



# WELCOME TO OTTAWA:





IT WAS CLEAR AND CRISP IN OTTAWA, the last day of September, 1974. The 30th session of Parliament was about to get underway amid the usual pageantry and funny little anachronisms of Canada's colonial past. Those of us who had come from Vancouver, Cache Creek, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Kenora, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury and Toronto with the Native People's Caravan on a cross-country protest march were about to learn some lessons on the present meaning of these seemingly quaint historical holdovers.

Most of the RCMP squads patrolling the Hill were dressed in combat-ready brown service uniforms; ceremonial scarlet costumes (the kind that are pictured on the postcards we sell to American tourists) decorated only those who stood by the doors of the legislative buildings themselves.

While waiting for the 2 o'clock arrival of the caravan contingent, the brownshirts spent their time tramping around the lawn, harrassing the 300-odd white and native people who had assembled to greet and join the caravan members, all the while pretending that nothing unusual was happening, just part of an ordinary day's work.

Some of them took up positions behind sawhorse barricades at the top of the steps opposite the main doors of the House. Meanwhile, just outside the

off the Peace Tower — and the pageant of Canadian democracy began to unfold before our eyes.

Between the caravan and the Parliament Buildings were the 3-deep row of browncoated RCMP, a road, and the steps to the building doors. Behind the caravan, on the steps to the plaza were its white supporters, including a contingent of the Communist Party of Canada (Maxist-Leninist) group, who stood below a large red banner.

The media were present in force, including a TV crew mounted high on a scaffold behind police lines to the left, and a cannon-sized microphone by the Parliament steps.

Another kind of drum was heard, and soon a military marching band in full dress regalia appeared, followed by two hundred shiny soldiers carrying rifles with fixed bayonets. The group stationed itself on the road between the plaza and the Parliament entrance.

While the military tunes tinkled in competition with the native chants, we began to understand that the army was part of the parliamentary ceremony. But the symbolic role had suddenly become all too real. Especially since the army did not leave at the appointed ceremonial time.

"We travelled 3,000 miles to bring this message to the government and they won't listen," said caravan leader Louis Cameron. "Instead they give us soldiers with guns."

## the Native Peoples' Caravan.

gates, a tight formation of black-suited municipal police formed a ring around the U.S. Embassy.

A few people in the crowd of supporters began to construct a little rock monument to the caravan near the Eternal Flame. Two unmarked RCMP cars drove up the sidewalk. Simultaneously, a squad of police marched up. Without a word, they collected the rocks, dumped them in the trunks of the cars, and pressed on.

The beat of the drum and the wail of the American Indian Movement (AIM) song began to echo through the streets, as the caravan marched from their headquarters, the abandoned Carbide Mill factory on Victoria Island (re-dubbed the Native People's Embassy by the occupiers), toward its final destination. The 300 Indians unleashed high-spirited piercing whoops that rattled against the sedate architecture of the ministries. Some had painted faces and feathers — all had decorated their denim clothes with whatever could be mustered.

They bore signs saying "Decent Health Care for Indians"; "Better housing — more land"; "Better Education"; "White Man's Pessimism Must Stop."

The waiting crowd parted, and the caravan led the way to the stairs and up, face to face with the sawhorse barricaded police at the top. There was no room to stand. After a minor skirmish the caravan gained some space on the plaza, and the police had lost about 10 yards.

In the process there was one arrest, a few beatings.

The drums began to play again, the chants echoed

Copies of a manifesto were distributed. "We are here to talk about violence," it said. "We are against violence. The violence of racism, poverty, economic dependence, alcoholism, land theft and educational warfare. This is the violence that has hurt our people. We say it is time for the democracy of Canada to end its political and social violence against our people."

The Peace Tower bells began to play a muzak version of an old British military tune, while a police helicopter buzzed overhead.

Cameron called on Trudeau or Indian Affairs Minister Judd Buchanan to come out and speak with the marchers.

Instead, the Chief Justice of Canada, Bora Laskin, rolled up in a black limousine. He stepped out, gave a stonefaced salute to the troops. The bayonets clacked as the army snapped to attention. While a 21-gun salute echoed through the Gatineau Hills, the military band struck up a few bars of *God Save The Queen*, moving rather quickly into *Oh Canada!* ("Our home and native land . . .").

While the 500 demonstrators roared out their anger, the Chief Justice turned and walked into the House of Commons to deliver the Speech from the Throne. A small crowd of civil servants patriotically stationed by the door gave Laskin a round of applause, while cries of "pig, pig!" drifted above the tumult.

Again the drum sounded. Again the air was filled with the lilting anthem of the American Indian Movement.



At 2:55 Louis Cameron declared, "It's the opening of Parliament. All the politicians are inside talking about our lives. We hope they can hear this message." He then read out the manifesto.

The chants and speeches continued. People were tired. They had come a long way. Mothers held their children in arms. Old men yelled in anger. Many legs were aching.

At 3:35 Cameron demanded that Trudeau within half an hour show himself. Building officials responded by shutting the doors. Troop movements were seen behind the glass.

At 4:05 Cameron announced, "One of these days this tower's going to look different. We'll have all these people who refuse to come out hanging from that tower." The people cheered.

The RCMP linked arms and braced themselves. The soldiers pointed their bayonets at the people.

The drum and song lasted another fifteen minutes. Cameron said, "Burn the manifestoes. They refuse to hear them. We will have to write another one — with more demands."

Fifty burning manifestoes were held in the air. The inverted Canadian flag, which had travelled with the caravan from Vancouver as a symbol of people in distress, was set afire. Someone said, "Let's go!" and the people pushed forward in a last attempt to reach the House. Sticks and stones flew in the air. The shoving match lasted at most three minutes; the RCMP line was pushed a few yards back. A breach was opened, and a couple of people made it as far as the military formation.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, poured 30 riot police wielding 3-foot clubs, huge plastic shields and tear gas guns. While a few people remained to do battle with this new force, most of the crowd turned as a body and tumbled down the stairs. People fell, were trampled upon, while children slipped under the rush of legs.

They fanned out on the lawn, hurling insults at the cops, who were regrouping at the head of the stairs, tossing off or arresting the few demonstrators who remained in their midst. While mothers wandered about looking for their children, a few enterprising young people continued to throw available debris at the police line. Somebody set a row of bushes ablaze.

At this point, Ottawa officialdom made the day's first and only direct verbal contact with the caravan. From the top of the stairs an RCMP officer, through a loudhailer whose acoustic quality left something to be desired, ordered the demonstrators to leave the Hill. The police then marched down the stairs and across the lawn in tight formation, sweeping the Native People's Caravan onto the street.

## Cache creek

"It all started with one house," Chief Keh Basil told native people of Regina in the Caravan's hasty quarters at the Friendship Centre.

Basil was at the high point of his detailed account of the Cache Creek blockades in British Columbia the month before.

"I saw 50% of my people living off the reserve.

They're mostly my age. I wondered why."

Johnny Morgan, an 86-year-old member of Basil's Bonaparte Band, fell ill last July and was admitted to the Ashcroft, B.C. hospital. While he was there, his decrepit house burned down, along with \$1700 worth of his personal belongings.

The Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) refused to replace Morgan's home, protesting that "the government provides sufficient money to keep up with natural growth, but not for the backlog of needed housing."

On August 11, 1974, the Cache Creek Native Movement (CCNM) set up an armed blockade on Highway 12, a secondary road, to publicize demands for decent housing on the reserve. They handed out pamphlets to motorists explaining the purpose of their action, charging a toll of \$5 a car.

The CCNM was an alliance between Basil's local supporters and militant young Indians from Vancouver. Many of the latter had been active in the Fred Quilt case (although a coroners jury ruled otherwise, there is strong evidence that Fred Quilt was kicked to death by two RCMP officers), and some had travelled the road of native uprisings from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee.

As the confrontation with police and political authorities developed, the demands escalated. By the time the blockade broke up, the CCNM was calling for a complete solution to the problems of native housing in Canada.

