



## It is time

for an Aboriginal 'glasnot' where everyone can contribute to a debate that absolutely needs to take place, according to indigenous author Calvin Helin.

Speaking to the Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society, in early July, Helin said, "To make lasting change we have to start talking frankly about what is happening and examining practical solutions on how to move forward."

He detailed statistics, which painted the dismal picture of living conditions for indigenous people, before calling for change.



*Calvin Helin presents book to Senator Gerry St. Germain*

His book, *Dances with Dependency: Indigenous Success through Self-Reliance* was released in December and is being hailed as possibly the most important book ever written on how to improve the lives of impoverished indigenous people. In the months since its launch, the book has leaped to best-seller status in Canada. In its first week in Chapters/Indigo book stores, the book made the top 25 best sellers list.

"This is not surprising given that indigenous grassroots folks have widely and enthusiastically embraced the new publication for giving voice to their often frustrated concerns and aspirations," stated a publicity release by the book's publisher, Orca Spirit Publishing.

"Grassroots indigenous folks are stuck with an antiquated anti-democratic governance system that leaves them feeling disenfranchised, powerless to change their destiny, and many, stuck with banana-republic like corruption. There is widespread frustration, hunger for constructive change, for real leadership, and a pervasive appetite for spiritual direction. This status quo is not making things better; indeed it is actually making things worse."

There are many reasons for change. "The Aboriginal reasons," he said, "can be summed up in the quote from *Dances with Dependency* — "The tears and broken hearts of thousands of mothers and grandmothers should be enough to convince anyone that we must take action now". The welfare trap and dependency mindset is stealing the lives and hopes of our future generations. We must stand up vigorously to protect our children now." The non-Aboriginal reason, Helin has termed the "Demographic Tsunami". The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing ethnic population in Canada. "Presently, the Indian and Inuit population represent 650,000 people and cost \$9

billion in transfer payments annually with an additional \$9 billion from provinces for services. Unbeknownst to most Canadians, the Métis population is winning Aboriginal rights cases at the Supreme Court of Canada and there may be 300,000-800,000 Métis by some estimates."

He asked, "Does this mean that Canada will be looking at \$36+ billion for this population?"

"The other half of the Demographic Tsunami is that by 2011, a full one-third of the mainstream population is set to retire — living longer, relying on expensive social programs such as healthcare, while not contributing to the tax coffers of the nation that are paying for all of this. "Unless we take corrective measures now, the Demographic Tsunami is coming to swamp the finances of the country," he said.

Helin believes this provides an opportunity and not a crisis.

"Canada desperately needs the young Aboriginal population gainfully employed in the current booming economy, particularly given current worker shortages in many sectors. In the right spirit of partnership, with the careful development of a long-term strategic plan, we need to implement a plan which results in more Aboriginal grassroots empowerment, more wide-scale employment, better Aboriginal education outcomes, and greater wealth creation." With his book, he is challenging people towards a path of change.

But to move forward he describes the need for a paradigm shift from a culture of dependency back to one of self-reliance which served Aboriginals so well for so many years before Europeans arrived with colonization aspirations.

Helin, a member of the Lax Kw'alaams community of northern B.C.'s Tsimshian Nation, is no stranger to personal success. He's a practising lawyer and has made the "Top 40 under 40" list in both Business in

***"Dances with Dependency: Indigenous Success through Self-Reliance"***  
***by Calvin Helin***



# Small Business Successes

Whispering Winds ...the voice of the Métis Community in British Columbia



Vancouver and the Financial Post. He is also president of the Native Investment and Trade Association (NITA), and vice president of the National Aboriginal Business Association.

NITA was founded in 1989 to promote economic self-reliance and strengthen Aboriginal participation in the mainstream economy. To carry out this mandate, it has organized national events focused on key economic and training issues that are fundamental to the growth and well-being of Aboriginal Canada.

In his book, Helin describes development of indigenous people in four periods. European discovery is the second wave while assimilation and development of the welfare trap is the third wave.

"The period of massive dysfunction arose out of the last century," he said. "In order to control indigenous people and take their traditional assets, successive governments, vigorously promoted populations onto welfare roles and discouraged self-reliance through misguided policy. This led to the 'welfare trap' and virtually total dependence of the indigenous people and their governments on external assistance to survive."

During his speech, Helin continued, "It has also entrenched a dependency mindset into the psyches of indigenous people as the result of several generations of welfare trap socialization. This period has also ushered in the era I have termed 'Shaman economics' — i.e. the government's 'black magic' belief that waving a fiscal wand over tribes, without addressing fundamental structural flaws of the system, would create a sound economic base ...

"There are also the phenomena of lateral

violence, and learned helplessness that rack our communities — conditions of a people that have been long colonized. "We also desperately need real governance reform," said Helin. "We need change that results in ordinary people having a greater democratic say in every layer of Aboriginal government, we need a new policy that leads to less corruption and wastage of resources, more transparency and accountability in every level of governance — one that grassroots people can take ownership of because they feel it actually represents their interests."

Helin describes the fourth wave or period as 'The way forward — beyond the Demographic Tsunami'.

Indigenous people, he said, must admit and begin discussing openly where they're at, take ownership of the problem and then move forward by acknowledging "the realities of our ancestors' self-reliance, interdependence, self-discipline, ethical leadership and cultural co-operation." Education plays a strong role in the future, he contends.

Quoting from the past Royal Commission on Aboriginal people, he said, "Destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated. Education is the transmission of cultural DNA from one generation to the next."

He further stated, "We must recognize that the education premium applies to Aboriginals as much as other people — as education rises, so does income and opportunities. We have to understand that education is not only vital to the economic well-being of individuals but also that of nations — education is associated with a wide range of non-economic benefits such as better health and well-being. We also must have an education strategy that not only accounts for and encompasses cultural differences but emphasizes academic standards."

Finally, Helin talked about economic integration and encouraging enterprise. "We must start taking control over our own purse strings if we truly want to

control our own lives.

"Aboriginals' massive leverage over natural resource development and booming commodities economy can provide a 'perfect storm' to move indigenous people forward immediately while a longer term strategic plan is being worked out.

"Communities have to start encouraging and valuing entrepreneurs rather than being hostile towards them. These risk takers may be the future revenue source for indigenous governments." Referring to his research, Helin said, "The Maori of New Zealand coined the phrase 'from grievance to development mode'. Their idea is that tribes have been justifiably grieving because of the host of harmful outcomes from colonization — grieving serves the purpose of adjusting to a psychological trauma. In Canada, leaders have largely never left grievance mode and have only been asking "Who are we going to blame for this?" At the end of the day the only useful question is "What are we going to do about this?"

The time for reform is ripe, Helin believes. The two colliding trends — the aging Canadian population and the growing native population — threaten to put a strain on the Canadian economy it won't be able to sustain.

In an interview with The Georgia Straight, he was quoted, "The answers to our present and our future lie in our past. We created beautiful arts, language and culture, and had a vibrant economy. How did this come about? Not from laying on the couch, eating potato chips and cashing welfare cheques."

"It is time to set the course for development back on to a path of self-reliance," he urged his Vancouver audience. "When the tide comes in naturally, the Canadian boat and the Aboriginal canoe can be lifted in an equally beneficial manner.

"Wai Wah," he concluded. That's a Tsimshian expression meaning "Just do it."

