“I know Arthur Manuel as a strong and wise leader, seasoned in the long battle that has been his life. To read this book, his detailed and very personal history of the long struggle of Indigenous people in Canada, is to go through an emotional rollercoaster of disillusionment, despair, flinty resolve, and, finally, growing hope, building to a present in which the struggle for their rights continues. This is not history buried in the past, it is going on right now and as Canadians we are all a part of it.”

— James Cameron, filmmaker

“I cannot recommend this book too highly: it weaves together a compelling life history, an account of the last nearly fifty years of Indigenous activism, and a relentless and compelling criticism of the doctrine of discovery that continues to underlie Canadian claims to Indigenous land. Everyone in Canada should read this book; if they did we might become a better country!”

— peter kulchyski, Department of Native Studies, University of Manitoba

“Art Manuel is like a tall cedar, watching the landscape of Canadian Indian policies through time and offering sturdy and dependable resistance. In Unsettling Canada his account of our recent history is dense with compelling personal stories, behind-the-scenes political anecdotes, an honest account of the dynamics of Indigenous activism, and revealing insights about the continuity of colonialism. In the often difficult conversation about Indigenous politics in Canada, Manuel offers us shade to reflect on our past and consider the future. This is a rigorous but very accessible and vitally important book.”

— Hayden King, Anishinaabe writer, educator, and activist
“Unsettling Canada should be truly unsettling to many Canadians. Canada’s treatment of Aboriginal people and their struggle to have a chair at the country’s political table reveals an almost Machiavellian sense of politics. No wonder the life expectancy of Native people is substantially lower than non-Natives. It’s the sense of heart-rending frustration and the collective banging of heads against the wall that probably kills us.”

— Drew Hayden Taylor, author of *Me Funny* and *Me Sexy*

“Arthur Manuel passionately builds a detailed historical analysis of creative and determined Indigenous movement-building, grounded in the day-to-day harsh reality most Indigenous peoples continue to live. It is an engaging and vivid memoir that demonstrates how critical legal victories are embedded in and reliant on grassroots political movements that have a global reach. Offering many organizing lessons, this book is a frank and inspiring call to action in support of Indigenous sovereignty, including building alliances with and involvement of non-Indigenous people, whose future is inseparable from Indigenous struggles for the realization of inherent rights to self-determination.”

— Sheila Wilmot, PhD, author of *Taking Responsibility, Taking Direction: White Anti-Racism in Canada*

“Based on his experience as a leader and activist, Arthur Manuel recounts key moments in the struggles of Canada’s Aboriginal population over the past fifty years. Part memoir, part political statement, *Unsettling Canada* is an insightful and articulate account of the challenges governments and Aboriginal people face in resolving disputes between them.”

— William Wicken, Professor of History, York University

“For those of us with enough winters to remember George Manuel in life, reading his son’s *Unsettling Canada* can be an almost eerie experience. No book of which I’m aware has ever conveyed with such clarity the continuities of voice and principle across generations in the Fourth World struggle for self-determination. Even we who might question whether liberation can be achieved non-violently, as Manuel believes, have much to gain from his consistency and strategic vision.”

— Ward Churchill, author of *Struggle for the Land*
UNSETTLING CANADA
Unsettling Canada
A National Wake-up Call

by Arthur Manuel
and Grand Chief Ronald M. Derrickson

with a Foreword by Naomi Klein

Between the Lines
Toronto
To all of the volunteer Indigenous activists
and to my grandchildren

— ARTHUR MANUEL

To my Elders, now passed on, who taught me
to love and respect my people and to fight for their rights:
Millie Jack, Margaret Derrickson (my mother),
Elizabeth Lindley (wife of Westbank’s first chief),
and Mary Anne Eli

— GRAND CHIEF RONALD M. DERRICKSON
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FOREWORD

Naomi Klein

UNSETTLING CANADA is a book that was a long time in coming, and yet it arrives at the perfect time. It comes at a moment when a great many non-Indigenous Canadians are deeply unsettled by the direction the country is going and are searching for new and bold paths forward.

The current government seems to have one idea about how to build an economy. Dig lots of holes, lay lots of pipe. Stick the stuff from the pipes onto ships—or trucks, or railway cars—and take it to places where it will be refined and burned. Repeat, but more and faster. It’s an approach to the world based on taking and taking without giving back. Taking as if there are no limits to what can be taken—no limits to what bodies can take, no limits to what a functioning society can take, no limits to what the earth can take.

Never mind the impacts on water. On wildlife. On forests. On the stability of the climate itself. Anyone who stands in their way, who points out inconvenient truths about health, human rights, or climate change, is treated as an enemy and various attempts are made to silence them—be they activists, First Nations communities, or the government’s own scientists. The opposition parties offer meek objections and little by way of alternative.

It is in this context that a great many Canadians are discovering that First Nations land rights and title—if robustly defended—represent the
most powerful barrier to this destructive, extractivist mindset. And so, unprecedented coalitions are emerging to fight tar sands pipelines in British Columbia, fracking in New Brunswick, and clear-cut logging in Ontario. In these battles we are beginning to see the outlines of a new kind of relationship, based on nation-to-nation respect, not assimilation or merger.

This wise, enlightening, and tremendously readable book will both strengthen and deepen these relationships. Interweaving policy and history with the personal stories of a remarkable family packed with leaders and healers, Manuel offers a unique education in the painful history that brought us to this juncture. He also provides a crash course in the legal concepts and humane principles that will help us all move forward.

With confidence and care, Manuel guides readers through the many clever disguises the Canadian government has used to rob First Nations of their land rights and title, unmasking each attempt at “extinguishment” in turn. This is a heart-wrenching story of how might triumphed over rights. Yet simultaneously, and with a palpable sense of momentum, Manuel takes us through the various legal victories that steadily strengthened the movement’s hand, bringing us to the current turning point. This is the back story of both grassroots and backroom struggles that created the context in which we find ourselves today, one in which a new generation of First Nations leaders is demanding sovereignty and self-determination, and more and more non-Indigenous Canadians finally understand that huge swaths of this country we call Canada is not ours—or our government’s—to sell.

Even those who are sure they know this material already will be taken aback by the originality of the legal and financial strategies described in these pages, and inspired by the hope they represent. This is a transformative journey of a truly visionary thinker, leading us all to a wide open door.

March 2015
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I first sat down to write the acknowledgements for this book, I was a bit overwhelmed. There are so many people to thank for helping in so many different ways. There are those who encouraged me and assisted me directly in the writing process. There are those who have fought alongside me and who have made important individual contributions to our common struggle. And there are those who are part of organizations that have believed enough in my work to help me along the way. Unfortunately I do not have nearly the space I would need to thank all of the people in these three groups, but I would like to mention at least a few of them here.

Those most directly involved in getting the book project launched were Grand Chief Ron Derrickson and Naomi Klein. It was Naomi who first suggested, even gently insisted, that I pull together the ideas I had been promoting in British Columbia, in Canada, and internationally in book form. And she was duly punished for this by having to write the Foreword, which she has done, as she does everything, with great generosity and wit.

Grand Chief Derrickson had echoed Naomi’s call for a book and offered to participate in the project as an adviser. He contributed greatly to this book in every way, including by writing the Afterword. In fact, Grand Chief Derrickson has been part of the formulation of the ideas in this book from the time we led the B.C. Interior peoples into the forest
in the Indian logging initiative in 1999. At the time I was the chief of Neskonlith, chair of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, and spokesperson of the Interior Alliance of B.C. It was in the aftermath of that action that I developed the Indigenous Network on Economies and Trade, and Grand Chief Derrickson has continued to offer his leadership, support, and unique insights along the way.

I began work on the book almost three years ago, and I have been given invaluable assistance in shaping the manuscript by Peter McFarlane, a writer and friend.

Nicole Schabus provided crucial input during the editorial process; with her contribution, as with so much else, she is in a class by herself. My life partner, Nicole was also a leading contributor, through her legal training and brilliant insights, in the formulation of many of these ideas, and as you see in the book, she has been at my side throughout the international struggle with NAFTA and the WTO.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge how both my parents imprinted on me a deep belief in the nationhood of our people. My late father, Grand Chief George Manuel, taught me about politics but would also call on me as a young person to speak at every meeting, appreciating the energy of our youth. My mother, Marceline, carried the heavy burden of supporting our family through the movement and stood on the front lines. My siblings share in much of the same burden and carry the same strength, from my late brother Robert and sister Vera, to Emaline, Richard, and Doreen to the youngest Martha, George, Ida, and Ara, who are following in the footsteps of our parents.

I also want to mention important contributors to our struggle whom we have lost: I still hear the booming voice of Irene Billy (1928–2011) ringing in my ears, reminding us not to sleep on our rights. I remember the knowledge shared by Dr. Mary Thomas and Coleen McCrory. I miss my friend Qwatsinas (Ed Moody). Nuxalk Strong! Nuxalk Forever! And I think about young leaders we lost far too early: Ethan Baptiste and my dear son Neskie Manuel.