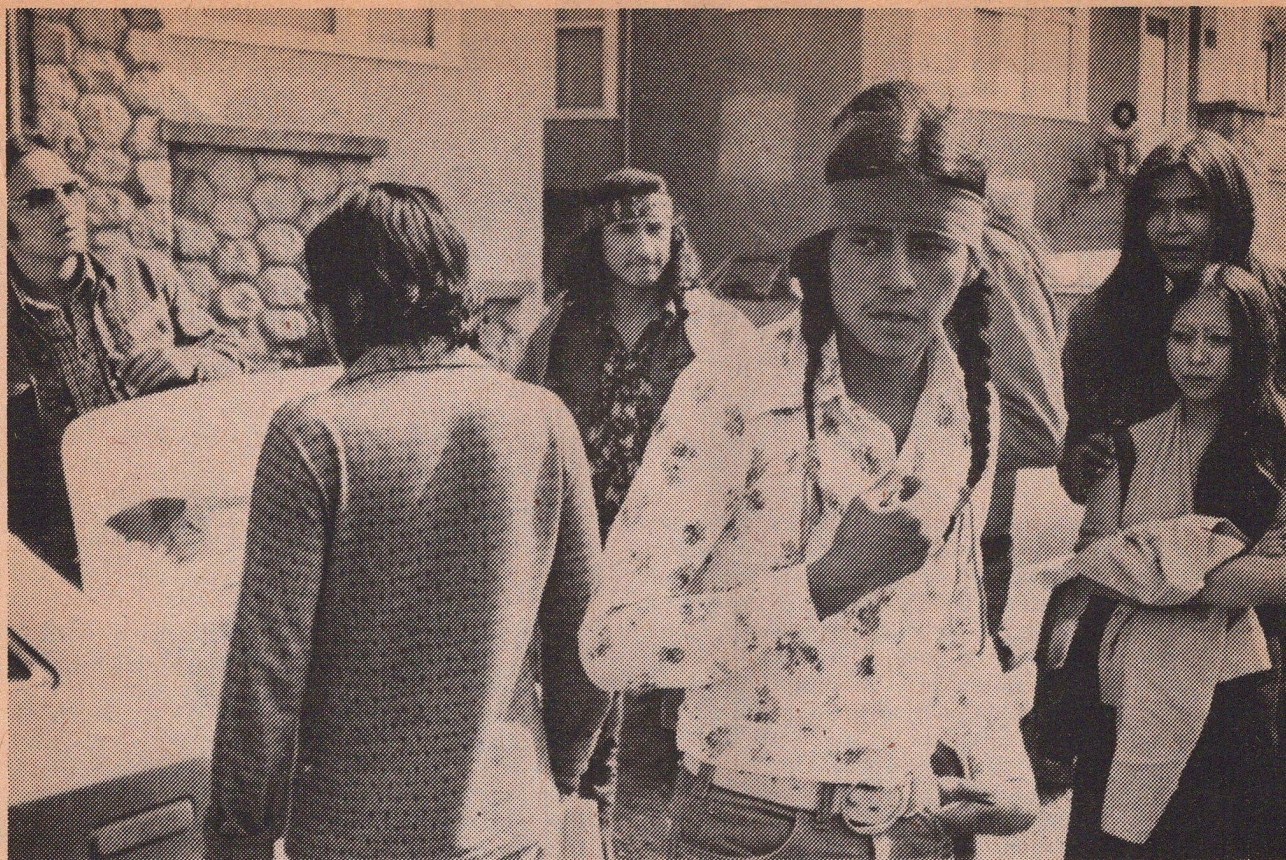
Basil and an RCMP negotiator agreed on September 2 to end the blockade in exchange for an agreement that no one participating in the action would be charged.

Five days later, Clarence Dennis was arrested. Dennis, who has spent fifteen of his thirty-two years in prisons, is a proven leader of militant B.C. natives. He was charged with violating parole (by leaving Vancouver for Cache Creek). Assault on a police officer was added on for good measure. While B.C. Attorney-General Alex Macdonald, who had authorized the no-arrest agreement through his RCMP agent, shrugged that the parole violation arrest was a federal not a provincial affair, natives, who have a cruder but more realistic assessment of police organization, failed to see any significant distinction. A broken agreement was a broken agreement. As of January, 1975, Dennis was still behind bars, waiting for the charges to be settled.

A few days before Dennis was arrested, AIM Canada arranged a meeting between Basil and Louis Cameron of Kenora at its national headquarters in Edmonton. They announced to a press conference that a Native People's Caravan would shortly depart from Vancouver for Ottawa, with the intention of arriving in time for the opening of parliament on September 30. The purpose of the caravan would be to publicize the problems of native people throughout the country and to unify the movement around a specific strategy and set of demands.

At this stage, the demands were: 1) settlement of land claims, 2) adequate housing, 3) native control over native education, 4) economic development, 5) investigation of the DIA, and 6) enforcement of broken treaties. With respect to the last, specific reference was made to the Jay Treaty of 1885, which guarantees unrestricted crossing of U.S.-Canadian borders to native people. Native people do not recognize this line, which, in their analysis, is merely the historical result of conflicts between white governments. The treaty, strangely enough,





—Miriam Ticoll and Stan Persky

**PREPARING TO LEAVE VANCOUVER—Jim Wen-jack, far left; Louis Cameron, center rear.**

is respected more by American than Canadian immigration officers.

While the caravan was born out of the specific struggles at Cache Creek and Kenora, it is best understood as the expression of deep and far-reaching developments within Canada's native community.

For over 300 years, native people in Canada have experienced a constant pattern of land grabs, poor education, job discrimination, deteriorating health conditions and police harassment. Even today thousands of reserve Indians depend for their livelihood on hunting and fishing (rendered increasingly difficult by industrial pollution); both they and many of their urban counterparts have no source of dollars other than the welfare system. Native people in Canada have the lowest incomes of any ethnic group, and the highest rates of unemployment, violent deaths, suicides, imprisonment and infant mortality.

Caravan leaders repeatedly referred to the reservations as a system of "concentration camps," describing the classic pattern of transition from the economic dead end of the rural environment to the degradation in the skid rows of Canadian cities.

All this is of course nothing new. Colonial governments everywhere, from South Africa to Brazil, find justification and leverage for their theft of land, resources and labour power in the objectively filthy lives that they themselves attempt to force upon their native peoples. The main mechanism in this process is the land grab. The first and simplest step is to seize lands, with or without a legal treaty. The Indians, herded into reservations, must then submit to the deterioration of their economic base and living conditions. As a result, many have been leaving for the city. (Urbanization of the natives

has increased from 17% of all status Indians in 1959 to 28% in 1972.) This growing trend makes the remaining reserve lands all the more handy for picking off. The DIA further encourages this process by promoting the idea of subdividing collective lands into private, legally registered plots.

## Status or non-status

Another strategy which comes into play is based on the various divisions among people, some of which are actively perpetuated by government policy. The most prominent among these is between status and non-status Indians. The census and DIA count only the former — their numbers increased from 166,000 to 313,000 from 1951 to 1971. Status Indians are eligible for all types of routine grants and subsidies. They alone are recognized in land claims negotiations. (That these "advantages" don't happen to add up to decent living conditions is another matter.) The 500,000-plus non-status are treated as ordinary citizens (at least for statistical purposes). The dream of the government, of course, is for all Indians to lose their status.

The rural-urban split itself creates problems, as do the different degrees of wealth found in various tribes and nations. Each of these sets of circumstances generates a bureaucracy of its own. The DIA



supervises the election of band chiefs which are generally grouped into provincial organizations (e.g., B.C. Union of Indian Chiefs, Saskatchewan Federation of Indians). Their umbrella is the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), which Ottawa takes as the legitimate bureaucratic representative of native people.

Non-status Indians, too, have organizations, often divided into local chapters (e.g., B.C. Assn. of Non-Status Indians, Metis Society of Saskatchewan). They, too, engage in negotiations with governments, largely on questions of economic development. BCANSI, for example, has a small but growing portfolio of investments in co-operative ventures, in some cases as a minority partner of government or business. Non-status groups are represented nationally by the Native Council of Canada, founded in 1974.

The current phase of native struggles takes place at both the "bureaucratic" level and at the level of "spontaneous" popular struggles. Both have been gaining impetus since the 1960's, part of the general thrust of resistance among minority peoples of North America — blacks, Chicanos, Quebecois, etc. The direction of the "bureaucratic" struggles is somewhat ambiguous. They involve negotiations at the national level between such groups as the NIB and the government, but more important are the battles waged by individual bands, tribes and nations over land claims and economic development.

Recent examples include:

**JAMES BAY** — The "Alaska-type" settlement of money and severely reduced territory was hailed by Judd Buchanan as a model for native claims throughout the country. Philip Paul, land claims researcher for the B.C. Union of Indian Chiefs described it as a "beads and blankets" deal which would not be acceptable to members of his organization. Given that the \$20 billion project was a fait accompli to which the Cree and Inuit were forced to accommodate themselves, the Quebec government now has virtually free hand in the vast area of James Bay.

**NASS VALLEY** — The Nishga nation of northwestern B.C. are "next in line" after the James Bay Indians. The provincial and federal governments have big plans for the northwest (see Reb Yankel's account, "B.C.'s Northwest Question — the hordes are at the NDP's gates" in *Dimension*, Sept. 1974). The Nishga blocked a CNR crew from building a line through their 7,000 sq. mile land claim, and Ottawa was forced to negotiate. Recently, a coalition of labour, community and ecology groups came together to demand the effective participation of northwestern residents in development. Their first demand is that no development takes place until land claims are settled to the satisfaction of the native people involved.

**NORTHWEST TERRITORIES** — In June, 1974, the Indian and Metis people of the N.W.T. "declared their continuing ownership of 450,000 sq. miles of traditional land and rejected land-surrender in return for compensation as a land-settlement model" (*Globe & Mail*, Nov. 27, 1974). Their refusal of development pending land claims negotiations conflicts directly with the Mackenzie gas pipeline scheme. They pose serious questions about the usefulness to Canadians of a pipeline which serves the "internal investment imperative of a multi-national oil industry."

Urbanization, an objective government strategy

for divesting native people of their land, has also created the conditions for building third world consciousness in the developing struggle for self-determination. James Wah-Shee, president of the Indian Brotherhood of the N.W.T., quotes the Tanzania Africa National Union (TANU) in a recent public address on the Mackenzie pipeline controversy: "Any action which does not increase the people's say in determining their own affairs or running their own lives is not development and retards them, even if the action brings them a little better health and a little more bread." (*Globe & Mail*, Nov. 27, 1974.)

