

Native writer slams 'Indian industry'

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The best way to kill a man is to pay him for doing nothing.

So goes a song by the French musician Felix Leclerc. The idiom was evoked Thursday by Calvin Helin, author of *Dances with Dependency*, a book calling on aboriginal people to empower themselves by acknowledging and overcoming their dependency mindset on "Indian industry."

"The 'Indian industry' is all of those people who are making a living off of our misery," Helin said.



Calvin Helin, author of *Dances with Dependency*. Don Healy, Leader-Post

"Some of them are doing a good, valid job, and a lot of them are out there just exploiting the situation and exacerbating the problems so that they can make more money out of it."

Helin said that the problem in the aboriginal community is that money has too often been regarded as the solution to problems.

"You would think with \$9 billion a year, we would be able to solve this problem," Helin countered, referring to the \$9.1 billion annually the federal government puts into programs and services for aboriginals. "If money was the problem, we should have been able to get a long way from where we are now."

The first step, according to Helin, is to simply begin talking about the issues and to give ordinary people a say in what goes on in the aboriginal community.

"Let them decide the direction we should take, not a handful of people," he said. "We need to be able to exercise our view whether it's heard or not in a democratic way to make a change just like every other Canadian has that right."

For Helin, short-term ideas for breaking out of the dependency mindframe have to do with immediate economics and leveraging off the resource development to create wealth for the people in aboriginal communities. In the larger discussion, structural changes need to be implemented and take shape.

"How do we change the economics of the system so that we can be self-reliant? At the end of the day, if we don't control our own purse-strings, those that control them will control us, and that's what's happening," he said.

"But we also live in a modern world with a modern economy. We don't live in a bubble, and we have to become economically integrated into the system to look after ourselves ... Is any other ethnic person, a Japanese or Chinese person, or a Jewish person less than who they are because they engage in economy? Of course not. In fact those that are doing best use their economics to preserve their culture."

But that's not the only thing that needs to change. Helin calls to attention the governing bodies of aboriginal society, which he says are at times rife with corruption.

Helin calls for a more transparent and accountable system of governance. While he concedes that the changes he is envisioning will take generations to take shape, he is confident that it is possible.

"We have no choice," he said firmly. "In the language of my tribe, what we say is 'wai wah.' Wai wah means 'just do it.' We're going to do it. This is going to happen ... What else is there?"