 30 per cent of the population and people don't understand that. Most of the 51 per cent plus that live in the cities are getting three and half per cent of that nine billion and the remainder goes to aboriginal people living in rural areas."

Given that the indigenous population will peak at the same time as 30 per cent of Canadians get set to retire, he said there is no way the Canadian government can continue to throw money at problems through the Department of Indian Affairs at the rate it has been.

"The bottom line is Canada cannot afford this and even if it could, the system should not be preserved anyway because it is leading to so much misery. It's not an aboriginal problem, if Canada wants to remain prosperous and competitive as a country, then we have to change the system. We have to figure out how to move forward from this and everyone has to have a picture of where we are coming from," he said.

And where they are coming from is 10,000 years of building beautiful, complex cultures that worked together to survive, he said.

"If the aboriginal populations and tribes and societies were on this metaphorical canoe journey for 10,000 why in the last 400 years have we gone from being completely self reliant to being in the situation we are in?" he said.

The answer are the pathologies that develop out of being forced on to an artificial source of revenue.

"Were our ancestors sitting on the couch eating potato chips and waiting for their welfare cheques? Well of course not, how could anybody survive doing that? You can only survive doing that if you have an artificial source of revenue coming in to your community," he said.

"Economically, in any western country about 90 per cent of the wealth is created by the business sector. But if you look at aboriginal communities, they have no business sector and almost all the wealth coming into the community is coming in the form of transfer payments or welfare.

"If you are put in a situation where you can't earn a living or may be you choose not to these days, there's no satisfaction in that. Our grandparents would tell us people get satisfaction out of putting out effort and doing something."

Dances with Dependency has been receiving international interest and critical acclaim from around the world as many other populations, such as those in inner cities and indigenous people in New Zealand and Australia face similar challenges.

"When you go through horrendous trauma like some of the aboriginal populations in North America (disease wiping out 90 per cent of population, cultures outlawed, forced to go to residential schools) what the New Zealand Mauri say is you have to go from grievance to development mode," he said.

"The purpose of grieving is to adjust to psychological trauma. Beyond that, the only useful question is what are you going to do about it and the chiefs in Canada have largely been asking who are we going to blame about it. In grievance mode that's a useful question, but beyond that, looking forward, the only useful question for aboriginal youth is what are we going to do about it."