## The Indian militants

In an uneasy alliance with these stable "bureaucratic" forces are the "militants" who have gotten big headlines for their spontaneous struggles over the past year. The term "militant" in the vocabulary of native organizations usually designates people who get involved with blockades, occupations and armed confrontations. Leaders who wish to indicate that they are anxious to negotiate but may feel constrained to step up the ante as a last resort can occasionally be heard to say, "We are not militants, but . . ." Relative to the inherently rural character of the status groups involved in land claims, the militants are, in general, more thoroughly urbanized. Many left the reserve in their youth, to find themselves in the speedy skid row scene. Welfare, drugs, alcohol and the constant threat of arrest are the setting.

An alternative is moving towards integration — getting a job and perhaps acquiring a skill. Beside the obvious social obstacles to this course are some real objectives to learning to clock in to "white man's time." Militant natives' refusal to sell their labour power is often an affirmation of continuing ties to their own people, to the land, and to a history of cooperation in economic life. These groups identify with the American Indian Movement and the long series of struggles that have taken place across the border. AIM in turn has contracts with various Puerto Rican, black and Chicano groups in the U.S.

Canadian Indians form a significantly larger portion of the national population than those of the U.S. Further, their land claims are much more extensive. And while the U.S. was born of conquest through the application of search and destroy tactics, Western Canada, with some notable exceptions, was won largely through settlement, some treaties and police "defensive" action. Indians in Canada were never conquered militarily, which adds a significant measure of strength to their demands.

On Saturday, Sept. 14, two hundred people marched from Hastings St. (the heart of Vancouver skids) to the Provincial Courthouse on Georgia St. Among the native people leading the demonstration were Ken Basil and Louis Cameron. The event was a kickoff for the caravan. Although the march focussed on issues that were to be repeated throughout the caravan journey, the demonstrators' mood was sharpened by the arrest of Clarence Dennis a



week before and by the continual surveillance of the Cache Creek people by the Vancouver police. The group was holed up in the Vine St. Native Friendship Centre (to the dismay of the Centre's Board of Directors).

About half of the demonstrators were native people. In addition to scattered non-native supporters, there was a small contingent (including the authors) from the *Western Voice*, a local "newspaper of working class struggle," and a large and vocal division of CPC(M-L) supporters. Many of them were members of Vancouver's East Indian community, which itself is increasingly victim to racist attacks amid police indifference, if not complicity. At the Courthouse, the demonstration was swelled by forty more people who had just concluded a Chile solidarity rally (organized by the Revolutionary Marxist Group, a Trotskyist organization). With the Chilean MIR representative present offering a few remarks in behalf of international solidarity, the occasion, through the ironies of political scheduling, produced a moment of protocol unity among leftists.

## Enter the lefties

Because leftist support was to be logistically crucial to the caravan on its cross-country trek, it would be inappropriate to ignore the relationships between leftist segments, or the central organizing role of the CPC(M-L) in support of the caravan, in any political account. When CPC(M-L) members invited the support of the *Western Voice* for the Sept 14 demonstration on behalf of the ponderously named Committee to Support Native People's Struggles in Defense of Their Hereditary Rights, we were more than slightly dubious and declined, rather peremptorily. Our swift transformation from "anarcho-syndicalists" (the party's term for the *Voice* at that time) into "progressives" was viewed by us with suspicion. Nor were we enamoured of a parental psychology that offered instant forgiveness for all past sins in the name of obedient "unity" around a particular struggle. As political militants, we had already scuffled with the CPC(M-L). As recently as two months previous, they had dutifully denounced the *Voice's* failure to cover the July 8 federal elections as "criminal acts against the working class." (The party had fielded a hundred or so candidates and garnered some 17,000 votes nationally.) One of their members came to the workplace of one of the authors to angrily shred the latest issue of the *Voice* before our eyes and in a somewhat uncomradely fashion, at the top of his lungs, to remind us that Mussolini had been hung by his heels.

Comic operetta incidents of this kind tended to produce a stereotypical and satirized image of the CPC(M-L) in our minds. "Reducing everything to the party's correct line, rather than understanding that the development of the party and correct line comes from historical development among the masses . . . the Maoists end up as a parody of socialism . . . Their party does not come out of mass struggle but remains elitist and sectarian. Their theory, then, is more a pronouncement of revolutionary purism than

a concrete expression of their mass practice." The foregoing (from Jim Harding's survey of leftist groups, *Dimension*, April, 1974) is fairly representative of the left's treatment of CPC(M-L) activities. The sketchiness of this sort of description (as opposed to more concrete accounts matching up particular CPC(M-L) pronouncements with their actions), as well as dismissals of the group as not meriting serious consideration would prove neither adequate nor useful to us in our actual contacts with CPC(M-L) personnel over the next two weeks of the caravan march.

When the support committee issued a demonstration flyer headlined, "Hail the armed struggle of the native Indian people at Cache Creek," coupled with a few "long live" this's and that's, plus the unmistakable cadences of "the native peoples have a glorious tradition of resisting the attempts of the colonialists and monopoly capitalists to carry out fascist suppression and genocidal attacks" etc., the Sept. 11 edition of the *Voice* suggested that although this inflammatory style will no doubt put off some people who are in sympathy with the natives' cause, "their struggle is a crucial one and their demonstration should be supported."

However, the sloganeering and the form of the analysis (centered around an inquiry into the strategy of monopoly capitalism), which was far from the simple but effective assertion tacked up at the Cache Creek encampment ("No outside white visitors allowed. Because of your failure to obey the laws of our tribe as well as the laws of your own, this village is closed."), led us to ask the caravan organizers who was in control of developments and what were their views on support.

In a pre-demonstration meeting, AIM member Lee Manor flatly informed us, "AIM and the Cache Creek Native Movement are in charge of this demonstration." Manor dismissed the wrangle about the analysis on the back of the demo flyer as an argument about the "fine print." Similarly, organizer Ken Dennis shrugged off our objections on the question of "armed struggle," yet showed little attachment to the concept: "Armed self-defence is what you want? Okay."



VANCOUVER DEPARTURE SCENE—Al Anderson's truck with wickiup.

—Miriam Ticoll and Stan Persky



Ken Basil explained, "We're asking for support from all people who want change. We're not isolating our struggle to just native people. We're all struggling for the same cause because we're all controlled by the same government." Manor added, "People can come to us and offer their support and we decide whether or not we accept it. We have sanctioned this support." The replies didn't resolve differences, but the assertiveness satisfied us that it was possible to participate in the caravan without leftist paranoia.

## A taste of oratory

That evening we had our first taste of the compelling oratory of the caravan leaders. At a rally organized (and largely attended) by the CPC(M-L), Cameron and Basil were joined by Jim Wenjack (a Toronto-based Ojibwa who came to be known as the caravan spokesman for security), Ed Burnstick (of Edmonton) and Ken Dennis.

Cameron's appearance again raised the issue of support. As the Kenora occupation moved into a negotiating phase in late August, Cameron, to maintain the momentum developed by native militants in the summer, held meetings for a national speaking tour with the CPC(M-L) as well as with a group of Toronto political activists. The result was Cameron's acceptance of a dozen-city tour under the direct sponsorship of the party. Yet, in his Vancouver speech, at various points he subtly demarcated supporters from the autonomous native direction of the caravan.

"Since 1492, our people have been struggling for the right to live — so women, children, old people, the whole nation can survive," Cameron told his audience. White development has been a "total nightmare to the Indian people of this land."

In the series of speeches Cameron initiated in Montreal shortly after the early-September decision to launch the caravan and which he continued, flying ahead from city to city as the caravan moved east, for the first time the level of politics went beyond the spelling out of grievances; the native movement was to be situated in a broader anti-imperialist context, while yet retaining popular demands and advocacy of the cultural integrity of native people. "All of us as human beings, not only as Indian people, French people, black people, Chicanos, but all of us as human beings — we can all join together to beat this imperialist monster," he said in Montreal on Sept. 7.

"There was an old man who stood up in the Longhouse — the first time I really got some education was from listening to this old man, because at the time I was of the opinion, like everyone else, that Indian people's culture, religion and spiritualism and all that was a metaphysical and idealist thing. When our medicine men speak in the Longhouse, they talk about imperialism. This is the thing you have to fight, you have to identify."

In Vancouver that night, he spoke in the same vein: "We know who we are fighting. People who

are experts in ideology try to explain it to us," he said, nodding in the direction of the CPC(M-L) meeting chairman. "But we know there are other human beings in this world and we know who we are fighting against. Probably the greatest thing that can happen to mankind would be a revolution in the U.S. and Canada, because they are committing high crimes. The revolution will have its own identity."

He also sounded the theme of determination that was to be characteristic of caravan speakers: "We said a long time ago, we're not going to let nobody sit on the fence. We're not playing games. It's a burden to us — while we are trying to fight and defeat the enemy — it's a burden to us, these silent people, these people who can't make up their minds."

## Scrambling the caravan together

I'm not sure what we expected. "Caravan," for me (Persky), meant the cavalcade of fancy cars the campus Liberal Party ran along the University of British Columbia's main mall during the student society elections. Unconsciously, the word "car" in "caravan" stuck in my mind. I guess I thought we'd arrive at the Indian Centre to see a string of 20-30 automobiles revving up. We got to the Vine St. Centre, just above Kitsilano Beach, at 9:30. The caravan was supposed to leave at noon.