Another person in a class by himself is my Mohawk friend, Russell Diabo, who has never wavered in his commitment to Indigenous rights and Indigenous nationhood. It has been a pleasure to work with him over the years and virtually all of the ideas discussed here were also discussed with him or published in his Strategic Bulletin. Between me and Russell and our friend David Nahwegahbow, LL.B., an Anishinabek
from Whitefish River, we have spent decades fighting to change the federal Comprehensive Claims policy, with the important contributions of Algonquin Chief Harry St. Denis of Wolf Lake and former Chief Jean Maurice (Poncho) Matchewan from Barriere Lake. I would also like to thank Chief Donny Morris and Sam McKay from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig, who have also inspired us all.

I want to mention some of my partners and friends from my early political life who remain friends to date: Beverly Manuel, Stó:lo activist Eddy Gardner, the late Stan (Butch) Plante of the Metis Nation, Tantoo Cardinal, Ken and Dana Williams, Pottawatomis from Moose Deer Point, Dave Monture, a Six Nations Mohawk, and Maya Lix Lopez.

At the community level, I have worked closely with my own chief, Judy Wilson, and with Secwépemc activists Dr. Janice Billy, Dawn Morrison, and Garry Gottfriedson and Elders Sarah Deneault (91) and William Ignace (82). I believe that it is important for Elders to speak out on political issues, to teach younger generations how to protect our land and build upon our values. We need them to take their place in every part of our lives and to speak out and give guidance in the political sphere.

I have also been honoured to work with community activists like Bertha Williams from Tsawwassen, Judy DaSilva of the Asubpeescho-seewagong Anishinabek (Grassy Narrows First Nation), Rosalin Sam and Hubert (Hubie) Jim, the lone fighter from Sutikalh and fishers June, Fred, and Rick Quipp of Cheam.

I would also like to thank Tsilhqot’íin chiefs, Chief Roger William from Xeni Gwet’in, Tribal Chairman Chief Joe Alphonse of Tl’etinqox, Chief Francis Laceese from Toosey Indian Band, and Chief Russell Ross Myers from Yunesit’in Government. I would also like to thank Tsilhqot’ín leaders like Stanley Stump, Danny Case, and David Quilt.

There are also many young Indigenous activists like lawyer June McCue, my IGov master’s student Ryan Day, and young Indigenous leaders from across Canada all the way home to my own children who give me new hope every day in our struggle for self-determination. As do all of the members of the Defenders of the Land and Idle No More, with a special thanks to the four women founders of Idle No More—Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean—to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude for inspiring a new activism among our peoples.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of a small team of very talented volunteers who have worked with INET: Dr. Shiri Pasternak,
Emma Feltes, Corvin Russell, and Pam Baley as well as activists like Harsha Walia and Brigette DePape who have understood the importance of our struggle and the broader struggle for Indigenous self-determination. A special thanks goes to Judy Rebick, one of the great progressive thinkers and journalists of our generation whose support is always much appreciated.

There are so many others and I am afraid it would take another book-length manuscript to mention them all. But I must make room to mention Ed Bianchi from KAIROS, an organization that has always stood by us. As have Ramsey Hart from Mining Watch, Maude Barlow from the Council of Canadians, Tara Scour from Amnesty International, Dave Bleakney, the national union representative from CUPW, and those like Dr. Peter Schwarzbauer, Michaela Mayer, Gawan Maringer, and Evelyn Schiemer from Arbeitskreis Indianer Nordamerikas (AKIN) from Vienna, Austria. Vivian Gonik and Olivier de Marcellus from Geneva and Helen Nyberg from Incomindios in Zurich, Switzerland, and Ludwig and Monika Seiller from the Aktionsgruppe Indianer & Menschenrechte e.V. from Munich, Germany, who defend us in the solidarity network in Europe, as well as my friend Kenichi Matsui from Japan. I would also like to thank Nicole’s parents, Eric and Traude Schabus, for their hospitality while we are in Austria. Closer to home I would like to thank singer/songwriter Kelly Derrickson and the ongoing support of the RMD team (Cathy, Kim, and Julia).

I would also like to thank leading academics like Professor Kent McNeil, Professor Brian Noble, Professor Michael Asch, and Professor Constance McIntosh, who have helped me develop my thinking in clarifying our Indigenous territorial authority. Along with Terry Tobias, traditional land map maker, and Herb Hammond, an ecosystem-based conservationist, who have helped me in resource-based planning.

I would like to offer a special thanks to my colleagues on the board of the Seventh Generation Fund: Vice-chair Tupac Enrique Acosta, Dr. Luis Macas, Dr. Henrietta Mann, Oren Lyons, Chris Peters, and Deborah Sanchez, and the executive director, Tia Peters. All of us were deeply saddened by the recent death of our chairperson, Tonya Gonnella Frichner, a woman who inspired us all.

I would also like to thank the North American Indigenous Peoples Caucus (NAIPC) and the present two Co-chairs Dr. Debra Harry,
Acknowledgements

Northern Paiute from Pyramid Lake, Nevada, and Janice Makokis LL.B. from the Cree Nation of Saddle Lake, Alberta.

Finally, my biggest thank you goes to my children, Mandy, Niki, Ska7cis, and Anita-Rosie, and my inspiring and energetic grandchildren—Aaron, Mahegan, Tuwiwt, Suli, P’exmes, Anaoni, Ske7cissiselt, and Mali Nali—who give me reason to continue the struggle that I inherited from my mother and my father, my grandparents and great-grandparents, for justice for our peoples. I love you and I am proud of you.

Arthur Manuel
March 2015
The Lay of the Land

There is no denying the beauty of the land. From the hills above Neskonlith—the community where I was born and grew up and where I served as band chief from 1995 to 2003—you can see the blue waters of the Shuswap lakes, the dry scrubland of the valley, and the cooler hills shaded by stands of ponderosa pines. Below, the South Thompson River empties from the lake and winds westward through the valley toward Kamloops, where it joins the North Thompson and flows to the Fraser and down to the sea.

This is British Columbia’s Interior Plateau. The land my people have shared for thousands of years, and still share with our ancient neighbours. Our Secwepemc territory spreads north to the Dakelh lands, south to the Syilx (Okanagan) lands, west to the Nlaka’pamux, St’at’imc, and Tsilhqot’in lands, and to the east by the Ktunaxa territory, where the Rocky Mountains rise to the sky, marking the boundary between the Interior tribes and the Nakota and Cree peoples on the Great Plains.

The village itself is moulded around a wide bend in the river. From the hills above, you see a handful of houses and the band office, and on the west side of the river, the gas station and store. Along the riverbank are small gardens, and now, after many decades of grasslands, the hayfields have been replanted with the help of the new sprinkler irrigation system.

Further upstream, where Little Shuswap Lake empties into the river, is the town of Chase. It began to form around the lumber mill built just before the First World War. We have generally had peaceable relations with the people of the town, with only occasional flashes of open conflict.
As co-chair of the Global Indigenous Peoples Caucus, reading the statement on the colonial doctrine of discovery at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, New York City, May 7, 2012

But even when it is peaceful, there has been a steady note of racism from across the river. Our parents and grandparents faced open Jim Crow and were forbidden access to most services in the white world. The only restaurants that would serve us were the Chinese restaurants; for the rest, Indians would be stopped at the door or, even more humiliating, left to sit unserved until they slunk away. My generation felt the sting of blatant racism in a less formal way, but it was still shocking to be confronted by it. A generation later, as chief, I was still dealing with racist acts against our children.

There are, of course, many decent people in Chase, as there are anywhere, but the underlying noise is there. And even the well-meaning people of the town have a difficult time understanding us. To a large extent, we live in separate worlds. They live in Chase, British Columbia, Canada. We live in Neskonlith, Secwepemc territory.

I drove up to the hills above Neskonlith on an afternoon in June 2012. I was just back from New York, where I was serving as the co-chair to the
Global Indigenous Peoples Caucus at the United Nations’ Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), and I was looking for a quiet place to think things over.

Somehow we had gotten our message through the clamour of states that make up the United Nations. We had condemned, as Indigenous peoples, the innocent-sounding doctrine of discovery, which was the tool—the legal fiction—Europeans used to claim our lands for themselves. Even that claim rested on obvious mistruths. The Americas were first portrayed as *terra nullius* on European maps. But in almost all cases, Europeans were met, at times within minutes of their arrival, by Indigenous peoples. There was an attempt to get around this inconvenient fact by declaring us non-human, but this was difficult even for Europeans to sustain over time. The doctrine of discovery remained because it was a legal fig leaf they could use to cover naked thievery.

