

*Bayer in afternoon*

*Presented to Bayer  
July 9*

Fort McPherson, N. W. T.  
July 7, 1975

Mr. Berger:

My name is Philip Blake and I am a Treaty Indian from Fort McPherson. I have been the Social Worker here for the past 5½ years.

I am not an old man, but I have seen many changes in my life. Fifteen years ago, most of what you now see as Fort McPherson did not exist. Take a look around the community now and you will start to get an idea of what has happened to the Indian people here over the past few years.

Look at the housing where transient government staff live and look at the housing where Indian people live. Look at which houses are connected to the utilidor. Look at how the school and hostel, the R.C.M.P. and government staff houses are right in the centre of town, dividing the Indian people into two sides. Look at where the Bay store is, right on top of the highest point of land.

Mr Berger, do you think that this is the way the Indian people chose to have this community? Do you think the people here had any voice in planning this community? Do you think they would have planned it so that it divided them and gave them a poorer standard than the transient whites who come in, supposedly to help them.

Take a look at the school here. Try to find anything that makes it a place where Indian values and traditions, Indian culture is respected. It could be a school in the suburbs of Edmonton or Toronto or Vancouver. Do you think Indian people would have chosen a building like this as a way to teach their children how to be proud of their Indian Heritage? Do you think Indian people chose to have their children taught that the only way to survive in the future is to become like the whiteman? Look around you, look at this building, find out who the teachers are, find out what they teach our children, find out what regulations there are in this school, find out who decides these regulations, who hires the teachers and who fires them. This school is just a symbol of white domination and control. It is a part of a system set up to destroy Indian culture and to destroy our pride in our Indian Heritage.

It is only part of that system. Look at some of the other parts. Do you think people chose to live in Rental houses, owned by the government, instead of in houses they built for themselves and owned by themselves. Do you think they chose to have a system of justice which often they cannot understand and which does not allow them to help their own people and deal with their own problems. A system which punishes Indians for stealing from the Bay, but does not punish the Bay for stealing from the Indians. Do you think that they chose to become cheap labor for Oil Companies, construction companies and government, instead of working for themselves and developing their own economy in their own way.

In short, Mr. Berger, can you or anyone else really believe that we Indian people are now living the way we have chosen to live. Can you really believe that we have chosen to have high rates of alcoholism, suicide and social breakdown. Do you think we have chosen to become beggars in our own homeland?

Mr. Berger, you are well aware that hundreds of years ago, in Southern Canada and in the United States, many Indian civilizations were destroyed. In some cases this was done simply by killing off the Indian People who occupied land that was valuable to white settlers. In other cases it was done by restricting the Indians to small reserves where they could no longer hunt and fish and make a living from their land. In all cases, it was pretty clear that whatever the whiteman wanted, the whiteman got. When he wanted greater land for farming, he cleared off the trees and he cleared off the Indians. When he wanted to dig the gold or minerals from the land, he killed the Indians who tried to defend their own land.

In James Bay, when the whiteman decided he wanted to again play God and change the course of mighty rivers, so he could make money and power from them, he corralled the Indians into reserves and flooded the Indian lands.

The nations of Indians and Eskimos in the North have been slightly luckier. For awhile it seemed that we might escape the greed of the southern system. The North was seen as a frozen wasteland, not fit for the civilized ways of the whiteman. But that has been changing over the past few years. Now the system of genocide practiced on our Indian brothers in the South over the past few hundred years is now being turned loose on us and our Eskimos brothers.

Don't be silly, you may say; we're sorry about what we did in the past. We made some mistakes, but its different now - look, we give you education, houses and health services.



Mr. Berger, the system of genocide may have become a little more polished over the past few hundred years, in order to suit the "civilized tastes" of southern people who watch Lloyd Robertson on the National, but the effect is exactly the same. We are being destroyed. Your nation is destroying our nation.

What we are saying today, here and now, is exactly what Louis Riel was saying roughly a hundred years ago.

We are a nation - we have our own land and our own ways and our own civilization. We do not want to destroy you or your land. Please do not destroy us.

You and I both know what happened to Louis Riel. Yet now, a hundred years later your Prime Minister is willing to say that Louis Riel was not all wrong. He's willing to say that a hundred years later, but is he willing to change the approach that destroyed Riel and his nation, and is now threatening to destroy us.

I'm sure throughout your visits to native communities, Mr. Berger, that you have shown much of the hospitality that is our tradition. As a people, we have always tried to treat our guest well. It never occurred to us that our guests would one day claim that they owned our whole house. Yet that is exactly what is happening.

White people came as visitors to our land. Suddenly they claim it as their land. They claim that we have no right to call it Indian land - land that we have occupied and used for thousands of years, which just recently the shiteman has come to visit. And suddenly he claims it to be his own. Is this the great system of justice of which your nation is so proud?