Everything was in a scramble. There were no cars. Not anything. Lee Manor was on the phone trying to line up rent-a-car agencies. Burnstick was dickering with Vancouver's lone Communist Party alderman Harry Rankin, inevitably present at events where disorganized youthful radicals are trying to get it together at the last minute. Yes, he would countersign the half-rubber cheque to be deposited for the bus they would charter . . . Rent a bus on a Sunday? Didn't these people know *anything* about . . . ?

Okay, you come on in with me, Jerry Brown says to Ticoll. No, it better be you, you look straight, he says to Persky, noting Ticoll's shaggy hair and beard. We're parked in a lot across the street from the rent-a-car agency. Wait, let's get it straight, the story is there's a salmonbake over on Vancouver Island, we'll be there two days . . . blah, blah, blah . . . and pretty soon we're telling lies about the details of the story we've fabricated. No, no, we won't fill up the back of the car with stinking fish, I'm saying to the woman behind the counter, beaming in my best American sportshirt. Jerry and I are doing the tourist/faithful guide number.

What had last night been just the vague hint of how it feels to be seen by whites as a group of "natives" (i.e., dangerous strangers) now sharpened into perception. Not just that we were doing a shuffle on racist stereotypes. But realize the irony of a caravan put together by people without cars. Not



only not having cars, but not even having licenses to drive cars. (On the caravan roster, the two questions to be checked off beside your name were "Do you have a license?" and "Are there any warrants out on you?" The ones with warrants outnumbered those with licenses about 3 - 1.) And when it came to renting cars, the whole relationship of Indians to whites came out starkly: Indians don't exist. Because, "to exist," even in this shabby car rental agency on a Sunday morning, meant you had credit cards, a job that could be verified, a whole bureaucratic identity made up of documents, certificates and laminated rectangles of plastic featuring your color photograph. None of the experiences these people regularly had would result in acquiring those merit badges of the white world. Nobody had written to Jerry Brown saying, "We're delighted that you've just graduated Mr. Brown, please accept this Master Charge card from the Bank of Montreal and may you have every success in your chosen career."

Afternoon. An older woman lit a braid of sweet grass after saying a prayer in her own language wishing the 60 of us in the Vine St. Indian Centre well as we prepared to leave. Slowly she moved around the circle and each of us ceremonially bathed our faces in the sweet grass smoke. Then the caravan leaders took out the things needed for smoking. After they smoked, one warrior took the pipe to each of the men. One by one we smoked the pipe. In the time it took for the pipe to come around, there was a silence in which we thought about what we were doing, about native people.

For Ken Basil, the caravan's demands went back a long way. His great-grandfather appeared before the federal-provincial McKenna-McBride commission on October 31, 1913 in Ashcroft, B.C. and told the commissioners, "When it comes to the fine point, I am short of land and it is hard to get water. As to the poorness of my children, I guess you have seen it yourselves as well. We are not the only ones that have the same grievances, but mostly all the Indians all over this part have the same grievances." More than sixty years later, conditions haven't changed, and Indians all across Canada have the same grievances.

## Through the Rockies

The trip to Calgary, an all-night run through the B.C. mountains, began with the threading road up the Fraser Canyon toward Kamloops and Cache Creek. One of the old cars we had commandeered konked out halfway up the gorge. The woman in the Hell's Gate diner eyed us suspiciously as we pressed the keys of the abandoned car upon her and explained that a friend would come by in a day or so to pick it up.

What had already emerged was the practical problem of logistics that would confront us at each place. Here were a group of people (whose numbers would grow as we moved eastward, though certainly not anywhere near the hoped-for thousands predicted by Basil and Cameron at the outset) who owned no means of transportation, had no food and who

only had had local experiences in getting such things together. In Vancouver, enough money to get us on the road had been raised between hat passages at the courthouse rally, Cameron's speech and a couple of events held at the Indian Centre. What began with a sanguine, somewhat magical belief in the ability of money to appear would evolve into the very material reality of counting grubby dollar bills one by one onto the desk of a Greyhound agent.

The caravan was beginning to face the problem of political logistics. Sentiment for the caravan on the part of native people across the country was an unknown factor. To discover that sentiment meant having a tight campaign schedule that could maximize opportunities by frequent stops at some of the 1500 reserves along the route, where organizing could take place in a non-hostile atmosphere and caravan members could derive a sense of having a real base of supply. It meant having a team of organizers in major cities to publicize rallies as the caravan passed through. It meant being able to get a favorable media, who wanted sensationalist images of gun-totin' Indians and instead would be faced with unarmed men and women who wanted to discuss serious issues. The caravan was the kind of project for which an experienced organizer would probably want three months of lead time to put together a network that would be able to deliver political support at precise moments.

As the caravan rolled down the Alberta side of the Rockies in the middle of the night, hungry, sleepy, comforted only by shooting Northern Lights, we wondered if, perhaps, this wasn't simply going to be a "spontaneist" disaster. It was nearly three in the morning when we pulled into Calgary. We stumbled around in the dark, knocking on doors of the Native Friendship Centre. Nobody home.

Finally, an unlocked door led us into the large meeting room of a long prefab hut attached to the Centre. People piled out of the bus with their sleeping bags and blankets, picking places around the floor to crash. A couple of people who had been sent to meet us appeared. The news was bad. We heard you weren't coming, they said. Nothing had been arranged. Somehow, we were too tired to feel any impact. The red light on the electric percolator that meant coffee was ready had just as much meaning for us as political details at that moment. That there was a bathroom with a toilet that worked and a place indoors to put a sleeping bag was important. The rest could wait 'til daylight.

Last sight before sinking into sleep: looking around the room — lots of teenagers — some of them were suddenly wide awake and horsing around — young marrieds with babies settling in, people who were happy having their children with them (no demand for daycare centers here) — people who were comfortable in large groups.

Four hours later it was daylight. There was no point in waiting around. It wouldn't be possible to get a meeting organized. Various caravan members crowded into the room where a hastily gathered press conference was set up. Basil made a dignified presentation. "The government have very deaf ears . . . I strongly feel the native people of Canada will no longer take any more direct suffering from the people that's in power," he told the reporters and the local radio station tape recorders. "We will demand our rights from now on because we are the aboriginal people of this land. The programs forced on the people on the reserve are not drawn up by the



people. This is the reason most DIA programs are failures."

It was straight forward stuff, delivered in tones of restrained anger.

"The struggles of Cache Creek and Kenora are a movement of grassroots people. We do not represent all the Indian people of Canada. But we are a movement dealing with the real issues," was the astute political definition Basil offered of the caravan. It is a way of distinguishing this effort at grassroots organizing from the "official" native leadership (those who "represent" people through election) without divisive criticism of the elected leaders.

## It starts to jell in Edmonton

We hit Edmonton in the early evening. It was a low point. If we couldn't pull it together here, it meant the breakup of the caravan. We went into the downstairs dining hall of the Edmonton Native Friendship Centre, carting our gear.

For the first time there were signs of preparation. A poster announced a pow-wow for that night. Members of the local AIM chapter were on hand to confer with the caravan. In the basement kitchen, food was being prepared. Basil then called together the first of what would be a series of internal democratic assemblies. It was more than a rehash of organizational details. The seriousness of the situation was spelled out, mistakes were openly admitted, criticism was subtle but frank, everyone was encouraged to speak out, the destructiveness of unexpressed resentments was recognized. Unpretentiously, and relatively unmanipulatively, the leadership was saying, we're the spokespeople here only so long as you say we are. In displaying their vulnerability, they were also sowing a new strength and a confidence in the caravan. Those famous Chinese political slogans about getting ideas *from* the people and bringing them *back to* the people in a crystallized political form — slogans which in our distance from experiences of solidarity often sound like so many words — had a hint of reality here.

There was a palpable feeling of pulling together. We would have to rely more on ourselves for advance organizing, it was decided. The PR team would have to go ahead. Not everything was settled smoothly. Lee Manor objected to the proposed arrangements of who would travel ahead, which car would be taken. He quickly turned it into an issue of his dignity, of whether proper "respect" was being accorded to him. When the proposed solution turned out to be unsatisfactory to him, he drew the line. "I'll see you in Ottawa," he said, picking up his belongings and stalking out. A moment of chill silence. Basil and Ed Burnstick stood stock still at the head of the circle. Then doggedly, they ploughed on, inviting further criticism.

Before the evening pow-wow, Burnstick and Basil were the primary speakers at a press conference. We begin to notice a new pattern emerging in relations with the press. The native people gradually

gain the upper hand. Reporters' questions are skillfully anticipated, provocative queries are coolly sidestepped and the spokesman turn the occasion into an educational session from the caravan members present.

Basil quashes the arms issue: "We stated from the start that we're not going to be armed. We've got real issues to deal with, and we're expecting positive, solid answers to our demands." He and Burnstick quickly turn to the caravan issues. "Land is the most important thing in this country; we have to have that to put decent housing on," Burnstick tells the reporters. "We have reserves, but there's not enough room to establish good homes, a good living. The land that's been taken away from the native people has to be given back, so they can build their own homes, develop their own communities, and to be independent in their own ways," he adds.