In New York, the United Nations report had called this doctrine frankly racist and described it as no more legitimate than the slavery laws of the same era. Most important, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues’ committee report attacked the ongoing efforts to extinguish our title to the land through force or one-sided negotiations as a continuing violation of international law.¹

I would like to think that we live in a world where enlightenment—like the Permanent Forum statement on the doctrine of discovery—is a warm breeze spreading across the planet, and that with patience and good faith we will finally be warmed by the justice we have been so long denied. But I know that is not the case. At an earlier session of the UN, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand fought bitterly against the whole world to try to block the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which eventually passed in 2007 by a vote of 144 to 4, with Canada leading the charge of the rights deniers.²

Nothing we have ever gained has been given to us or surrendered without a fight. When circumstances forced the Europeans to make concessions, as was the case with the parts of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that recognized Indigenous sovereignty, the next generation would take advantage of a resurgence in its strength to reverse the concessions and try to push us even further into poverty and dependence.

Still, we have not given up and, as my father, Grand Chief George Manuel, often pointed out, the most important gift we have received from our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents is the legacy of
struggle. They have opened the trail we now pass along and, in a very real way, set the destination for our journey.

Before we look at where we are today and where we are heading, it is important that we first look at how we arrived at this place. I will briefly describe the process for my Secwepemc people. Among the other Indigenous peoples in Canada and throughout the Americas, there are many variations, but there is one constant: the land was stolen from underneath us.

Europeans made their initial land claim on our Secwepemc lands in 1778 when Captain Cook sailed along the British Columbia coast, more than four hundred kilometres away from our territory. According to the tenets of the doctrine of discovery, all that Europeans had to do to expropriate the lands in a region was to sail past a river mouth and make a claim to all of the lands in its watershed. Our lands, given to us by our Creator and inhabited by us for thousands of years, were transformed into a British “possession,” not only without our consent and without our knowledge, but also without a single European setting foot on our territory.

In the early 1800s, European traders and advance men like Simon Fraser did begin to show up on our rivers. For the first fifty years, they were seen and treated as guests on our lands. We had more or less friendly relations. We traded with them, we shared food with them, and we often helped them on their journeys through our territory. On a personal level, we tolerated their eccentricities and they tolerated ours.

But gradually, the numbers of these uninvited guests began to increase, and they began to act less and less like guests and more and more as lords. It was a process that Indigenous peoples around the world have experienced. The strangers arrive and offer trade and friendship. The Indigenous population responds in kind. Gradually the strangers begin to take up more and more space and make more and more requests from their hosts, until finally they are not requesting at all. They are demanding. And they are backing their demands with garrisoned outposts.

In the case of the people of the Interior Plateau, we are fortunate to have a document from our ancestors that describes the precise pattern of usurpation. This declaration, which is known as the Laurier Memorial, was presented to Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier on August 25, 1910, by the Interior chiefs when the prime minister was visiting Kamloops on an election campaign stop.
It was prepared in the months before in mass meetings by our chiefs and people, who wanted to ensure that Canadians knew that we clearly remembered the betrayals of the previous century and that we demand redress in the current one. We called it a memorial because it represented, in a very precise way, our collective memories of our history with the settlers.

Europeans first came to the Interior Plateau looking for things they could pick up and cart away, as they did around the world. In this case, it was precious metals. The following are excerpts of what our chiefs told Laurier about their initial experience with Europeans:

At first they looked only for gold. We knew the latter was our property, but as we did not use it much nor need it to live by we did not object to their searching for it. They told us, “Your country is rich and you will be made wealthy by our coming. We wish just to pass over your lands in quest of gold.”

Soon they saw the country was good and some of them made up their minds to settle it. They commenced to take up pieces of land here and there. They told us they wanted only the use of these pieces of land for a few years, and then would hand them back to us in an improved condition; meanwhile they would give us some of the products they raised for the loan of our land.

Thus they commenced to enter our “houses,” or live on our “ranches.” With us when a person enters our house he becomes our guest, and we must treat him hospitably as long as he shows no hostile intentions. At the same time we expect him to return to us equal treatment for what he receives.

It soon became apparent that the settlers were not offering equal treatment, and they were not planning to leave. On the contrary, their numbers were increasing. This led to growing unrest in the 1860s at a time when the route to the newly discovered Cariboo gold fields passed along the Fraser River to the Thompson and North Thompson rivers, directly through Secwepemc territory. The trickle of prospectors grew into a full-blown gold rush. With the unrest putting this new mining wealth at risk, James Douglas, the governor of the small colony on the coast, sent an emissary to meet with Chief Neskonlith to try to defuse the situation.
Chief Neskonlith, who was known as a tough and uncompromising leader, had been chosen to speak for the four bands around the Shuswap lakes. At the time, our people were under great stress because European diseases were sweeping through our country. First smallpox, then waves of measles, influenza, and tuberculosis. But even with our people in a weakened state, Neskonlith was forceful with the colonial representative. He told him that the encroachments on our land had reached an intolerable level and we would not accept any more European settlement. The emissary understood that this was not a bluff. But he had no financial or other resources that he could offer a deal with. So he simply asked Chief Neskonlith what the necessary lands were for his people and the other three Secwepemc bands.

Neskonlith showed the essential area on the emissary’s map. Together they marked out the territory for exclusive Secwepemc use; today, this area is known as the Neskonlith Douglas Reserve 1862. On this map, our land area totals almost a million acres; the emissary agreed this territory was for the exclusive use of our people. Chief Neskonlith then went out and staked the land where non-Secwepemc settlement was to be forbidden.

But as Indigenous peoples around the world have discovered, a deal is not a deal when it comes to settler governments. No restraint was placed on settlers moving onto our lands. In fact, colonial powers began to give away 160 acres of our land, free of charge, to each settler who applied. At the same time, in an astounding act of racism, the authorities allocated only 20 acres for Indian families. Our forests were then handed over to the control of the lumber companies. Our million acres was gradually, without our consent or even notification, whittled down to barely seven thousand acres scattered in small strips across our territory. The Interior chiefs told Laurier in 1910 that they had been betrayed by the government.

[The settlers] have knocked down . . . the posts of all the Indian tribes. They say there are no lines, except what they make. They have taken possession of all the Indian country and claim it as their own. . . . They have stolen our lands and everything on them. . . .

After a time when they saw that our patience might get exhausted and that we might cause trouble if we thought all the land was to be occupied by whites they set aside many small reservations for us here and there over the country. This was their proposal not ours, and we never accepted these reservations as settlement for anything, nor did
we sign any papers or make any treaties. . . . They thought we would be satisfied with this, but we never have been satisfied and never will be until we get our rights.

Bitter insult, the Interior chiefs told Laurier, was added to injury when the settlers not only invaded our territory, but also began to treat us as trespassers and bar us from the lands that had been ours since time immemorial.

Gradually as the whites . . . became more and more powerful, and we less and less powerful, they little by little changed their policy towards us, and commenced to put restrictions on us. . . . They treat us as subjects without any agreement to that effect, and force their laws on us without our consent and irrespective of whether they are good for us or not. . . .

In many places we are debarred from camping, traveling, gathering roots and obtaining wood and water as heretofore. Our people are fined and imprisoned for breaking the game and fish laws and using the same game and fish which we were told would always be ours for food. Gradually we are becoming regarded as trespassers over a large portion of this our country.

Indigenous peoples from around the world recognize this process of slow, lawless confiscation of their lands, with promises made and laws of protection enacted, then quickly broken as soon as the coalescence of forces again favours the settlers.

Non-Indigenous readers may be thinking—yes, terrible things went on in those days, but really, it’s all ancient history. To you, I want to stress that this is not at all ancient history. The meeting with Laurier occurred in my own grandfather’s time. When I was young, I hunted on Secwepemc lands with my father, and I remember being surprised to see how nervous he was that he would get caught by the authorities. In recent years, my daughters have been arrested and sent to jail for protesting a new encroachment on Secwepemc lands. My people have been beaten, jailed, and shot at by the authorities simply for occupying our own lands.

And it is the loss of our land that has been the precise cause of our impoverishment. Indigenous lands today account for only 0.36 per cent of British Columbian territory. The settler share is the remaining 99.64
per cent. In Canada overall the percentage is even worse, with Indig-
enuous peoples controlling only 0.2 per cent of the land and the settlers
99.8 per cent. With this distribution of the land, you don’t have to have a
doctorate in economics to understand who will be poor and who will be
rich. And our poverty is crushing. Along with suffering all of the calami-
ties of life that hit the poor with greater impact, our lives are seven years
shorter than the lives of non-Indigenous Canadians. Our unemploy-
ment rates are four times higher. The resources to educate our children
are only a third of what is spent on non-Indigenous Canadian children.
Our youth commit suicide at a rate more than five times higher. We are
living the effects of this dispossession every day of our lives, and we have
been living this misery in Canada for almost 150 years.

What has been the response of the Canadian government when we
protest the illegal seizure of our lands and the intentional impoverish-
ment of our people? Generally, it has been to simply turn away. Until
our voices become too loud to ignore; then false promises or outright
repression come into play. This was the response after our chiefs made
their determined plea to Laurier. First, silence from Canada. Then, after
the First World War, when Indigenous veterans returned to their com-
munities and began to insist on action on the land and on rights issues,
the Dominion government responded with unprecedented repression.

