



GITXSAN HEREDITARY CHIEFS

1650 Omenica St., Hazelton, V0J 1Y0 Ph: 250-842-6780 Fx:250-842-6709



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A Gitksan Update

The Globe and Mail article of November 9th

Since publication, I have received four responses. Two leave the door open, wanting to hear the good, bad and the ugly. And two are totally against the notion of removing Indian status and everything the article says. The thing we need to keep in mind is what we won in the Delgam'uukxw and Yal court cases. Those wins now enshrined in Canadian Law, and further protected by section 35 in the Canadian constitution. One example is, it says we have a right as to "the uses the land be put." Since the Delgam'uukxw case was framed on 33,000 sq. kms. And under the authority of the Gitksan Hereditary Chiefs, it's obviously not the Reservations. It also says we have to be consulted, and it expressly says not "mere" consultation before anything happens on our land. Then we look at the benefits we get on the Reservation now as opposed to the benefits off all our lands. That is what it comes down to.

What is the now picture?

The Government's stance has been and still is the assimilation policy. Therefore essentially put us in concentration camps called Reservations, on our own land I might add. They introduced Band councils to replace the hereditary system of all what they call Indians. They shipped many of us off to Residential schools so that we lose our language and culture. As one high DIA official said when they master minded something to take care of the "Indian problem." He says that, "one day there will be no more problems as there will be no more Indians." The intent was not to make good for us, the intent was to cripple us by the means I mention above. The assimilation policy also intended to create dependency. If your door knob breaks, they want you to run to the Band office to have it repaired. They give you \$185.00 a month as a single person to survive on. The housing policy, same as other programs, are always inadequate. The councils rack their brains to make it work. At the same time the Reservation citizens think they are sitting on hoards of money. My own opinion is; anything is better than what we have now....

This day, our negotiators are using our legal standing to improve the lives of all Gitksan with certain revenue that you rightfully should get, on 33,000 sq.kms of Gitksan territory. When we pay taxes, it is not a lost cause. If you were to look at the streets of Hazelton and Smithers, as opposed to the pot holes in Kispiox, there is quite a contrast. Theoretically we will enjoy the same level of services where we will no longer complain about the whiteman. The worth of our lands are in the millions, surface and sub surface. So what is the obvious way to go? The fear now is we have very little and we don't want to give any taxes with what little we have. If we have a lot, than it's different as Canadian common laws says we have to be accommodated.

What about what the Governments want through Treaty talks, our second only choice; an enlarged Reservation? To buy off your section 35 rights? The cookie cutter model designed to keep us contained? Who cares if you miscalculate on health care for example?

Our other choice is to die on the Reservation with what we now have or seriously look at the Alternative Governance model that is seriously being looked at. "Exploration" is what they call it, (nothing yet in stone). Our leaders will further clarify in our own debates, the logic and their reasoning to show that they, on your behalf, are still "holding the course" is the fundamental concern of many Gitksan. Examine the good, the bad and the ugly as one Hereditary Chief puts it. There is no doubt that some Gitksan people have some grave concerns as they should. We hear the many areas such as; any deal we make has to be good for the Gitksan not here yet, not to sell out our rights. The National post calls it "A Pioneering Proposal" as it is not buying into the cookie cutter president setting Treaties such as the Nishga'a. So when one Chief says, "I want to hear the Good, the Bad and The ugly. Maybe that spells out what needs to happen.

Any questions? Call the number above or awilson@gitksan.com