Dear Editor, A muse on the Attawapiskat & other North American Indian Nations’ ill-treatment...

In the Friday, December 9th, 2011 issue of The Province newspaper a reprint of a coverage by the Agence France-Presse titled “Studies show rats can feel empathy” stated that the experiment showed the lab rats have feeling too; had me wondering if a similar study were done on the trustees of the CROWN’s Trust with the beneficiaries, the North American Indians whom are the alloidal title holders of their tribal lands that have not been sold to the CROWN (and there are only three small areas that they have acquired lawfully & legally), would the results show the same? From what I’ve seen and read (about past ill-treatments) I highly doubt it, my thinking is that the opposite would be the case. This may seem that I’m putting a bit of humour in such a serious matter, but I’m not at all looking to diminish it; however at times one does need to lighten one’s thoughts on such dark realities. Here’s to hoping that the trustees will see the light...

Disconnecting Heat/Power during Winter: A Manitoba Irony

by Gaile Whelen Enns

This writer has been receiving calls asking for research about Manitoba Hydro disconnecting heat and power for homes in northern Manitoba. These disconnects are going on now. It is worth remembering that in northern Manitoba, and any community without natural gas pipeline, all energy use is electric. So the furnaces are electric. The Public Utilities Board (PUB), under its Act, can set policy, and deal with appeals when power is cut. And the PUB Act states you cannot disconnect heat in a Manitoba residence between October 1 and May 1. Makes sense, that is the cold time of year.

In 2008 the Public Utilities Board issued a new policy regarding disconnects. But the policy only applies to residences with natural gas heat. It includes using ‘limiters’ on the meters so that heat continues, and limited use of electricity continues.

The Public Utilities Board does not have enough authority regarding Manitoba Hydro. No PUB authority regarding hydro capital projects, just hydro rates. An inquiry appointed in the 1970s, reporting to the NDP in the 1980s found Manitoba kept going over budget on capital projects, while causing unacceptable environmental damage. Could an inquiry today access the necessary information?

So the PUB has no authority over disconnects if they are electric power only disconnects, where the furnace is electric. And limiters are not being used in northern Manitoba, based on our research.

Time to adjust policy and the legislation – so that Manitobans in the north who have electric furnaces receive equal treatment so that Manitobans in the north who have electric furnaces receive equal treatment –

Q & A: Stephen Harper’s record on First Nations

A decade has passed since former Liberal Indian and Northern Affairs minister Robert Nault tried to overhaul the Indian Act with his First Nations Governance Act. Now a consultant still firmly plugged into the Aboriginal community, Mr. Nault spoke with the National Post’s Kathryn Blaze Carlson about the lessons he learned as minister and his views on the current prime minister’s approach to First Nations policy. An edited transcript:

Q How is Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s approach different from that of former prime minister Jean Chrétien? Paul Martin?
A There’s no doubt in my mind that the strategy of the current government — which is different from the strategy when I was there — is to go very slowly, very carefully down the road to incremental change without causing too much ruckus.

Q What ideas has the Harper government borrowed from your First Nations Governance Act, which never passed?
A If you look at what they’ve started to implement, they were all in the First Nations Governance bill. Maybe they’re wiser than I was by doing it piece by piece, which seems to be allowing them to get these things through.

Q Do you think Mr. Harper has been more successful in advancing the First Nations file than the prime ministers before him?
A I think he’s doing as much, if not more, than most prime ministers. Most prime ministers — the Liberals in particular — did everything with money. They didn’t do a lot of work on structural, legislative change. Harper is moving more on the incremental change of institutions that in my view may perhaps in the future have an impact. I don’t believe any of this is near good enough, though, to make a serious difference in the lives of the people you’re seeing on TV.

Q What do you make of National Chief Shawn Atleo’s relationship with Mr. Harper? Do you think Mr. Harper puts as much power in the Assembly of First Nations’ hands as Mr. Chrétien or Mr. Martin did?
A I think [Chief Atleo’s] relationship with Mr. Harper is a much more professional one — it’s not as cozy as the other national chiefs tried to have with previous prime ministers. The relationship is different. The clout is not the same.

Q Do you think the Indian Act should be abolished? Do you think Mr. Harper is the man to do it?
A Yes, it should absolutely [be abolished]. I think Harper has the ability to do it, if he has the political will. He would have to take some risks, and Mr. Harper is quite risk-averse, so I don’t know if he’s willing. Certainly, though, he has the majority and the mandate.

Q What do First Nations people think of Mr. Harper’s approach?
A You either hear, “It’s not a big deal because we’re already doing that,” or you hear, “It’s not a big deal because the change is so small.” Still, any time Parliament passes something, it will be opposed because it didn’t come from the First Nations leadership themselves.

Q Do you think the environment is more amenable to change today than when you were in office?
A I do yes. As time goes on, and as you have more and more discussions about governance and the importance of making changes — and as there are even small improvements in education — [First Nations people] have the capacity to articulate and agree that these changes need to be made. I think we’ll slowly make some progress. But the Indian Act should go, and it’s got to go in the next five years.

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