The returning First World War veterans, like my father’s uncles,
François and William Pierrish, were radicalized by the war. François had
been band chief before he went overseas, and he returned to his post at
war’s end with a new determination to hold the government to account
for its broken promises to our people. François had the toughness of old
Chief Neskonlith, and he began to resist the government at every turn.
But the stress of the war and the fight against the government took its toll
on him; while still a young man in the 1920s, he died of a heart attack in
his hayfield. His brother, William, who had lost an arm in the nightmar-
ish battles in the trenches in France, took over as chief and as leader in
our resistance. In 1926, William Pierrish and two other B.C. chiefs trav-
elled to London, England, to present a petition to the Privy Council to
demand action on the land question. Their petition stated:

We Indians want our native titles to our native lands, and all our land
contains as we are the original people of Canada. We Indians want
our consent before laws are made upon our possessions.⁴
The Lay of the Land

The Privy Council refused to get involved in a fight with the Dominion government and pointed the chiefs back to Ottawa. Ottawa responded to the threat posed by this new Indian activism by passing draconian Indian Act amendments in 1927 that tightened the control over our daily lives and that made Indian organizing, for all intents and purposes, illegal. The government tried to separate activist veterans like Chief William Pierrish from the people by offering them citizenship—with the basic human rights afforded other Canadians—but only if they surrendered their Indian status. Virtually none of the veterans accepted this poison pill. Chief Pierrish summed it up when he said, “We do not want enfranchisement, we want to be Indians to the end of the time.”

The purpose of these measures was made clear by the Indian superintendent in the 1920s, Duncan Campbell Scott. Speaking with uncharacteristic frankness, he called our people “a weird and waning race” and said: “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed.”

The 1927 Indian Act amendments, which were in force until 1951, brought about a shameful period in Canada’s history. Our people were, by Canadian law, virtually forbidden to leave our reserves without permission from the Indian agent, who now controlled almost every aspect of our lives, and the courts were effectively cut off to us as an avenue for addressing a land claim against the government. Our reserves began to resemble the internment camps that were set up during the world wars for enemy aliens.

But this repression did not extinguish resistance. It merely drove it underground. Communities met at night with travelling activists like Andrew Paull, who kept the fight for Aboriginal title alive. Paull, a Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) political organizer, had attended law school, and he was able to travel the country as the manager of an Indian lacrosse team. He founded the Allied Tribes of British Columbia in the 1920s and later founded a loose coalition he somewhat grandly called the North American Indian Brotherhood. Because of the restrictions of the day, both organizations existed mainly in his briefcase, but Paull, tirelessly criss-crossing the country to preach resistance, provided the light in this period of darkness.

It was at these travelling meetings, where Andrew Paull called for justice on the land question, that my father and many others of his generation
headed down the path of national and international struggle. In the 1950s, when some of the more oppressive laws against our people were finally lifted, my father’s generation began to build the national organization—the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), forerunner of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN)—to take their fight to Ottawa and to Canadians. But first they had to find each other again. Organizing meant taking a collection at a local meeting, travelling long distances, and sleeping in their cars. As we will see in the following chapters, these men and women—for women were extraordinarily present in these battles—led us back out of political wilderness and fought for our rights in the national and provincial capitals, in the courts, and when necessary, by demonstrating in the streets. The struggles of my parents’ generation are part of this book not only because it is important that we honour them, but also because we can learn from their successes and their failures.

Along the way, we will examine their civil rights battle in the 1960s, the critical battle against the 1969 White Paper, court victories like the 1973 Calder decision, and the direct action of the 1980s that won recognition of Aboriginal rights in the Canadian Constitution. We will also look at how their ongoing fight for justice on the international stage transformed our struggle from a group of isolated activists fighting for survival to a movement of more than 350 million Indigenous peoples from around the world working together to regain our land and dignity.

The book then focuses on how my generation has been able to build on the successes of our parents’ generation, but we will also look at some of our missed chances and wrong turns. This history is still being written with our deeds; the story includes some tensions and conflicts within our movement. As we search for the path through the chaotic and often bruising world we all inhabit, we should not be afraid to disagree among ourselves.

This is a fault that sometimes appears in our movement. It is a fundamental tenet of Indigenous peoples that everyone is allowed to speak their mind. That is the only way we can move forward as a people. It shows no lack of respect to point out that someone may be leading us down the wrong path or that another path may take us more quickly to our goal.

Finally, before we embark on this journey, it is important to note that when we speak of rebuilding Indigenous societies and Indigenous economies, we are not seeking to join the multinationals on Wall Street or Bay
Street as junior partners, but to win back the tools to build our own societies that are consistent with our culture and values. Our goal is not simply to replace Settlers Resource Inc. with Indigenous Resource Inc. Instead we are interested in building true Indigenous economies that begin and end with our unique relationship to the land. This is essential so we can be true not only to ourselves, but also to a future we share with all of the peoples of the world.

Our Indigenous view—which includes air, water, land, animals, and people in a continually sustaining circle—is increasingly seen by both scientists and citizens as the only way to a sustainable future. As Indigenous peoples, we must always keep in mind that taking care of Mother Earth is the most important contribution we can make. This is how we can support a new international economy that is not based on the outdated and environmentally unsound laissez-faire concepts of economics. In this endeavour, we can be an important ally of those growing forces—in Canadian society and internationally—that understand that for our collective survival on the planet, fundamental changes must be made. Mother Earth cannot simply be reduced to the industrial binary of profit and garbage.

We welcome the new alliances. And when we speak about reclaiming a measure of control over our lands, we obviously do not mean throwing Canadians off it and sending them back to the countries they came from—that is the kind of *reductio ad absurdum* that some of those who refuse to acknowledge our title try to use against us. We know that for centuries Canadians have been here building their society, which, despite its failings, has become the envy of many in the world. All Canadians have acquired a basic human right to be here. We also know that Canada does not have the astronomical amount of money it would cost to pay us for the centuries of use of our lands. We are certainly asking for compensation for the illegal seizures, but those amounts we can discuss. And we can begin these more precise discussions with Grand Chief Ron Derrickson’s Afterword to this book. At present, we are asking for the right to protect our Aboriginal title land, to have a say on any development on our lands, and when we find the land can be safely and sustainably developed, to be compensated for the wealth it generates.

That is the thought I had in the hills above Neskonlith that warm June afternoon, when I returned from the UN meeting. The land retains its power and its beauty. All we have to do is rethink our place on it. Simply by
removing the shadow of the doctrine of discovery, you find a rich tapestry of peoples who need to sit down to speak to each other as equals and build a new mechanism to co-operate with each other, to satisfy each other’s needs and aspirations in the modern world.

There is room on this land for all of us and there must also be, after centuries of struggle, room for justice for Indigenous peoples. That is all that we ask. And we will settle for nothing less.
My own history of challenging the unacceptable treatment of my people had modest beginnings. I was still a teenager at St. Mary’s residential school in Mission, British Columbia, and I was just back from summer vacation. Seated in the noisy dining hall, I was eating another mushy macaroni dinner when I realized that the food they were serving us was worse than the food they serve in jail. That moment led to my first political act—a strike over the food in residential school, where meat and fresh vegetables were almost unknown.

I knew the school was below the standards of jail food because I had spent most of my summer holiday housed at the Spy Hill Gaol in Calgary. That adventure began in July when I decided to hitchhike to nowhere, heading east and meeting up with others on similar journeys. Canadian highways were full of wandering young people then. Immersed in the youth culture of the 1960s, we all wore our hair long after the fashion of the day.

When I reached Golden, an old logging town and railway junction just west of the Rockies, thirty young people were lined up for rides. The group I was with went to the back of the line at the foot of Ten Mile Hill. I thought it would be days before we’d get a ride out. But late in
the afternoon, we noticed a freight train, made up of a long line of empty boxcars, chugging up the hill parallel to the highway.

“I know how to jump freights,” one of the older guys said, and he began to run across the scrubby field to the tracks. We followed. The train car doors were open. We ran alongside the slow-moving train, then slung ourselves on board by grabbing the door handle, feeling a kind of youthful euphoria as we stood in the open doorway watching the valley disappear below.

The sun was setting as the train levelled off at the five-thousand-foot-high Kicking Horse Pass. By the time we reached the foothills in the east, moonlight filled the doorway. It was the type of adventure that you dream about when you are trapped in the airless dormitories of residential school.

But my journey to nowhere ended abruptly in Calgary. When the train halted along a side track in the Calgary yard, we stayed quiet in the corner of the box car while a flashlight swept by the open door. We expected that at some point the train would move east again, so we waited wordlessly. But half an hour later the flashlight returned, this time with Canadian Pacific Railway police and a barking German shepherd. They hauled us out of the freight car, and it seemed that they were about to let us go when the CPR police sergeant came by, looked us over, and made some remark like, “Call the police and send these girls to jail.” Girls no doubt referred to our long hair.