People begin filling in upstairs where chairs are set around the edges of the room in a large rectangle. A big drum is in the centre. By the time the pow-wow begins, there are some 200 people present, mostly of the "solid citizen" variety, people, people for whom the Friendship Centre serves as a social focus. They arrive in families, elders to babies, well-dressed. These are the community people the caravan is trying to reach.

"In my years, which are few, I have seen too much suffering," Basil begins, pacing a bit, carrying a small carved stick from which a line of feathers are strung along a strip of buckskin. "Eighty million dollars is spent by the Department of Indian Affairs on hiring 'experts.' These experts are trying to tell us that we are the problem and they're the solution. That's very incorrect."

Basil blast the false reports of arms that have appeared in the media. "This is the method they use to divide, to try to stop the progress of any group trying to make change. They spill out propaganda to sway people from the real issues. This misrepresentation has created fear in the people willing to support this caravan." He acknowledges the touchiness of the guns issue. "Our people do not approve of the Kenora and Cache Creek tactics, but we had to take up arms for our own protection. We on the caravan do not need arms to protect ourselves; the people, you people, are going to protect us."

"We do not seek violence, but if it comes our way we will not run. We are warriors; we must protect our wives and children, our people." It's a long speech, moving through all the reasons for the caravan. It's the kind of talk people haven't heard for a long time. Basil is well-received. The hats being passed around are quickly filled. The drummers take their place and an evening of singing and dancing unfolds. People who haven't seen each other for a while relax and gossip with the music in the background. Outside on the steps and lawn, caravan security is on duty, eyeing the unmarked police cruisers that slowly pass the centre, keeping us under surveillance.

The next morning executive members of the Native Council of Canada begin arriving from the airport. They could easily cover the basic funding that would guarantee our arrival in Ottawa. Caravan spokesmen huddle with them in a small office. We lounge around the centre, talking to new caravan members, mostly teenagers. By noon there is an



assembly. Basil announces that the NCC supports our aims. Then he adds that they aren't offering any sums of money. Everyone agrees it was wrong not to have had that discussion in the open. Nelly Carlsen of the Alberta Committee of Native Rights for Native Women brings her group's support and a cheque, and explains to the assembly that the Indian Act of 1868 contains a clause under which Indian women lose their status as native people when they marry non-natives. She explains the struggle her group has been engaged in. The situation begins to feel right — the caravan stopping at various places, meeting with local representatives, hearing their particular problems, taking their grievances to Ottawa for action. This is what we had in mind when we set out. "I will continue to break the law. I will call myself an Indian," she says. Along with political issues, practical matters are remembered. She closes the meeting by offering to wash people's clothes in her machine. "I would've made you some bannock, but I ran out of flour," she adds as people applaud her.

## They add another bus

The caravan treasurer reports to the group that there isn't enough to pay for a Greyhound charter to Saskatoon. There are more people signed up

and we need an additional bus. One of the local organizers suggests that a wine bash could be held that evening (no beer because the breweries are on strike in Edmonton). People are enthusiastic about the idea, a bit too enthusiastic in fact. Skip Greenstalk, the CPC(M-L) member, intervenes: "I'm in favour of this idea, too, but I think we have to be very cautious. We have to remember, historically, what alcohol has done to our people." He goes on to present a sensible analysis of the issue. We note with some surprise that his remarks run counter to our stereotype of the political group he's part of. No big rhetorical rap about how the monopoly capitalists have cunningly done this and that. Just a concise statement that quickly has people nodding in agreement. The caravan members reaffirm our disciplinary rule against the use of any drugs or alcohol while on the trip. This example of deciding to ban alcohol for political reasons is impressive to other natives we contact. As is the fact that the caravan isn't funded by a government grant. Announcement are run off and caravan members head down the skids to pass them out to natives while others get on the phone to contact people on the Friendship Centre lists.

In the afternoon, cheers break out when it's learned from the newspapers that Judge Fred Nichol in St. Paul, Minn., has dismissed all charges of felony against Russell Means and Dennis Banks, two leaders of AIM, after a gruelling eight month trial for their actions at Wounded Knee in 1973. For caravan members, the AIM victory has special meaning.

We also get the *Edmonton Journal's* early edition. It again illustrates our problem with the media.

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Ford's fake amnesty offer to American war resisters in Canada is all over page one, while the caravan story is on page seven. Yet, reporter Jan McMillan's story is careful and favourable, perhaps the most even coverage the caravan would get from any of the bourgeois papers. By the late edition, it's been pulled. Not even buried on page 70. It's infuriating to be in the middle of what one realizes is a significant political event only to see it virtually ignored because it's being presented calmly and with minimal fuss. The presence of a single weapon would have boosted it to front page banner headlines, we noted bitterly.

By midnight, as the wine bash and dance concluded, there is enough money to mobilize the caravan. We can begin to evaluate the results of our work in Edmonton. While not an absolutely unqualified success, we have held the caravan together and accomplished most of our immediate goals.

The next day, Sept. 18, we're moving across the wheat fields, passing through small agricultural towns where grain elevators are clustered next to the railroad tracks. A light rain begins to fall as we roll into Saskatoon. At the Saskatoon Native Friendship Centre, something happens.

From the moment we come in, it's in the air. The centre is a huge low-ceiling rather gloomy shed-like affair. Yet there is food and good feeling. We'll be in Regina by midnight. A few people have come over to meet us. The kids hanging around the centre are genuinely interested in what the caravan is about. The press arrives promptly — local TV with glaring lights bouncing into our eyes, the regular press and knowledgeable people from the weekly *Saskatoonian* and the student paper.

At the conference, Basil begins in an ordinary tone. We notice that caravan members are beginning to have confidence in his oratory, which is proving consistent and inventive. Then almost without warning, Ken Basil explodes into eloquence. "During the events in Cache Creek no government official came to me. I did not want to go to them. If I did have to go I wanted to go in numbers.

"What happened in Cache Creek and Kenora awakened the government. Their senses came alive. The only method they understand is a gun. Only when they are confronted with the weapons they used to destroy my people do they understand. If you look at the movement that's gathering, there's a circle, a circle of life."

Basil lashes the DIA bureaucrats: "They sit in soft leather chairs, smoke dollar cigars, wear \$350 suits, alligator shoes... our people live in shacks, death firetraps." He spits out the last words and calls for the immediate removal of Judd Buchanan. When asked if he would suggest a replacement, he shrewdly names George Manuel, president of the NIB.

The evening ended with the inevitable cramming into cars and buses. As one of the few people with a valid driver's license and a believable credit rating, I, (Ticoll) was driving a Dodge wagon rented from one of the more open-minded (gullible?) Edmonton agencies.

We were the second (security) car. Beside me were "Joeface" (security head at the time) and Donna Basil (the Chief's wife). Among those who filled the back seat and rear were Eetsah, an Edmonton woman politically close to the CPC(M-L), and her eight year old daughter Maria.

As the cavalcade was pulling out, a rambunctious, battered old white Chevrolet came down the other

side of the street, horns blaring and fist-signs filling the windows. The lead car tooted in response, but I, figuring 'nuff said, stuck to the business of driving.

"Why didn't you honk?" Donna asked.

"It's not the honker — it's the honkey!" chorled Joeface — and several passengers nearly split their sides with laughter.

## A new element joins in Regina

The Friendship Centre was waiting for us. Our unofficial host was Wayne Stonechild, who reminded us that the RCMP training school is located in Regina. The young trainees, it seems, do their field-work in the Indian section of town — the frontier, 11th Avenue, being well known to white and native residents alike.

After several stints in prison, Stonechild decided a few years ago that the best way to deal with the law is to stand up to it. He formed street patrols, advocated on behalf of his brothers and sisters in the bars and alleyways, and proved that self-discipline and a bit of organization can overcome a lot of hassles with the law. As a result, he himself has not been in prison for over three years.

Stonechild and his group were an important new element for the caravan. They had shown a bit of the way to overcoming the long-term problems of the street, much in the style of the Black Panthers.

During the stay in Regina at two separate meetings eight people were expelled from the Caravan for violating the rule against drinking. In the case of the second seven, it was purely a matter of strict enforcement of caravan discipline. Most people were sorry to see them go.

Edmonton had set the pattern of activity for each major city: pow-wows, rallies, press conferences, and fundraising in all kinds of ways. Despite the problems that had to be constantly struggled through and notwithstanding short nights of sleep on hard floors, the prevailing mood was euphorically high from Saskatoon on.

It was in itself an extraordinary feat to arrive at each succeeding city — broke, tired and hungry, to begin again the round of propaganda and soliciting that propelled the caravan forward "toward our destiny" in Ottawa, as Basil put it.

At a Thursday morning press conference Basil and Burnstick integrated the demands of prison and legal reform into the caravan platform. Wayne Stonechild's entry into the caravan was consciously linked to this development.

"Here in Regina," Basil said, "75% of the prison population are native people. The National Parole Board should have native people on it. People from the community who know what it's like to be behind bars."

That same night the caravan hosted a pow-wow for 200 members of the local native community. The event was a continuation of the Saskatoon celebration. The dancing, drums and singing went on for two hours. Then Basil got up to give an



hour long speech. He told the entire story of the Cache Creek action, with a full background analysis of the native housing situation. He spoke as a military leader, describing tactical moves in detail.

