

I Can't Front: White Supremacists and Canadian Policies of Genocide

by Stephan MacLEOD

I never used to think the words *Canadian heritage* could imply injustice. I guess I was naive, but this summer I saw a poster that tried to appeal to the sympathies of people in fear of the demise of Canadian heritage that forced me to reconsider what I associate with those two words.

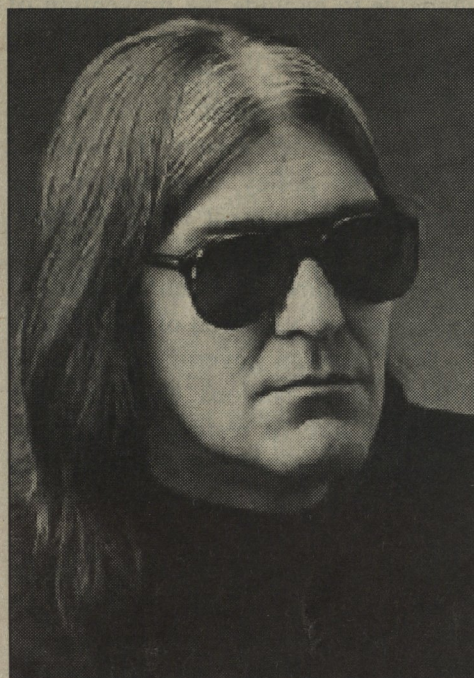
A friend of mine was visiting when these posters started appearing around downtown Charlottetown. The Charlottetown branch of a group known as the Heritage Front put up the posters to endorse white pride and their concern with the demise of Canadian heritage, traditions, culture, values and historic contributions because of immigration. My friend, who is active in the fight against racism, told me about similar posters popping up around his hometown in Manitoba. I'd never seen anything like them before in Charlottetown, but I was well aware of the presence of hate groups like the Heritage Front because of an incident last April when one of its members, Dwayne Finlayson, was arrested for assaulting three female Japanese visitors in Charlottetown. Finlayson was sentenced to four months in provincial jail after he pleaded guilty to pushing a slice of pizza in one of the women's face while shouting racial slurs.

A year later, the group of white supremacists was now spreading its message with an aggressive postering campaign downtown. If you've read any of these posters, you'd notice that the Heritage Front takes a defensive position in its literature. It does not come across as overtly aggressive, or necessarily racist upon first glance. It urges readers to examine "What is hate?" and attempts to evoke a sense of nationalism, but at the same time the group blames minorities and immigrants for a decline in Canadian culture. I always have trouble getting past this point, the realization that cultural pride in this case is inherently linked to a con-

cept of superiority over other groups of people. It is not pride in and of itself that the Heritage Front is endorsing. It wants pride in white "Canadian" culture at the expense of an appreciation for diversity because they believe the influx of other cultures diminishes the value of white pride.

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While its reasoning is questionable at best, completely wrong at worst, I agreed at least in part with its claim that most people do not take pride in much of the historic contributions of white Canadians/Europeans. But unlike the Heritage Front, I think Canadians have good reasons to feel ashamed of many blemishes on their past ... besides the invention of the snowmobile and Bryan Adams. I've heard stories of European settlers giving disease-infested blankets to Natives, but I wanted to find out more about the events in Canadian history that don't end up in those "Canadian Heritage Moment" ads. After talking with my friend about how a broader awareness of the history of white culture in Canada would only serve to make white people feel guilty for the actions of their ancestors rather than increase "white pride," he lent me a CD of a lecture by Ward Churchill of the University of Colorado at Boulder. Churchill is the author of *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and*



Ward Churchill.

Denial in the Americas, 1492 to Present (City Lights Books, 1998) and *Struggle For the Land: Indigenous Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide and Expropriation in Contemporary North America* (Common Courage Press, 1992). In his lecture, Churchill discusses a trial where he testified for a group called the Friends of Lubicon. Daishowa Inc., a paper-products firm that had logging intentions on land claimed as traditional hunting territory by the Lubicon Cree of Northern Alberta, sued the Friends of Lubicon for conspiracy to harm the company. The Friends were boycotting Daishowa by persuading customers and potential customers of Daishowa products to buy from other suppliers because of Daishowa's logging of Lubicon land. At the heart of the lawsuit was accusations made by the Friends of Lubicon that Daishowa's logging amounted to genocide of the Lubicon people. They argued that clear cutting by the corporation on Lubicon land resulted in the loss of a traditional economy of hunting, trapping and gathering and contributed to a disintegration of a culture tied to nature spiritually and economically.

Churchill, an authority on genocide, was called in as an expert witness.

In his lecture, Churchill traces the international laws implemented by the United Nations concerning genocide back to the origin of the term. In 1944, exiled Polish jurist Raphael Limpkin coined the term *genocide* to describe "any policy undertaken with intent to destroy or bring about the disillusion or destruction of a targeted human group." Churchill is concerned with the widespread implications of genocide. Limpkin's definition includes everything from physically killing a group to slow death measures, policies that can indirectly wipe out a culture by starving them to death or withdrawing medical attention. Churchill says genocide can occur "even by simply rounding up target population and imposing on them sterilization, wiping them out overtime. The norm of genocide," he says, "is to proceed by nonlethal means. To go about it not by killing."

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In 1946, the United Nations got Limpkin to help them create a legal definition on genocide. This can be found in the Secretariat's Draft. Limpkin broke genocide down into three components: physical (direct killing measures and slow death measures); biological (sterilization pro-