We spent the night in the city jail and were led into court the next morning. The charge was trespassing, and we were given thirty days in jail or a twenty-five-dollar fine. The two older boys paid their fines on the spot. The other young guy was from Ontario. He called his parents, who actually drove non-stop from that province to get him out. I did not have anything near twenty-five dollars in my pocket or anyone who would send me the money. And that, finally, was the “crime” I was jailed for.

I was only sixteen years old and I knew that I wasn’t supposed to be held in an adult jail like Spy Hill. Whoever processed me must have known this, too, but they went ahead and locked me up anyway. I didn’t protest because even more than jail I feared being turned over to child protection. As Indian kids, we all knew that that was the worst that could happen to you. Any of our friends who were taken away had disappeared into the system only to be thrown out a few years later as emotional wrecks.
It was something we talked about as kids. Until I was eighteen, when anyone asked my age, I would lie and say I was older. It was safer that way.

Still, for a sixteen-year-old, Spy Hill was a fearful place. The building was made of cement and iron and, at first sight, the men there also seemed to be made of cement and iron. I kept very quiet and tried hard not to attract attention to myself.

But I soon realized that, with the regimen and boredom and the dorm-style sleeping, it was not so different from residential school. Most of the men were there on drunk and disorderly charges. Virtually all of them were Native, and the main pastime was playing cribbage. I still remember the relentless sound of it. The shuffling of the cards and the snap of the deck: fifteen two, fifteen four, a pair is six . . . All day long. With breaks only for meals or to take their turns at the other jail pastime, cutting the expansive jail lawn with rattling, old gas-powered mowers.

It was a familiar routine for these men, as they passed in and out of the jail’s revolving door. Quite a few were released and returned to jail even in the short time I was there. In Canada then, as today, it is not uncommon among Indigenous peoples to have family members go to jail. It is part of the system that we live with, in which a young Indian man still has a greater chance of going to jail than he does of finishing high school.

It is another a sad commentary on our place in the world that what struck me most about Spy Hill was how superior the food was to what they served us at residential school. Instead of the school’s pasta mush, we were served meat and potatoes, pork chops, broiled chicken, and sometimes even steak. Breakfast, I was especially impressed to discover, included sausages.

Like most teenagers, I was not given to thinking too deeply about things. When I started agitating for a food strike at the school that fall, I was inspired most, I think, by the sausages. But even then, I understood instinctively that this simple injustice, of feeding Indian kids food below the standards that you feed jail inmates, was a symbol of—and very much part of—the vast system that placed my people at the bottom of the heap in Canadian society. I began urging my classmates to join me in a strike, and I found a number of willing comrades. But we were still a minority. I decided we needed outside support.

I wrote to an organization, Native Alliance for Red Power (NARP), that I’d read about in The Star Weekly magazine. It was portrayed as a radical Indian organization that was ready to take direct action against
any act of racism against Indian people. I wrote the letter in secret, all in red ink, and sent it to their address in Vancouver, asking for help in fighting the poor food at residential schools.

For a long while, I heard nothing. I was beginning to think that the organization was just some white journalist’s invention when NARP, quite literally, appeared before me.

It began as a bit of a mystery. I was told by another student that I was to show up at the school clinic for an eye exam. I knew the examiner was at the school, because some of the students had been called to go for an examination, generally on the recommendation of one of the teachers who had noticed them straining to read. But my eyesight was excellent. I couldn’t imagine why the eye examiner would insist on seeing me.

When I arrived at the clinic, the Stó:lō Indian eye technician, whom I came to know as Wayne Bobb, held the sides of my head, looked into my eyes, and said quietly, “Don’t say anything, just listen. I’m from NARP. We received your letter. We support you.”

I couldn’t believe my eyes and ears. The travelling Indian eye technician was a NARP agent. Bobb, who would later become chief of his Seabird Island Band, explained, “We didn’t want to risk sending a letter because the school would intercept it. But we will support the strike.”

He then slipped me a pack of papers, which he said were for my eyes only. Later, when I opened them, I was deeply impressed to find not only the NARP newspaper but also radical writings of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers. I was amazed and thrilled by the cache and by NARP’s clandestine wiles. Looking back now, I understand that Bobb risked losing his job in this act of solidarity.

I hid the papers in the locker beside my bed, which was protected by a combination lock. I eventually showed this material to some of my closest friends, but I kept it well hidden from most. I knew that the majority of my fellow students, especially those who had been in residential school since they were five or six years old, were frightened at even the thought of breaking the rules or challenging the authority of the priests. But word travels fast in institutions. My strike plans and my contact with NARP were quickly transmitted to the teachers, and I was summoned to the principal’s office.

When I entered, I was surprised to see a stocky figure in a brush cut sitting with the principal. It was my father. He was the last person I expected to see there. We were not close in those years, and I had built up a certain
amount of resentment toward him. I blamed him for the family breakup. I blamed him for my being forced into residential school. I blamed him for leaving me in jail in Calgary for almost a month because I couldn’t pay a twenty-five-dollar fine.

At the time, I was aware that he was working as a community development officer in Cowichan on Vancouver Island. I wondered how he had gotten here and how he even knew about my troubles. It turned out he had been almost 750 kilometres away at a meeting in Prince George when the call came from the school. He had immediately flown down to Vancouver and rented a car, the first time in his life that he had ever done so, and driven to St. Mary’s. The principal outlined my acts of insurrection. My father listened quietly. Then he asked if he could take me out for a while.

We drove to Sumas, about a half an hour away, just across the American border, for lunch. To my surprise, my father showed both concern and understanding. “I know what these places are like,” he said. “But if you keep pushing the food strike, you are responsible for all of the kids you lead out. You have to think on how you will feed them. Really, if you are going to lead people, you are responsible for your actions, not only for yourself, but for the people who follow you. And if you can’t feed them, you’ll find yourself with both sides mad at you.”

Then he surprised me again by adding, “But I’ll support whatever decision you make.”

It was the beginning of our reconciliation. From that moment, I began to know my father not as a dark force driving the family apart, as he had seemed in my childhood, but as the man I would soon come to know: a fighter, yes, but also a man of rare intelligence and a profound understanding of people.

My father, George Manuel, would go on to become national chief of the National Indian Brotherhood and founder of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP). In many ways, I was both lucky and unlucky to grow up in a family that was devoted to the struggle of our people. Lucky in the sense that I often had a front-row seat in the political theatre of my father’s generation, and witnessed their often single-minded determination to advance the cause of our Aboriginal title and treaty rights. Throughout my childhood, I felt their unshakeable commitment, something that I came to understand through living my own life.
At one time, I was very upset with my father and mother as parents, but I now know that they did their best under some extremely difficult circumstances.

I will not go into a great deal of detail about my childhood; this is not that kind of book. But to understand the struggle of my parents’ generation, you have to understand how exceptionally difficult their day-to-day lives were. They lived in a hostile world. They weren’t welcome in the town and, in their youth, had been explicitly excluded from the life there. Their economic prospects were slim to non-existent. It was a daily struggle simply to survive.

In my parents’ case, these challenges were compounded by the fact that they were both physically disabled at a time when disabled people were routinely mocked and ridiculed. My father had osseous tuberculosis as a child, which left him with a twisted hip bone and a profound limp. My mother, Marceline, suffered throughout her life from painful arthritis that left her, in many periods, unable to walk; she was also hospitalized for long periods as a child. That is what life dealt them.

But their circumstances left no time for self-pity. Both of them had to work hard physically to ensure the survival of the family. My father, despite his bad leg, became a boom man on the South Thompson River. It is dangerous, exhausting work, requiring exceptional balance. The boom man leaps from log to log, corralling and keeping the booms together and moving them to the conveyor belt that feeds the sawmill. He was the only Indian working for the lumber company, and to do his job while physically handicapped took amazing athletic ability and an iron will. To make extra money, he also worked as a Secwepemc language interpreter for a very understanding local lawyer, Henry Castillou, who defended our people in court. My father was a man determined to find a place in the world for himself and for his people.

My mother was a Ktunaxa (Kootenay) from the St. Mary’s Indian Band near Cranbrook, British Columbia. She was also a very hard-working woman. She was skilful at beadwork, and she would make tanned hides from the deer and other animals. She came from a long line of strong women. Her mother, Mary Paul, known by her Indian name of Kupe, had always expressed pride that the whites had not undermined her Ktunaxa language, which she passed on to my mother. In fact, she had taken the school bell from the school in her community as a kind of trophy for her victory against the nuns there, and passed it down to my mother.
I kept it to remind my own children and grandchildren that we can and must outlive our oppressors.

On summer weekends, we all pitched in to take in the hay from our fields. Even when I was seven or eight years old, I would work dawn to dusk haying with the family. When haying was done, we repaired fences or hauled wood. In the late fall and early winter, we would go into the bush and cut Christmas trees. We did this after school, so it was always in the dark. My mother used to cut the trees and my older brother, Bobby, and I would haul them out to the logging road where my father was waiting with the car—with the seats stripped out to make room for the trees—and take them down to the valley where they were sold. I remember those cold, dark nights and my mother—despite her physical disabilities—bent over in the snow cutting the spruce trees with her double-bladed saw by the light of the first winter moon.