Look at what happened to France during the second World War. Germany moved in and occupied the land that France claimed as her own. At that time Canada seemed willing to help a people whose land had been unjustly taken. Now the same thing is happening to the Indian nations of the North. Your nation has suddenly decided to move in and occupy the land that is rightfully ours. Where is your great tradition of justice today? Does your nation's greed for oil and gas suddenly over-ride justice? What exactly is your superior civilization, that can so blindly ignore the injustice occurring continually over one-third of the land mass in Canada, and yet barely gets reported in your T.V. or newspapers. One-third of the land mass of Canada is under a direct Colonial rule, yet you seem willing only to talk of igloos and polar bears and snow when you talk about the North. One has to read about South Africa or Rhodesia to get a clear picture of what is really happening in Northern Canada. While your newspapers and Television talk about the sports fishing up here, we as a people, are being destroyed, and it doesn't even merit any coverage.

Look at us and what we stand for, before you accept without any further thought, that the Indian nation must die.

In many parts of the world, people are starving. It is said that two-thirds of the people of the world go to bed hungry each night. We as Indian people are sometimes accused of not being willing to share our resources. But what of this absurd scheme that Arctic Gas has dreamt up. What does it offer to those who are starving. Does it promise to use our resources and our land to help those who are poorer.

It suggests exactly the opposite. It suggests that we give up our land and our resources to the richest nation in the world, not the poorest. We are threatened with genocide only so that the rich and powerful can become more rich and more powerful.

Mr. Berger, I suggest that in any man's view, that is immoral.

If our Indian nation was being destroyed so that the poor people of the world might get a chance to share in this world's riches, then, as Indian people, I'm sure we would seriously consider giving up our resources.

But do you really expect us to give up our life and our land so that those few people who are the richest and most powerful in the world today can maintain and defend their own immoral position of privilege. That is not our way.

I strongly believe that we do have something to offer your nation, however, something other than our minerals. I believe it is in the self-interest of your own nation to allow the Indian nation to survive and develop in our own way, on our own land.

For thousands of years we have lived with the land. We have taken care of the land, and the land has taken care of us. We did not believe that our society had to grow and expand and conquer new areas in order that we could fulfill our destiny as Indian people. We have lived with the land, not tried to conquer or control it, or rob it of its riches. That is not our way. We have not tried to get more and more riches and power. We have not tried to conquer new frontiers, or outdo our parents or make sure that every year we were richer than the year before. We have been satisfied to see our wealth as ourselves and the land we lived with. It was our greatest wish to be able to pass on this land to succeeding generations in the same condition that our fathers had given to us. We did not try to improve the land and we did not try to destroy it for that is not our way.

I believe that your nation might wish to see us, not as a relic from the past, but as a way of life, a system of values by which you may survive in the future. This we are willing to share.



If your nation chooses instead to continue to try to destroy our nation, then I hope you will understand why we are willing to fight so that our nation can survive. It is our world. We do not wish to push our world onto you, but we are willing to defend it for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

If your nation becomes so violent that it would tear up our land, destroy our society and our future and occupy our homeland by trying to impose this pipeline against our will, then of course, we will have no choice but to react with violence.

I hope we do not have to do that, for it is not the way we would choose. However, if we are forced to blow up the pipeline, I hope you will not look only on the violence of Indian actions, but also on the violence of your own nation which would force us to take such a course. We will never initiate violence. But if your nation threatens by its own violent action, to destroy our nation, you will have given us not choice.

Please do not force us into that position, for we would all lose too much.

Mr. Berger, I believe it is because I am a Social Worker here that I have, in a sense, had to make some sense out of the frustration and desperation that people in this community, and others along the valley, are feeling. I have therefore tried to read as much as possible of other situations in Canada and in the world. It is clear to me that the pipeline in Alaska has not been any part of "Progress" - whatever "progress" may mean. Where progress should mean people getting greater controls over their own lives, greater freedom, the pipeline in Alaska appears to have driven people into the ground, along with the pipeline. Clearly, we do not want that here. Perhaps, it is also because I am a Social Worker that I am aware what steps my people may take in reaction to the building of a pipeline here.

Mr. Berger, it should be very clear by now what are the wishes of the people along the Mackenzie Valley regarding a pipeline here. I do not believe you or anyone else could misunderstand what the native people of this valley are saying.

Obviously, if we lived in any kind of democratic system, there would be no further talk of a Gas Arctic Pipeline. The will of the people, has been made very clear. If this consensus, if the will of the people, is not respected, then I appeal to you, and all the people of Southern Canada to respect and support us in our efforts to re-establish democracy and democratic decision-making in our homeland. I guess the question for Southern Canada is simply, which side are you on? Are you on the side of people trying to find freedom and a democratic tradition or are you on the side of those who are trying to frustrate our attempts to find freedom and who are instead trying to destroy the last free Indian nation.

Mr. Berger, I guess what I'm really trying to say is, " Can you help us, Can we help you make sure that the will of the people is respected", After all, isn't that suppose to be what Canada once stood for. Can we as an Indian nation help Canada to once again become a true democracy.