The fund-raising, too, had been going on all day. Groups of teenagers had fanned out on the Regina street to panhandle and solicit support from shopkeepers. We also began to work with white progressive friends and contacts centered around *Next Year Country* who suggested trade union, church and academic sources who, in combination, came up with a fair bit of financial support on short notice. A native member of a national leftist political organization joined the caravan with a promise to supply emergency funds to keep the caravan going (a promise he lived up to).

## On to Winnipeg

In Winnipeg, with two native centres turning their backs to the caravan, the Unitarian Church came to the rescue. It was Saturday, Sept. 21. The caravan had been on the road for nearly a week. The opening of Parliament was nine days away.

Despite the organizers' predictions of up to 15,000 people on Parliament Hill, the current population was under 150. And, since Hobbema, contacts with reserves had been absolutely minimal. Basil was visibly distracted by all this.

That night a station wagon rented by Ed Burnstick from a Vancouver agency disappeared into thin air. Despite the 24-hour guard, no one saw how a car parked right by the church entrance had been made off with. The next day, there was bad news from Toronto. Several native people had resigned from an ad hoc united front support committee. They were upset, apparently, about the initiatives taken by the CPC(M-L) in publicity and logistics work. Their condition of continued support was that the caravan declare itself a point project of the Cache Creek Native Movement and Ojibwa Warriors Society. This put Basil in a somewhat difficult position. He had not realized the public impact CPC(M-L) participation had, particularly in the complex, sectarian, Toronto scene, where both white and native groups were annoyed at the party's role.

Basil's central position, often re-iterated, was that the caravan does not speak for any specific group, rather, "we represented the real issues." The caravan, for him, was its own boss, subservient neither to political line nor local interest group. Isolated in Winnipeg, dependent for its information on long distance telephone rumors, the caravan was beginning to feel like a deer chased by rival packs of wolves.

It was learned that the station wagon had not been stolen, but that the rental agency had flown someone from Vancouver with a second key to repossess the car in the middle of the night. This was, in a way, more of a shock than outright theft would have been, for people believed it showed how thoroughly the national police were monitoring the comings and goings of the caravan.

Sunday's press conference was heavy. Burnstick and Basil went through the original demands, with Basil emphasizing, "If the doors of Ottawa remain shut, white society and the general public are not going to like what they see in the future — Kenora and Cache Creek were just minor skirmishes." In the light of the problems behind the scenes, one of Basil's last comments assumes significance. "The question is not how many organizations support the caravan, or how many people are with us when we arrive in Ottawa. The point is we represent the real issues."

External support for the caravan was on the upswing. While we were in Winnipeg, the Canadian Council of Churches announced its backing and sent a representative to meet with caravan leaders. Two members of a Quaker organization joined the caravan as official observer-participants.

At the \$50-a-head Poor People's Feast of wieners and beans organized by a *Dimension* editor, Basil spoke with desperate dignity of his own life as a typical native person. "I went to school because I thought I'd get a job and get some dollars. But that's not the way of our people. We are not materialistic." He said native people want their land back, "... we did not destroy the land. We cherished land, because it gives us everything we need ... Society is creating cold, lifeless prisons and forcing people to live in them." He suggested the links between native and other popular struggles, pointing out that "fifteen families in all North America control us," and that "85% of Canadian companies are controlled in the United States."

This speech was Basil's swan song. Earlier that morning he had already talked informally about leaving, saying that the "movement isn't developing correctly." The day before he had talked of future caravans, and how they would reach into the reservations, correcting this action's major failing.

That same morning a small event occurred which seemed to indicate a great deal about the state's relationship to the caravan. Burnstick, who is employed by a LIP-type native media project in Edmonton, received a phone call from the office of the Secretary of State. The caravan was offered funds to complete its journey and free accommodations in Ottawa. The offer was refused outright.

Was it more than a coincidence that this offer came when it did? The caravan was having a hard time building its numbers, was in constant financial trouble, and Toronto was putting the political squeeze on the leadership. It is known that Security Services, a cabinet-level intelligence group, was keeping a close watch on the caravan. The word from friends in Ottawa was that the Minister of Indian Affairs Buchanan had done little but worry about the caravan for the past week.

### RESEARCH PROPOSALS

The Centre for Resource Studies at Queen's University is undertaking a major study on *The National Impact of the Minerals Industry*, and invites proposals from investigators who wish to participate in the research. The project is expected to have a duration of about one year and a total budget in the order of \$150,000. On completion of this initial study, further work will be required on specific topics. The initial study will be in seven parts, relating to different aspects of the industry: economic linkages; personnel; local and regional impacts; environmental impacts; trade patterns; industry composition, organization, and behaviour; and industry performance. A proposal may cover one or more aspects.

For further information contact:

Dr. C. G. Miller, Executive Director,  
Centre for Resource Studies, Room 642, Goodwin Hall,  
Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6  
Telephone — 613-547-2924.





—Miriam Ticoll and Stan Persky

Every aspect of the caravan and its work was being discussed by telephone. Many long distance calls were made at each step. Presumably, the first act of a surveillance operation would be set up a phone tap. It would certainly have made sense for highly placed people in Ottawa to offer to buy the caravan at its weakest moment.

## A split in Kenora

The buses drove to Kenora on the afternoon of Monday, Sept. 23. New faces had been added in Winnipeg, a city with 25,000 native people, but rolling into Kenora at dusk, there were still 150 of us.

Louis Cameron, who had been on a national speaking tour, was to rejoin the caravan here, along with a large group of militants. Word of the so-called "redneck" reaction had reached the caravan. A powwow was scheduled to be held at a school about a mile away from the Friendship Centre, where we were staying. The group would march through the streets of Kenora in the early evening. Pople felt there was a good chance that contact with the citizenry or local police would occur during this march. The caravan marched down the middle of the main street. Not only did the local citizens fail to show up despite the drum-beating and

whooping chants, but we didn't see any sign of police. National security had done a wonderful job of choreography.

The next morning, with the buses outside waiting to take the caravan to Thunder Bay, a meeting was called. Stonechild, who had been delayed in Regina, had arrived during the night. With him were four of the eight people who had been expelled in his city for drinking. He had picked them up by the road; they were hitchhiking in hopes of catching up to the caravan, to ask for a pardon.

Stonechild proposed that the four be readmitted, in consideration of the fact that they had already been punished, and had gone through cold nights by the side of the road in an effort to rejoin the group. Basil and Burnstick were opposed, arguing that the caravan should stick to its decisions. A good majority of the group voted to readmit the four. Basil and Burnstick, choosing to interpret the decision as a vote of non-confidence, announced their decision to leave. Basil referred to his Winnipeg statement that a leadership shift would be necessary in Kenora — that he and Burnstick had carried the group this far, and with the new elements of Eastern leadership coming in, a shift would be only logical.

The PR team had left for Thunder Bay late Monday night, before the split occurred. At about 2:00 a.m. they stopped in Dryden, Ont. for a cup of coffee. A local policeman passed by, checked their license plate, and after an interchange, arrested Ken Dennis. There was a Canada-wide warrant for his arrest, so off he went to the clinker. The others informed the police at the station that "national security" (i.e., the Security Services division of the Solicitor-General's office) had guaranteed that no



arrests would be made on previous warrants during the caravan. The police refused to take them seriously.

Two hours later, after phone calls to Vancouver and Ottawa, Dennis was out. "I'll never forget this," the stunned sergeant muttered in disbelief as the car pulled away.

## A new committee

In the cavernous Thunder Bay church where the caravan had quartered, with less than two hours before a rally that had been slated, the caravan held an assembly. First, the caravan determined to carry on to Ottawa. It was decided to elect a new leadership. Twelve were nominated, and then, instead of holding a vote, the group decided to name all of them.

The Central Committee, as it was called, was a unity slate within the caravan as a whole. It included west coast people (Dennis Hanuse, Debbie Mearns, Larry Joseph and Ken Dennis — all of whom had been at Cache Creek and had taken active roles within the caravan), Wayne Stonechild of Regina, Cameron and Ron Seymour of Kenora, Jim Wenjack of Toronto, and Vern Harper and Skip Greenstalk of CPC(M-L). Bill Creely, an older Saskatchewan former chief and lifetime troublemaker, and Wandering River, a young plains traditionalist, rounded out the group.

Despite this formal development towards unity and continued action, things still seemed pretty shaky. The new leadership group embodied a departure from the aggressive personalism which had carried the caravan — through sheer guts and a lot of luck — halfway across the continent. The twelve people now standing before the assembly seemed to augur a new, collective style of leadership. But many of them had never even met before this trek. And none of the problems which cast their pall in Winnipeg had disappeared. Would it work?

We found out soon enough. The evening press conference and rally was well attended by both native and non-native local people. The jibes and probings of the press were parried firmly, but graciously. When a reporter insisted that the Indians "follow the proper channels," Cameron responded, "Human rights cannot be taken into court. For years we've seen how existing channels work."

Nine of the twelve committee members spoke during the rally. Each expanded on a different theme, totally extemporaneously. Each was eloquent, many were inspiring.

Larry Joseph, picking up on Ken Basil's conception of the specific integrity of the caravan, emphasized that it "was not spearheaded by AIM" but reminded the audience that "the borders (between Canada and the U.S.) were not drawn by us." He extended solidarity to non-natives, pointing out that the caravan was "a unified body representing all people." His parting shot was the often-repeated reminder that "we will not tolerate any hassling with our caravan. Any tactics used against us will be paid back in kind."