For several summers, my mother took us down to Washington State to pick strawberries for industrial producers. She had done this since she was very young. The farmers used to send battered old school buses up into British Columbia to pick up Indians to work in their fields because we could cross the border to work without a permit. For many years, it was an important source of income for our people. But then Mexican workers began being brought in for the first time and Indian berry pickers were pushed aside—housed in the worst camps and sent to the lower-yield fields where it was difficult to make any money. After a few seasons, my mother realized that we were no longer wanted as farm labour, either, and we never went back.

Despite their unrelenting toil, both of my parents understood that you had to give back to your community. In my mother’s case, it was as an active member of the homemakers’ club. The club raised money through raffles and sales for community projects or for emergency help for those who needed it most. In later years, she also became an alcohol and drug counsellor, and she was recognized in the community as a medicine woman.

My father’s personal work was Indian politics. It took up increasing amounts of his time and energy, as well as family money. He had grown up with his grandparents, who had reached adulthood before the intense invasion of our territory and the founding of the town of Chase. Through his grandparents, he understood what had been lost and what that loss had done to us. In the early 1960s, he had inherited the leadership of Andrew Paull’s North American Indian Brotherhood, a role that kept
him on the road most weekends. Few Indian people had telephones, and writing letters was the only way Indigenous activists could communicate with each other between meetings. When he was home, I remember him working long into the night, pecking away at an old Underwood typewriter with his fingers smudged from the carbon paper, working long after I fell asleep, and then up and already working at his daily chores when I awakened in the morning.

As I grew older, he was more often on the road, travelling as cheaply as possible, sleeping in his car or in the homes of political supporters, but still having to spend his hard-earned money on gas and food that my mother knew was needed for the family. It is not that she didn’t support the struggle, but she became increasingly frustrated at her children having to do without while meagre family funds subsidized my father’s political work. I remember my mother and father getting into arguments about this, which I think were made a little more fierce because each knew in their hearts that the other had a valid point and that really there was no resolution. My father was a determined, independent man who saw the struggle as the only avenue to make life more livable for his children; my mother was an equally determined and independent woman who knew that the cause, however noble, was hurting the family. Tensions grew until they pushed my parents completely apart and we found ourselves boarding the train with our mother for Chilliwack, leaving my father behind.

I remember the five of us standing on the platform. I was about thirteen years old at the time. My sister Vera was fifteen, Arlene was nine, Richard was seven, and Doreen was only five years old. My older brother, Bobby, was not with us. He was seventeen and he had run off a few months before. By coincidence, he was getting off the train, returning for a visit to Neskonlith, just as we were leaving. He had picked up some mill work while he was away and he had money in his pocket. There were lots of jobs in those days, to the point that you could arrive in most Western towns in the evening and by the next morning be working as some kind of labourer. Bobby was happy to see us at the station—thinking that somehow we had known he was coming and gone out to meet him.

My mother explained that she was leaving our father, and Bobby said he understood. She asked him not to tell our father that he had seen us. Bobby said don’t worry, he didn’t even plan on speaking to him. That’s how things were between Bobby and my father in those days, and they
would remain like that for some time. My father, for all his accomplish-
ments, was not a great success at fatherhood in those early years. He later
recognized this and made efforts to make amends.

My brother Bobby stayed on the platform, and we headed south to
Chilliwack. Looking back to our time there, it seems like a strange sort of
exile. My mother rented a house in the rundown part of town. My broth-
ers and sisters were upset with the sudden breakup of the family, and my
mother was forced to work hard as a domestic and at local farm work to
support us. We did not realize that the family crisis had only started.

The new ordeal began while we were in the fields picking strawberries
for a local producer in Yarrow, British Columbia. While we were work-
ing, the owner came out to speak to my mother. He pointed at a govern-
ment man waiting for her in the shade at the end of the field.

My mother limped over to speak to him. A few minutes later she
returned and called us around. She said the man was from Indian health
services. He had told her that if she agreed to go into the Coqualeetza
Indian Hospital in Sardis right away, she would be eligible for a long-
awaited hip replacement operation that could relieve the daily pain
from the arthritis and ensure her continued mobility. If she didn’t accept
the immediate operation, he told her that her name would be put at the
bottom of the list and it could be many years, if ever, before she would
be eligible for treatment again. The operation would involve months of
convalescence in the hospital, which meant she would not be able to take
care of us for a long time. It was her only chance if she hoped to remain
mobile.

My father drove from Neskonlith to pick us up a few days later. We
went back with him to our house on the river, but even this would be tem-
porary. At the end of the summer, he would leave for a community devel-
opment course at Laval University in Quebec City. It was the 1960s and a
faint breeze of reform was passing through the Indian Affairs Depart-
ment. There was a program to select the most active and effective local leaders
and train them in skills that they could apply at the community level. My
father was one of those selected. It was supposed be an independent initia-
tive, but the design of the program still had the Department’s fingerprints
on it. The Indian community development workers were to be paired with
white workers, who were paid far more and given leadership roles. Indian
community workers described this as working Lone Ranger style, with
themselves inevitably given the role of Tonto.
But the course would get my father off the river and position him to work full-time for our people. He had to go, and Indian Affairs made it clear that he would not be able to bring his children with him. For the family, my father’s imminent departure presented a painful choice. We were faced with going either into foster care or to residential school.

School, we hoped, was a way that at least some of us could stay together. My father, like most kids of his generation, had spent much of his youth in institutions, first in the Kamloops Indian Residential School and then, when he was sick with tuberculosis, several years recuperating at the Indian hospital. He knew residential school could be tough and he warned us about it. He told us that, at the school, what they teach you is to follow a set of institutional rules and minute-by-minute instructions. So all they really teach you is how to follow orders from the authorities. We would sleep in large dorms, he told us, and we would have to line up for everything.

That summer my father continued to work as a boom man on the river and at his political work. Bobby returned to his mill job and my oldest sister, Vera, who was now sixteen, had elected to stay in Chilliwack. So I was the oldest one at home, in charge of the cooking and taking care of the younger ones. When the summer ended, it was finally decided that my youngest sister, Doreen, would stay with a family on the reserve and the three of us—Arlene, Richard, and I—would go to the Kamloops Indian Residential School.

I remember feeling profoundly sad when my father drove us up to the school. As I sat in the waiting room with my sister and brother, that sadness was overtaken by fear. The principal, Father Noonan, came into the room, introduced himself, and told us we would be divided up. My sister would go to the girls’ dorm. My brother Richard would be a junior boy and I would be a senior boy. We were split up after all and although we would remain close for most of our lives, we never did live as a family again. In fact, it would be a couple of years before I even saw my mother. But when I did, she always made me understand that we were a family and that I had to help my sisters and brothers. That feeling has remained with me all of my life. My mother was a very strong spiritual leader whose medicine I learned to trust.

During these years, I went to three different residential schools (Kamloops Indian Residential School, St. Mary’s in Mission, and St. Eugene’s Residential School in Cranbrook, British Columbia). I did not suffer any extreme abuse, nothing like the terrible legacy of physical and, as we have
all heard, sexual abuse that was suffered by many. But even without this extreme abuse, I remember the residential school experience as a time of great loneliness and alienation. The schools are cold places to spend your youth, and the staff worked diligently to reinforce in us a sense that in Canadian society, we were the bottom of the heap and were powerless to resist. They demanded, and rewarded, obedience. Nothing else.

After my lunch in Sumas with my father, I went back to the school and dropped the planned food strike. But not the ideas behind it. I understood from my father that simply lashing out against injustice is rarely productive. You have to think things through; you have to work with people first and develop clear objectives and then be ready to act. You are responsible for those you lead.

At that moment, my father and his generation were ready to act. They were aided in an unexpected way by rise of the civil rights movement in the United States. Canadian journalists suddenly began to compare the treatment of Indians in Canada to that of blacks in the United States, and Canadian politicians began to look at program solutions they could borrow from the Americans. There were, in fact, important similarities in the situations of American blacks and of Indians in Canada. Both peoples had been subjected to prolonged institutional and informal discrimination that had left them in abject poverty on the fringes of society. But there was an important distinction as well. Indigenous peoples had not been stolen into slavery and brought to a foreign land, but had had their land stolen out from underneath them.

The first basic human rights opening had come after the Second World War. In the 1951 amendments to the Indian Act, the explicit barriers to Indian organizing that had been put into place in 1927, and a few of the more ridiculous laws such as barring Indians from pool halls, were repealed. But the heart of the Act was left intact—with final decisional power over every aspect of our lives under the control of the Indian Affairs minister, and, more precisely, Indian Affairs bureaucrats. The amended Act even presented a new danger by opening the door to provincial powers invading reserves in areas like child welfare, but at least it decriminalized our struggle and allowed our leaders to emerge from the shadows.

