

Report urging native program cuts not policy: PM

By Stephen Bindman **OTTAWA**
Citizen staff writer **APRIL 19 - 1985**

A federal task force report recommending major spending cuts on native programs and a virtual end to the Indian Affairs department is not government policy, Prime Minister Mulroney said Thursday.

"This government has always made it clear that politicians accountable to the Canadian people will make policy, not bureaucrats," Mulroney said in a prepared statement after the confidential cabinet document was leaked to the press.

In what the opposition parties called a "salvage operation," Mulroney also appointed an embarrassed Indian Affairs Minister David Crombie to head a new cabinet committee to co-ordinate government policy on native policy.

Crombie admitted to reporters Thursday he had not seen the report until after it had appeared in newspapers, but was told of its "general topics."

The report of the task force, appointed by Deputy Prime Minister Erik Nielsen to find ways to cut unnecessary spending, concluded it can save \$169 million and "redirect" 3,500 of the 5,000 department employees through "a major and substantial shift" in responsibilities.

The task force recommended the transfer of many department responsibilities to other federal departments and the creation of a "memorandum of understanding" with each province.

Over an unspecified period, the provinces would assume responsibility for native health care and almost all duties in native education and economic development programs.

In the Commons, Liberal leader John Turner said Nielsen had "undermined the credibility" of Crombie by not advising him of the report.

"(The report) demonstrates, I believe, the hidden agenda of this government," Turner said. "It illustrates once again that the government really does not know through one minister what another minister is doing or

vice versa. The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing."

Turner said the report makes the first ministers conference on aboriginal rights held in Ottawa earlier this month "a sham."

But Crombie and Mulroney told reporters the current level of funding for all native programs will not be cut and said while the report has some good recommendations, others are "not so good."

"There are some wise ones, some not so wise," Crombie said. "There are some recommendations which will probably never see the light of day again, which I thought were unwise and probably hurtful. We'll just make sure that the good ones which are consistent with the government's policy and way of approaching aboriginal people, we'll support those."

Crombie denied the new cabinet committee was set up overnight to prevent further embarrassment to the government from the

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Report

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leaked document.

"It was a matter that was coming at any rate and I think it would have come at about this time."

If power is taken away from the federal Indian Affairs department, it should not be transferred to other departments or to the provinces, Crombie said, but to Indian communities.

"The important thing is to enhance the power and ability of Indian communities to look after their own affairs. That's my goal."

Cabinet didn't accept on Thursday "any recommendations on substance," Crombie said.

A spokesman for the Assembly of First Nations, which represents Canada's status Indians, said in a statement it was not surprised by the report, since it has never been consulted.

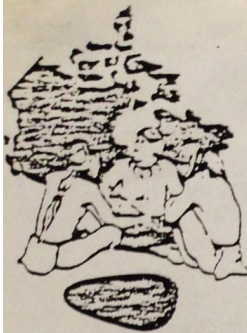
Noel Starblanket said the report's recommendations to save the government money were "good public relations, particularly to Canadian big business."

"Clearly the federal government has singled out Indian people, already on the low rung of the country's economic ladder, as a target group for financial punishment."

The assembly said it opposes any attempt to hand over powers to the provinces. "We will not tolerate provincial government involvement in our affairs. Most of the provinces to date have very poor track records when it comes to providing services to Indian people."

Former Liberal Indian affairs minister Warren Allmand said the search for self-government for natives should not be a process in saving money, but "a process in respecting the right of people to run their own affairs."

"What the document seems to indicate is that they're looking on this simply as a means of saving money. It shouldn't be a question of simply saving money and least of all should it be a transfer to the provinces," Allmand said.



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PRESS RELEASE

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The Prime Minister, along with his government colleagues in Cabinet, has a cynical blueprint for the elimination of the First Nations as unique peoples within the Federation of Canada. This plan is documented in a Cabinet Memorandum of April 12, 1985. The plan is characterized in that document as: "the Buffalo Jump of the 1980's". The Prime Minister stated on April 18, 1985 that he was disowning the Nielsen Report. The actions now being initiated by his government clearly show that he is not withdrawing the Nielsen Cabinet Memorandum.

This Cabinet Memorandum shockingly outlines a strategy to assimilate Indian people beginning with the 1985 budget speech. The "Communications Strategy" outlined in the document indicates that the plan of the government is to tell the Indian people and the Canadian public one thing; and meanwhile to begin to implement the opposite.

A "buffalo jump" was a method of exterminating vast herds of buffalo to make way for colonial expansion.

Elimination of the buffalo was equivalent to elimination of the livelihood of Indian people -- an act of genocide. The Prime Minister's initiative to take dollars away from Indian people is proof that the strategy outlined in the Cabinet Memorandum is being implemented. The object is clearly to kill the political effectiveness of the First Nations -- to exterminate the "body politic".