A couple of speakers emphasized the need for

self-determination. Ron Seymour stated, "We will stand for the liberation of white and Indians, but whites must learn about our ways — we have our own culture, our own identity, our own religion . . . I was a drunk for a while. Then I saw how Indians Affairs was used to put us down. Our people must learn how we are controlled."

Vern Harper told of his experience in the Korean War. "They told us we were fighting for our country. When we got back, we found we couldn't go into a bar for a drink." He cautioned against splits, arguing that "political or non-political, we respect one another. The caravan builds that kind of mutual self-respect."

Dennis Hanuse said, "I've been in jail, lived on the reserve, been a drunk — I've been through your entire educational system." He went on, "The system teaches us to hate ourselves — we need educators who teach us the truth about our way of life, about the oppression. I value education, but I don't think I learned a goddamn thing until I joined the movement."

Wandering River told a spiritual tale of an ancient prophecy foretelling the return of the Great Spirit in the era of technological hubris.

In the closing speech, Cameron assured the audience, "We won't steal your TV set. We are not interested in becoming a part of your corrupt society. The same government whose democracy has been our nightmare is doing it again in Cyprus, Chile and Vietnam. Because a thousand treaties have been broken, we must break a thousand laws. The Indian Act makes us slaves."

## Around Superior to the Sault

The following morning (Sept. 25) as we were preparing to leave for Sault Ste. Marie, word reached the caravan that Basil had been contacted by the Winnipeg press. The split had become public knowledge and prominent in the press accounts was the drinking issue.

The rally in Sault was small, mostly attended by people from the Garden City reserve who recounted their problems with the Ontario school system.

Stonechild, who had left with Cameron for Toronto late the previous evening returned with the news that Cameron had succeeded in pulling together the support of the warring sects of the left.

Basil, according to a newspaper report, had announced a plan to organize a second caravan. The Quakers who had joined up in Winnipeg informed us that the office of the Secretary of State had called their organization in Ottawa to suggest that they throw their support behind Basil's plan. The proposal was squelched thanks only to the intervention of the two Quakers travelling with us.

In Sudbury the caravan was joined by Art Solomon, a highly respected medicine man who became an unofficial member of the central committee. At a press conference there, aggressive ques-



tions were about reports on a speech Cameron had given in southern Ontario in which he had threatened that a "suicide squad" would march into Ottawa office buildings with bombs strapped to the chests. It seemed that despite all the issues that the caravan had raised during its twelve day journey, the press could do no better than seize on a bit of hyperbole in a sensationalist way.

Things were very quiet in the Toronto high school gym where the caravan was quartered. A bit of basketball, tending to babies, short outings in the greyness of the big city. The Saturday evening rally was, despite dire forebodings from several quarters, a success. Several hundred people turned up, and nearly \$1500 was raised. As in Thunder Bay, a round of speakers told of the various issues and experiences in the life of the caravan. They were joined by Butch Eliot, of AIM, and Maria Campbell, author of the best-seller, *Half-Breed*. Despite our two weeks of living and breathing the reality of the caravan, it was still a happy shock to hear, as if for the first time, the words told to so large a gathering.

"We travelled across this country in the last two weeks," said Cameron, "and we saw that the dreams of democracy and struggle were illusions. We saw a people disunited and unhappy. We have a message for the Canadian people. We must unite, learn from the land, and fight for our independence."

Now we were on the last stretch of a long and precarious trek. It went quickly. We reminisced and gossiped, and in four hours we were following complicated telephone instructions that led to a Quaker House in Ottawa. Debbie Mearns of the central committee introduced us quickly to Wolf Bradshaw, a local native organizer. "Where's the caravan?" they both asked simultaneously. "About a half hour behind us. What's up?" "Let's go. We've got to find them," they said, chortling as we dashed to a car.

As we traced the byroads leading into Ottawa, keeping a lookout for the bright yellow schoolbuses we'd hired in Toronto, Debbie explained that the various churches in Ottawa couldn't put us up and she had telephoned Judd Buchanan, demanding accommodation. I'm afraid I can't help you, Buchanan had sputtered. We all laughed at the minister's discomfiture. "Wolf's got a place for us," she said. "They'll never guess."

Finally, we found the caravan on the outskirts of Ottawa. "Follow us," Debbie told the drivers. Ottawa had wall-to-wall police coverage," as one radio put it. Rumour had it we would try to occupy the DIA tower. Instead, the caravan sailed past the police guards, taking a backroad onto Victoria Island, an industrial site in the middle of the Ottawa River. We sped beyond the Eddy Paper Co. complex and pulled up in front of a huge, century-old abandoned factory.

Wolf, when he had heard about the caravan, immediately set out to locate a safe place for us. He'd found the abandoned Carbide Mill factory, now a semi-historic building under the jurisdiction of the National Capital Commission, and cased it with an architect friend.

He hopped out of the car, dashed up the rickety wooden staircase, axe in hand, and within minutes we were pouring into our new headquarters with an air of glee. We had seized the initiative. Within a half-hour we were listening to an account of our

exploits on a local radio station while a herd of police cars, flashers churning, kept a discrete distance.

We wandered through the huge old factory like new tenants. Up on the darkened top floor we stood in front of the floor-length windows and gazed out across the river at the night-lighted Parliament Buildings. It was within spitting distance. Tomorrow we'd be on that hill.

## No regrets

There were no regrets as we made our way back to the Native People's Embassy, leaving the RCMP rioters with the hill. The clash had had an inevitability. There was no way we would, after coping 3000 miles, politely march up to the Parliament and politely march back, not having been heard. And equally, there was no way that the government would admit us into the Commons to hear our spokespeople place the grievances of native people before the entire nation. As we fanned out across Rideau Street, there were twice as many of us as had set out that afternoon. The "battle of Parliament Hill" (as the *Globe & Mail* dubbed it) was over, but instantly we were engaged in another battle, though we didn't realize it immediately. It was the battle that would be conducted through the media to establish the meaning of what had happened.

Inside the Embassy information was sorted out about arrests and injuries. One 20-year-old woman's skull had been cracked. The drumming that had accompanied us for the past 24 hours continued. The caravan prepared for the press. The other side was doing the same. An impassioned Cameron told the media, "On Parliament Hill you saw a community — women and children who need housing, men who need jobs. You saw the police clubbing these women and children. We did not go there with guns and knives, but as a community which has travelled across the continent to bring our demands to the government.

"Their answer was police, with bayonets, tear-gas, guns and clubs . . . since the birth of Confederation our people have endured an economic crisis. If the government violence persists, our people, human people, will continue to fight back."

His curious usage of "human people" had a poignant ring, as if to remind us there were people whose actions were less than human.

At 11 p.m., the CBC television national news blinked onto a set we had managed to secure. Everyone gathered around. How would it look to people who hadn't been there? The afternoon's footage began to roll. Unarmed people. Simple words. The unearthly riot police charging the demonstrators. A demonstrator down on the plaza being beaten. Again, unarmed people against the pomp and force of the government. Then the commentators, the combatants. Cameron's proud grief. Bumbling government explanations.

The first reports were favourable. The nature of the media is to reduce the complexity of events to some simple image of right and wrong. It's wrong to beat on people with clubs. The powwow that night at the Native Embassy was very much



alive. Montagnais dancers from Sept Iles, Que. whirled late into the night.

The next day, Tues., Oct. 1, newspapers across the country came up with their various versions of what had happened. Patrick Nagle, staff reporter for the *Vancouver Sun* cabled back to the largest of the west coast dailies, "Screaming members of the Canadian Native People's caravan tried to storm Parliament today, creating one of the ugliest scenes on the Hill in years." In contrast, the Canadian Press wireservice version, which appeared in the *Globe & Mail*, reported: "In one of the ugliest scenes on Parliament Hill in many years, the RCMP yesterday defeated attempts by about 200 Indians to enter the Parliament Buildings."

In these front-line dispatches, published before the soul-searching editorial exercises have been completed, the battle is subtly fought out in adjectives and verb choices. Whereas Nagle portrays the natives as "screaming," "frenzied" and "roaring" and charges the caravan with "creating" the scene everyone agrees was "ugly," the *Globe & Mail* version is somewhat more sedate, forbearing on evaluative adjectives and making the RCMP the subject of the active verb in the opening paragraph. Where the *Vancouver Sun* merely notes that "scores of RCMP reserves" were called out, the *Globe* describes "the RCMP riot squad with clubs . . . helmets, shields." The *Sun* omission was all the more glaring given that this was the first use of the squad since its formation in 1967.

## The battle moves to the media

As millions of Canadian on their way to work were absorbing these first accounts, the government launched its attack. It consisted of three elements. RCMP Superintendent Marcel Sauve invited the media to view a desktop covered with stones, spikes, sticks and other odds and ends — "proof" that the battle was instigated by members or supporters of the caravan. On Tuesday evening, Trudeau appeared on national television, a red rose in his lapel, to praise the virtues of peace and order. He announced that the government "will never negotiate under the threat of violence" and opined that "the Indians did their cause more harm than good." As far as he was concerned, the caravan was just another group of "concerned citizens." A third option offered by Indian Affairs Minister Buchanan was to suggest that the violence was provoked by the CPC(M-L). It was in the great apologetic tradition of, if all



—Miriam Ticoll and Stan Persky



else fails, blame the Reds. It was the explanation reporters like the *Sun's* Nagle leaned towards, writing, "The Marxist Leninists . . . tried to antagonize the RCMP defence lines further. They threw their placards and literature in the faces of the Mounties and attempted to tread on toes and kick the shins of the first line of defence."