Then, in 1960, the Diefenbaker government extended the federal vote to Indians. It was a controversial move for my people. Admittedly,
it was clearly an improvement on the earlier policy that allowed certain Indians to “enfranchise,” that is, to become full Canadian citizens instead of “wards of the state,” but at the price of losing their Indian status. This right had been offered to the thousands of Indians—like my great-uncles François and William Pierrish—who fought in the First and Second World Wars, but only a tiny handful of veterans accepted it. Enfranchisement was also required for Indian people to be accepted into certain professions, like medicine and law. It was because of his refusal to give up his Indian status that Andrew Paull had pulled out of law school before receiving his diploma.

The 1960 change was a significant departure because the clearly racist part of enfranchisement—demanding Indians give up their heritage in order to vote—was dropped. At the same time, many Indian individuals and communities resisted the right to vote. They did not see themselves as Canadians but as members of sovereign nations trapped inside a country they had never sought to be part of.

My father accepted the vote, preferring to see it as a tool we could use to further our cause. Indians became, at least for that brief period during election campaigns, important to whites. As soon as we got the vote, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) candidates came to the reserve and witnessed the crushing weight of our poverty. They began to raise issues like our terrible housing, the low levels of assistance given to Indians compared to whites, and the racism we lived with on a daily basis—including the racist drinking laws and the restaurants that refused to serve us. My father fought on this civil rights basis in the 1960s because it was a way to build support for the larger battle to come.

When he finished his course in Laval, my father went to work as a community development worker in Cowichan on Vancouver Island, where he deepened his lifelong respect for the coastal peoples, their spiritualism, their fabulous art, and their rich cultural heritage. It is also where, finding himself parachuted into a community not his own, he learned how essential it is in any social movement to begin by listening to the people—their hopes and dreams, sorrows and fears—before prescribing remedies.

At first, he tried to call the people to action on a range of issues that he thought needed to be addressed. He was met with politeness but no sense of commitment to an outsider’s agenda. He called meetings but no one came. Finally he understood that he had gotten it backwards. First listen, then call a meeting on what the people are interested in.
So he visited every household in the community to sit with the people at their kitchen tables and listen to what they had to say. In an overwhelming number of cases, the issue that arose was the crowded and unsanitary housing conditions. When my father finally called a meeting on housing, the community hall was packed. He picked out some natural activists and brought them in to help develop a strategy on fighting the government for improvements. At one point, he led a group of local activists to Victoria and physically walked them through the provincial government departments so they would have a sense of who the people were they were fighting. Finally, they decided that the only thing the government reacted to was embarrassment, and they called in the media to see the terrible conditions the people were living in. As we have seen so often, this strategy can get results, although generally only in the short term. In my father’s community development work, however, it lit a flame of resistance in the community, and some of the activists there continued fighting at his side for the rest of his life. I understood the impression he made when, almost fifty years later, I was embraced by the community because of my father’s work.

The lesson he took from his experience in Cowichan, which he hung onto throughout the rest of his time in politics, was simply that you have to begin by listening. Programs and organizations that don’t serve the people’s most basic needs are less than useless—they are hindrances to development.

While he was working in Cowichan, my father was still active in the provincial and national political struggle. He was invited to sit on the National Indian Advisory Board the Liberal government had set up to shape what they promised would be a new approach to Indian Affairs in Canada, and he was elected co-chair of the board.

As a community development worker in Cowichan, he was nominally an employee of Indian Affairs. In 1968, he moved to Edmonton to work at the Indian Association of Alberta (IAA) with the dynamic young Cree leader Harold Cardinal. In Alberta, and across the country by this time, there was a perceived need to build a truly national Indian organization that could take the fundamental issues of the Indigenous struggle to the power centres in Ottawa. Not as advisers to the government, but as representatives of the people. Harold developed a great respect for my father during this period, seeing in him someone who combined a fine strategic instinct with a talent for delivering a stump speech and a boom man’s way of attacking problems head-on. My father, for his part, admired
Harold’s quick intelligence and considerable courage in challenging the government from his Alberta base, rare qualities in those days. He was also impressed that while Harold had been well educated in white schools, he still spoke his Cree language and was profoundly rooted in his culture.

Shortly after my father moved to Alberta, Harold suggested he consider running for the presidency of the newly formed National Indian Brotherhood. But at the time, my father wasn’t ready. He was planning to return to British Columbia and he was already working with other leaders at founding the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs (UBCIC). The Union would make a concerted push on the B.C. land question, to have our legal claim to our lands recognized by the government.

There was also, in these initial months, a sense that the National Indian Brotherhood lacked clear focus. It was designed to represent the ten provincial and two territorial Indian organizations, and this made it a grab bag of some six hundred communities, sixty nations, and treaty and non-treaty peoples who were only indirectly represented through their provincial bodies. It was uncertain how anyone could bring such a loose coalition together.

Ironically, the impetus for unity, and what finally put my father into the leadership of the National Indian Brotherhood, was provided by the Trudeau government’s Indian Affairs minister, Jean Chrétien. In June 1969, Chrétien unveiled a legislative time bomb that was designed not only to destroy any hope of recognition of Aboriginal title and rights in Canada, but also to terminate Canada’s treaties with Indian nations. It was

This statement sparked an epic battle that did not end in 1970 when the Indian Association of Alberta presented its counterproposal in the Red Paper. In many important ways, it was the opening shot in the current battle for our land and our historic rights against a policy designed to terminate our title to our Indigenous territories and our rights as Indigenous peoples. The White Paper of 1969 is where our modern struggle begins.
It could have been a scene from a movie. More than two hundred chiefs from across Canada packed the parliamentary visitors’ gallery to hear the announcement of the government’s long-awaited new Indian policy. It had been preceded by years of consultations with Indian leaders throughout Canada, including with National Indian Advisory Board that my father co-chaired. When the Indian Affairs minister of the day, Jean Chrétien, stood to deliver his White Paper in the House of Commons, the leaders waited with great anticipation that, finally, a government was preparing to move on their demands.

In the movie version, the young Québécois Indian Affairs minister would have announced a new era in Canadian-Indigenous relations based on historic rights and international justice for all nations. That is what the leaders in the gallery were hoping to hear. But instead, they received the shock of their lives.

After beginning with oddly empty phrases like “to be an Indian is to be a man, with all a man’s needs and abilities,” the 1969 White Paper proposed abolishing the Indian Act and at the same time sweeping aside Indian status and Indian lands and turning First Nations people into ethnic groups—like Italian-Canadians or Irish-Canadians—to be gradually...
absorbed into the melting pot. Any further services to Indigenous peoples would be turned over to the provinces, and existing treaties would be wound down. This policy would, in the cheerful words of the White Paper, “enable the Indian people to be free—free to develop Indian cultures in an environment of legal, social and economic equality with other Canadians.”

To understand the full depth of the anger and sense of betrayal felt by my people, you only have to imagine what would have followed if the federal government announced in Parliament that it was stripping Quebeckers of all of their constitutional protections, including their political institutions like the National Assembly and all control over the territory of Quebec, under the noble goal of ensuring they were completely absorbed into the English-Canadian mainstream. Outrage is not a strong enough word to describe the reaction of the Québécois in that situation, and outrage is not strong enough to describe the reaction of my people.

The White Paper’s attack on our lands and on our very essence as Indigenous peoples galvanized the newly formed National Indian Brotherhood. For my father, it became the battle of the decade. He and his fellow leaders organized mass meetings across the country to send Ottawa the message that the White Paper would never be accepted. Its mission, after all, was the same as Duncan Campbell Scott’s stated goal in the 1920s: solving the Indian problem by ensuring that every individual in that “weird and waning race” would disappear into the Canadian body politic. Unfortunately, these goals and most of the specific policies of the White Paper have remained constant in Canadian Indian policy ever since.

Concerning our constitutional rights, the White Paper pointed out that “under the authority of Head 24, Section 91 of the British North America [BNA] Act, the Parliament of Canada has enacted the Indian Act. Various federal-provincial agreements and some other statutes also affect Indian policies.” To address this fact, the White Paper argued, “the removal of the reference in the constitution would be necessary to end the legal distinction between Indians and other Canadians.” In other words, we were to be ejected from the Constitution and not recognized at all in Canada.

To drive this point home, the White Paper went after our lands. Again, it began with the banal. “The result of Crown ownership and the Indian Act has been to tie the Indian people to a land system that lacks
flexibility and inhibits development. Indian people do not have control of their lands except as the Government allows and this is no longer acceptable to them.”

They proposed that our land, after some “intermediate states,” be reduced to “fee simple” ownership. That is to say, to turn our homelands into real estate that is bought and sold on the open market with property taxes collected by the provinces, as with all other mortgage lots. Aboriginal title lands would be struck out of existence and reserve lands would cease to exist under the fee simple arrangement. As the White Paper put it:

The Government believes that full ownership implies many things. It carries with it the free choice of use, of retention or of disposition. In our society it also carries with it an obligation to pay for certain services. The Government recognizes that it may not be acceptable to put all lands into the provincial systems immediately and make them subject to taxes. When the Indian people see that the only way they can own and fully control land is to accept taxation the way other Canadians do, they will make that decision.

