A CANADIAN GENOCIDE IN SEARCH OF A NAME

Posted on July 19, 2013 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

Phil Fontaine, Dr. Michael & Dan Bernie M. Farber, thestar.com , 19 July 2013

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It is time for Canadians to face the sad truth. Canada engaged in a deliberate policy of attempted genocide against First Nations people. And the starvation experiments were only the first of a litany of similar such attempts to control, delegitimize and, yes, even annihilate First Nations to suit the needs of a growing Dominion.

Some have argued that the beginnings of this genocide had its seeds with the establishment of the Indian Act of 1876, which legalized First Nations as an inferior group and made them wards of the state. In truth, these were just words on paper compared with accusations lodged against the Canadian government by our first Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Peter Bryce, in 1907.

According to an academic study undertaken by Adam Green for the University of Ottawa, Dr. Bryce uncovered a “national crime” pertaining to the health of First Nations people. In a book Bryce wrote after he was summarily dismissed from his position for blowing the whistle on the Canadian government’s complicity in the mass deaths from tuberculosis of aboriginals on reserves and in residential schools, Bryce outline in detail what he observed.

According to Bryce, Canada’s aboriginal people in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan were being “decimated by tuberculosis and that the federal government possessed the means to stop it.” Instead, it chose a such minimalist approach that, in the medical opinion of Dr. Bryce, it “amounted to almost nothing.”

The government of the day sought to hide Bryce’s findings from the general public and chose to

bury the report and relieve Bryce of his duties. This had the effect of ensuring that no real steps would be taken to help save the lives of natives on reserves and in residential schools from the ravages of this disease. Indeed, Bryce was so frustrated that in the end he charged that "the government's treatment of it's aboriginal peoples amounted to nothing less than an infuriating and criminal disregard to the country's Treaty pledges."

It would be the easy course for us to continue to turn our backs and pretend that Canada would simply never have engaged in a deliberate attempt to destroy aboriginal people. However, the facts seem to point ominously to that conclusion.

We must ask ourselves: When does genocide become genocide? This might seem an absurd question, but history isn't always forthcoming with a neat little package bearing the label "genocide, open with caution." The definition of genocide is quite clear, however:

> *. . . any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:*
>
> *(a) Killing members of the group;*
>
> *(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*
>
> *(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
>
> *(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
>
> *(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.*
>
> *— Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article II*

Under this definition, Canada's treatment of its First Nations, even in our own lifetime, meets the genocide test:

- The recently exposed nutrition experiments carried out in the residential schools meets the criteria under point (b).
- The residential school system itself, and the practice of forcibly removing First Nations children from reserves and placing them with adoptive non-aboriginal families, common in the 1960s, and referred to as Sixties Scoop, meet the criteria under point (e).
- The decision by the government in the 1900s to allow native children to die of tuberculosis meet the criteria under point (c).

This list is by no means exhaustive.

In 1910, Duncan Scott, then head of Canada's residential schools, refuting the high death rate in his

schools as reported in the Bryce's study, wrote:

"But this does not justify a change in the policy of this Department which is geared toward a Final Solution of our Indian Problem (our emphasis)."

The Government of Canada currently recognizes five genocides: the Holocaust, the Holodomor, the Armenian genocide, the Rwandan genocide and Srebrenica.

The time has come for Canada to formally recognize a sixth genocide, the genocide of its own aboriginal communities; a genocide that began at the time of first contact and that was still very active in our own lifetimes; a genocide currently in search of a name but no longer in search of historical facts.

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