

News on the Thames

NNNC exclusive interview with ICO re: return of Camp Ipperwash lands

While speculation surrounding the most recent negotiations to return Camp

Ipperwash ran rampant in the mainstream press last month, NNNC reporter Dan Smoke obtained an exclusive two hour interview with Michael Coyle, Director of Land Claims for the Indian Commission of Ontario.

Involved in the process since March, 1996, Coyle's says his job is to be a "neutral, impartial party at the table" and to help the First Nation's, provincial and federal governments all reach an agreement on the return of the lands to the First Nations people. During the interview, he openly discussed some of the issues surrounding the next round of negotiations, defining both his role and the stages that negotiations must complete.

The interview that follows provides factual information for First Nations' readers and includes many of the main issues discussed during this meeting.

Dan Smoke: Who are the parties represented at the negotiating table?

Michael Coyle: There is a team of people representing Canada from the Department of National Defence and the Department of Indian Affairs. Ralph Brant is the chief negotiator for Canada. On the First Nations side, there is a negotiating committee with a number of members on it, lawyers, First Nation members. . . The First Nation Chief and Council have appointed (their) team; it's a team that works separately (from the Band Council). The team has people who live at Kettle Point and people who represent those who live at Stony Point. Then there is the Indian Commission of Ontario trying to mediate, trying to help the parties keep on track, building constructively toward a settlement.

Smoke: This is the first time these parties have ever been brought together, I understand?

Coyle: Yes, that's right. Certainly the first time that these individuals have been brought together, and these are the only negotiations going on right now regarding the return of the Camp..

Smoke: I guess that the people at Stony Point are not being recognized as a separate entity unto themselves?

Coyle: No, at the moment, Canada is negotiating with the one First Nation, The Kettle and Stony Point First Nation.

Smoke: Have you reached an agreement yet?

Coyle: At the moment we do not have an agreement of any kind. There is no agreement, not even an agreement in principle, not even a tentative agreement amongst the negotiators. . . I can tell you that some of the information in the London Free Press in the last few days is not accurate. Like any other negotiation, particularly one that involves legal rights, these negotiations are confidential until we can reach an agreement. I'm not and neither is anyone else at the table in a position to be able to say, "this is a specific issue that we have reached an agreement on".

Smoke: You were interviewed on a radio talk show here in London last week and the interviewer mentioned that the return of Ipperwash Provincial Park might be on the table and included in the negotiations.

Coyle: If there were to be an agreement surrounding the future of the park, any agreement of that kind would have to have the provincial government's agreement. . . . I was asked on the radio if the issue of the park had ever been raised. And, my answer to that was, and still is: If you have intelligent people sitting around a table over 18 months, many issues will be raised. There are a wide range of concerns that the First Nation community has and we have spoken about many of those issues. But, it is one thing to raise an issue, you and I are speaking about the park and its possible future right now, but that is completely different. Just because you've raised an issue, doesn't mean we are negotiating it. The Ontario government has not been involved in our negotiations in any way, and there simply could be no negotiations surrounding the future of the park without the government being there. If the future of the park is an issue that the parties want to address, then the provincial government

would have to be invited to sit down. . . and have some serious discussions about that. That has not happened in our negotiations.

On the talk show, the host was under the impression that there is already some kind of agreement that's been reached on the future of the park that people should be concerned about. But, there has been no negotiations on the future of the park.

Smoke: What are the avenues that a First Nation can follow when attempting to regain lost lands?

Coyle: If a non-Indian person had their land taken away, or had a contract broken, they would normally have a number of remedies. If the government had done this, they could bring political pressure on the government to correct what had happened. Unfortunately, for First Nations people in Ontario and throughout Canada, they had very little political influence for a very long time in this country - not even getting the vote federally until the 1960's. So going to press their claim at a political level was a very difficult and an uphill battle until just recently.

The second thing one might do is to try to negotiate based on a breach of the contract, to negotiate an outcome. Again, in Canada until 1973, the federal government did not have a policy that it would negotiate breaches of treaty or breaches of agreement.

The third thing one might do is hire a lawyer. But, it was only in 1951, that the Indian Act was amended to take away a provision that made it a criminal offence for a lawyer to represent Indians, in what was said to be an Indian claim, without the permission of the federal government.

These are some of the reasons, why First Nations have not had a forum to correct that injustice. Those options are now available (to First Nations). Today the federal and provincial governments are prepared to negotiate. One of the reasons there is such a backlog of historical grievances, is that for so long it was impossible for a First Nation to present their case.

See the March Issue for the conclusion to the interview

NATIVE ACCESS PROGRAM FOR ENGINEERING

Become an Engineer!

The NATIVE ACCESS PROGRAM FOR ENGINEERING (NAPE), designed for Native students by representatives of the First Nations and Lakehead University, provides:

- Pre-university academic preparation in Mathematics, Science, Computing and Communications to study engineering at Lakehead University,
- An academic, social and cultural support system throughout the student's entire program of study.

(NAPE) consists of a six-week Orientation Program followed by one academic year of study. Successful completion of the program qualifies you to enter the Lakehead University Engineering Program to become a Chemical, Civil, Electrical or Mechanical Engineering Technologist and Engineer.

You are eligible if you:

- Are of Aboriginal, Inuit or Metis ancestry;
- Are 21 years of age or older;
- Have been out of school for at least two years; and,
- Apply by April 3, 1998.

The Faculty of Engineering is looking for mature, dedicated, hard-working students to join the present NAPE "family".

Women are encouraged to apply.

If you want to know more about engineering and NAPE contact:

Native Access Program for Engineering
Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5B1
Tel: (807) 346-7712 or (807) 343-8399
Fax: (807) 343-8013
E-Mail: NAPE@LakeheadU.CA