This last point is crucial in our struggle today. A small number of Indian people are working with the government and conservative think tanks like the Fraser Institute in support of the fee simple trap, which is still very much part of the government strategy for getting rid of our collective land base. We will look at the return of this idea, which has risen from the grave like the undead in a zombie tale, in more detail in chapter 15.

The fact that these measures would not only contravene but also render inoperative the treaties was immediately recognized by the chiefs. Their protests were met with an astounding response by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

“It is inconceivable,” he said, “that in a given society, one section of the society have a treaty with the other section of the society. We must be all equal under the laws and we must not sign treaties amongst ourselves.” Furthermore, “we can’t recognize aboriginal rights because no society can be built on historical might have beens.”

To finalize the evisceration of Indian status in Canada, and for the federal government to wash its hands of its obligation to Indigenous nations, all federal programs for Indians would be terminated and our people’s
welfare turned over to the provinces. This is clearly stated in the White Paper.

The Government further proposes that federal disbursements for Indian programs in each province be transferred to that province. Subject to negotiations with the provinces, such provisions would as a matter of principle eventually decline, the provinces ultimately assuming the same responsibility for services to Indian residents as they do for services to others.

The destruction of our nations and the final theft of our lands was to occur over a very short period. As the White Paper blandly described the timetable:

The Government hopes to have the bulk of the policy in effect within five years and believes that the necessary financial and other arrangements can be concluded so that Indians will have full access to provincial services within that time.

Among the Indian leaders in Ottawa for the White Paper announcement was Walter Dieter, the provisional president of the newly formed National Indian Brotherhood. He issued a press release describing the White Paper as “the destruction of a nation of people by legislation and cultural genocide.” The popular resistance that followed caught the government by surprise; it caught many Indian leaders by surprise as well, as people at the community level rose against the government’s termination policy. The government, true to form, found a small number of leaders willing to work against their own people and sent them and Indian Affairs across the country to try to convince them to drink Chrétien’s Kool-Aid. One of the few who accepted the contract to sell the White Paper in the communities was William Wuttunee, an Indian lawyer who at the time had close ties to the Liberal government. Time and again he found himself ejected from or refused entry to reserves.

As Harold Cardinal saw it: “In spite of all government attempts to convince Indians to accept the White Paper, their efforts will fail, because Indians understand that the path outlined by the Department of Indian Affairs through its mouthpiece, the Honourable Mr. Chrétien, leads directly to cultural genocide. We will not walk this path.” In Alberta,
Harold asked his people “forcibly if necessary to eject federal officials from Indian lands.”

In the House of Commons, the government tried to use the affable and well-respected Len Marchand, an Okanagan Indian who had been elected as a Liberal in the Interior of British Columbia in the 1968 election, as a shield. Marchand stood up in the House several times to try to defend the White Paper, but after catching heat from his own community, he dampened his praise considerably. He was finally reduced in the House to pleading with his own minister to “look at this matter very carefully and clarify it so it will be clearly understood.”

In British Columbia, and elsewhere, the mass movements against the White Paper continued to grow. In the fall of 1969, Philip Paul and my father organized a meeting in Kamloops to formally launch the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs with a specific mandate to fight the White Paper by any means. Philip Paul, from the Tsartlip band on Vancouver Island, had been a young protege of Andrew Paull; he had roomed in Paull’s house in Vancouver when he was in town for Buckskin Gloves tournaments. A talented boxer in his youth, he went on to become a respected educator and director of Camosun College, a Victoria, British Columbia, college that supports Indigenous students. My father had been working with him in the National Indian Advisory Board since the early 1960s and Philip Paul, a fighter in and out of the ring, quickly became one of the driving forces in the development of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs.

It was around this time that Harold Cardinal engineered my father’s election as leader of the National Indian Brotherhood. In the serious situation following the White Paper, Harold once again urged him to take over the leadership of the organization. My father, Harold later said, reluctantly agreed to have his name put forward, but not to campaign for the job. Harold told him, “Don’t worry, I’ll do the campaigning. You go take a vacation and I’ll do the campaigning.”

My father withdrew for a tactical break and Harold kept his promise. By the time he returned, Walter Dieter had been manoeuvred out of the leadership at a special executive meeting in Winnipeg, and my father was offered the presidency of the NIB. He was also given the daunting mandate of battling the White Paper at the same time as he needed to set up and staff an office in Ottawa.

In discussions within the NIB, it was decided that it wasn’t enough to merely block the White Paper; they had to counter it with an Indian
agenda. Several agendas were produced by different provincial associations. Among them were the Brown Paper in British Columbia and the Red Paper in Alberta. The Red Paper demanded, first, the obvious: that no changes be made to Indian status without the consent of the Indian people. It stated that “only Aboriginals and Aboriginal organizations should be given the resources and responsibility to determine their own priorities and future development.”

It then addressed the title and treaty rights threatened under the Chrétien proposal and summed up the overall effect: “We would be left with no land and consequently the future generation would be condemned to the despair and ugly spectre of urban poverty in ghettos.”

The White Paper was not only frighteningly bad policy, the Red Paper continued, it was a profound insult to all of the Indian people who took part in the consultations that preceded it. “Even if we just talked about the weather the Minister would turn around and tell Parliament and the Canadian public that we accepted the White Paper.”

On the land question, the Red Paper flatly rejected the fee simple arrangement.

The government wrongly thinks that the Crown owns reserve lands. The Crown merely “holds” such lands, they belong to Aboriginals. The government also thinks that Aboriginals only can own land in the Old World, European sense of land ownership. Aboriginal peoples should be allowed to control land in a way that respects both their historical and legal rights.

The Red Paper is now best known for the way it was delivered to the prime minister and the full cabinet in 1970, at the same time that the White Paper was formally rejected and returned to its author, Jean Chrétien. The ceremony was accompanied by Indian drumming and singing, something new in Ottawa in those days, and it apparently had an impact on the prime minister.

“You say that the government doesn’t understand, that it is dumb, that it is stupid or arrogant,” Trudeau said. “Perhaps all of these things are true, at least in part, but don’t say we’re dishonest and that we’re trying to mislead you because we’re not. We’re trying to find a solution to a very difficult problem that has been created for one or two hundred years.”
It was an interesting response, but the real problem hadn’t been that the government was being dishonest. It was that they were moving ahead, quite openly in fact, to rob our peoples of our homelands and our heritage.

The dishonesty came later. While the government officially buried the White Paper, Chrétien told my father unofficially, in private, that they “were withdrawing the White Paper but they would hold it aside for the generation of leaders who will accept it.”

In fact, it has continued to be the federal policy under many different shapes and sizes, in pieces and fragments that successive Canadian governments have unrelentingly tried to get my people to accept. The White Paper lives on in the termination treaty process of the past twenty years. It is in the push for taxing reserves. It is in Tom Flanagan and Manny Jules’s recent policy book Beyond the Indian Act: Restoring Aboriginal Property Rights that the Fraser Institute is promoting to turn our national lands into fee simple real estate, and in Stephen Harper’s “results based” negotiation strategy announced at the end of 2012. All contain essential ingredients of the White Paper: extinguishing our title to our lands, rendering our treaties obsolete, and ending our existence as sovereign peoples.

It is up to our generation to not only continue to refuse to accept our own termination but to also move forward beyond this battle. Fortunately, we increasingly have the means to do so. The effective blocking action against immediate White Paper implementation that our fathers and mothers’ generation undertook at the beginning of the 1970s kept the wolf from the door. Over the following ten years, they would win a crucial court battle on Aboriginal title and rights and launch a massive campaign to ensure our rights were enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. This battle would provide us with a constitutional tool for our nation-building efforts.

But part of the strength of the NIB during the 1970s—and in another sense its greatest weakness—was the government core funding that it was awarded. The government funding was necessary to give our people the chance to reply to the White Paper with their own vision. But to continue accepting core funding from the government for our political organizations for decades on end has been a mistake. Slowly but surely, our leadership was drawn into quasi-governmental organizations that reflected the old adage that whoever pays the piper calls the tune. We began seeing
the results of this approach in the 1990s, and it is clear to almost all of today’s activists—except those who are getting paid, often handsomely, to do those jobs—that these neo-colonial structures have seriously weakened our movement.

This did not happen by accident. Walter Rudnicki, the Department of Indian Affairs insider who switched sides and worked closely (without pay) with my father, charted the DIA plan to create these Indian bureaucracies in ways that made them completely dependent on the non-Indigenous bureaucracy of the Department of Indian Affairs. In band council offices today, you find the same lethargy that you find at DIA headquarters, as the Indian bureaucrats administer the same programs by the same DIA guidelines as the non-Indigenous officials once did. And at 5 p.m., the offices empty. Our band council offices have become perfect little Department of Indian Affairs branch offices and our leadership, too often, serve as junior government officials.
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