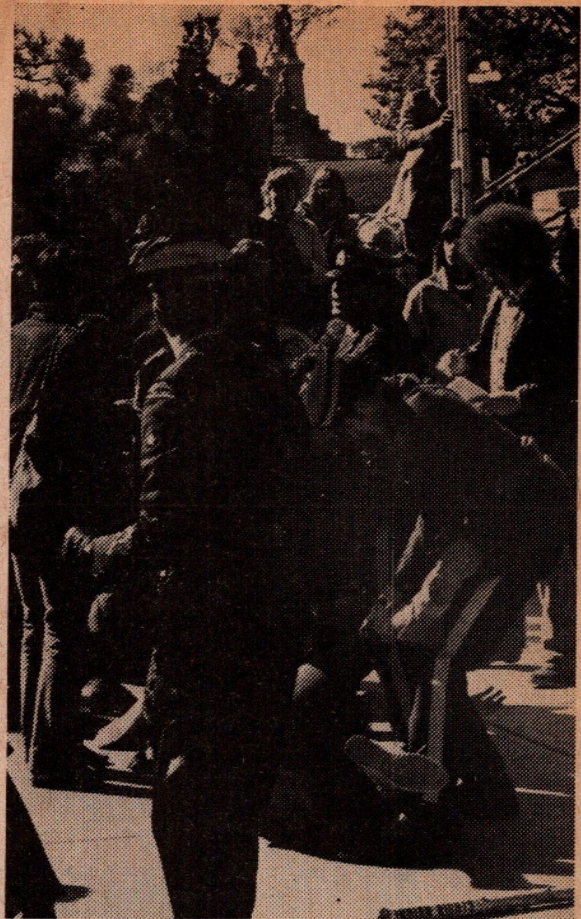
Although the *Globe & Mail* accorded passing mention to "some of the Communists (who) also joined in the clashes against police," Buchanan's blatant effort to shift the blame from himself was graphically belied by a front-page *Globe* photo, taken from the top of the Parliament Hill steps, showing the entire caravan line of march. At the rear, some hundred and fifty yards back, the discerning viewer can pick out the large banner of the CPC(M-L) under which its members were grouped. It's not that the CPC(M-L) are shy of the police (as is documented by a couple of thousand arrests over the past few years), rather, they made a decision to locate themselves in a clearly supportive position.

The move to blame the CPC(M-L) was an outright lie and faded quickly. The irony, of course, was the government's inability to comprehend the notion that there are native people who are themselves members of the CPC(M-L) and would quite naturally participate in the caravan. Efforts to portray the group as "outside agitators" should not obscure for progressives that the CPC(M-L) had genuine roots within the caravan as well as an organizational commitment that resulted in quite tangible support. As for Sauve's efforts to prove who started it, his explanations were somewhat undercut when the TV stations juxtaposed his claims to replays of the riot squad charge. In any case, people weren't terribly interested in "who started it;" it was fairly obvious that two antagonistic forces coming face to face would result in flare-ups. As for Trudeau's speech, it did his cause more harm than good, since it led people to begin asking, what was the government doing during all this?

As the day wore on, a counterattack on the government position unfolded, one that gained credibility from being obviously unco-ordinated and candid. Northwest Territories MP Wally Firth, himself a Metis, revealed that he had been an eyewitness to the whole affair, watching with tears in his eyes. "When you see police lined up five deep and soldiers armed with bayonets, it looks like provocation. The reaction on the part of the demonstrators was natural, but I'm sure not all of the people there wanted what happened." In Parliament, Firth called for unanimous consent in the Commons to have matters of social and economic conditions put before a special meeting of the Committee on Indian Affairs. The motion was defeated by the Liberal majority.

Given the clash between two nearly sacrosanct parts of our national myth (Mounties and Indians), it was only fitting that another monument be trotted out for comment. Thus, the hoary tones of John Diefenbaker were heard on CBC radio's "As It Happens" show. Dief the Chief explained what great folks the Indians are and what good friends of his they were. He criticized Trudeau for refusing to talk to the demonstrators and debunked Judd Buchanan's claim that he had been willing to meet with one caravan representative in his office.

It was beginning to snowball. The Canadian Civil Liberties Assn. attacked the police and called for an investigation. The clincher came on Thursday,



—Photo by CUP

when Clive Linklater, vice-president of the National Indian Brotherhood, issued a statement backing the caravan. Just as the caravan leaders had been restrained in their comments on "official" native leaders, only the naive could expect the NIB to divisively turn against the caravan. Linklater admitted that the caravan represented a "legitimate point of view," and he argued that the NIB has been trying for years to deal with many issues raised by the caravan. He called for an investigation into "whether it was the riot squad of the RCMP who in fact rioted" and supported the caravan demand for an investigation into the affairs of the DIA. Non-status and Inuit national organizations quickly followed suit with similar statements.

The battle of the media was nearly over. The "blame" had gradually been fixed on Judd Buchanan for failing to meet with the Native People's Caravan. Just a few minutes of the minister's time, lamented various publications, could have prevented this "tragedy."

On Oct. 3, the *Globe & Mail* editorial, offered a strategy for the ruling class in order to combat native militancy: the NIB must make efforts to extend and consolidate its power within the Indian community, and the government must collaborate by legitimizing the NIB with visible concessions.

Obediently, Buchanan immediately agreed to sit down with NIB leaders and even Trudeau hinted that he would try to make time in his busy day to "drop in" on the meeting. Buchanan, for his blundering, was given an Air Canada pass and ordered to get out to some of those reserves and make contact.

As for the *Western Voice* members of the caravan, we prepared to head west once again. We



said our goodbyes, awkwardly, painfully. "See you next time," we said to Louis Cameron. The Montagnais contingent had pulled out early in the morning on their way to Sept Iles. "I guess we'll be going now," we said to Jim Wenjack. Then, unable to think of anything that wouldn't be sentimental, we asked, "Is there going to be another meeting later today?" "You don't need to have a meeting to go home," Wenjack drolly replied, intentionally misunderstanding us in order to get off a last joke at our expense.

## Postscript

Back in Vancouver, the somewhat roseate view of the CPC(M-L) we had acquired in the course of day-to-day work in cooperation with their members in the caravan settled back down to earth as we read their article titled, "What are Trudeau, Allmand, Buchanan and the *Western Voice* so upset about?" (*People's Canada Daily News*, Oct. 2-5, 1974). By an oversight they forgot completely to mention that the *Voice* had fully participated in the caravan and announced, "we can only conclude that they have the same interests as the open representatives of the monopoly capitalist class." "The role of the social-fascists (socialist in words, fascist in deeds) in *Western Voice* is to stand on the sidelines and through innuendo imply the Canadian people have no interest whatsoever in supporting the struggles of the Native people." Our criticism of their advocacy of the "armed struggle" slogan is a "diversion" and "slander." Thorough going opportunists that they are, the *Western Voice* claim that this armed struggle is something that should be hidden from the masses, and at the same time, they use the tremendous support it has generated to promote their rag and to parasitise off the struggle of the Native people."

Since the end of September, the native movement has continued in diverse ways. Basil returned to his Bonaparte reserve and received a visit in early November from a chastened Judd Buchanan. A discussion on housing problems — two road blockades and one caravan after Basil had originally proposed such a conversation — did not produce any results. In Kamloops, B.C., on Nov. 27, Basil called for the formation of a half-dozen AIM chapters in the province and said they would begin activity following an AIM conference to be held in Albert in February. "We are lying to ourselves if the Indian people do not recognise that armed struggle and rebellion will happen if events are not altered significantly and in a short period of time," he predicted.

Ed Burnstick went back to Alberta where shortly afterwards he launched an occupation of federal offices there. Buchanan, in a new get-tough policy, pressed charges against the occupiers.

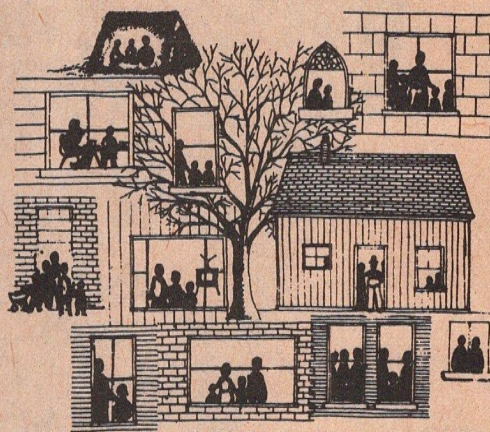
The Caravan itself organized a second event, a spiritual conference. The object was to gather native spiritual leaders from across the country and hear their advice. The possible political function of this endeavour was to locate respected people on the reserves whose support for grassroots organizing

would provide a counterweight to elected conservative chiefs. Reports on the outcome of this activity have been sketchy and inconclusive.

And finally, new claims, demands and warnings by individual bands and organizations have been issued with increasing frequency. Rather than looking for a linear development we can continue to expect sporadic outbreaks of militancy that will show a growing tendency to coalesce to movement-sized proportions.

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