

On January 12, we lost an irreplaceable soul in the struggle for Indigenous rights. The soft-spoken yet steadfast Arthur Manuel of the Secwepemc First Nation died of congestive heart failure at the age of 66.

Manuel dedicated his life to the struggle for Indigenous land and treaty rights, entering the world of Indigenous politics in the 1970s as the president of the Native Youth Association. He went on to serve as chief of the Neskonlith Indian Band and elected chair of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council. Recently, he was a spokesperson for Defenders of the Land, an organization dedicated to

Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice. Manuel was also the spokesperson for the Indigenous Network on Economics and Trade, a community of Indigenous organizations working to achieve recognition of Aboriginal and Treaty Rights at the international level.

In 2015, Manuel published *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake Up Call* which was awarded the 2016 Canadian Historical Association Aboriginal History Book Prize. The book calls for radically rethinking the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state.

Manuel was unabashed in his demands for decoloni-

zation and Indigenous self-determination, calling settler colonialism for what it is: the ongoing theft and plunder of Indigenous land. Manuel saw colonization as being grounded in the dispossession of Indigenous land and ongoing dependency arising from dispossession and oppression targeting Indigenous expressions of self-determination.

On the 150th anniversary “celebration” of Canada, Manuel wrote a poignant analysis of what colonization is and how it functions. We have reproduced that piece in full here.

# ARE YOU A CANADIAN?

Arthur Manuel

*This article first appeared in the First Nations Strategic Bulletin Volume 14 (August-December 2016).*

2017 will mark the fact that we have been officially colonized by Canada for 150 years. This is an important milestone and it is time for us to decide if we want to continue to be colonized peoples or if we want to seek self-determination.

We have to face the fact that Canada is a settler state that was created by Great Britain to take over our Indigenous territories for use and benefit of Canada. This kind of human exploitation is called colonization and it is designed to give settler Canadians ownership over all Indigenous lands. Indigenous peoples basically subsidize the Canadian economy with free land and resources.

Colonization is a complex relationship but simple to understand if you know that dispossession, dependency and oppression are the consequences that it is designed to produce between the colonizer and the colonized. It is important to understand the United Nations (UN) has condemned colonization in all its manifestations because the moment you dispossess someone of their land and make him or her dependent upon the colonizer, you create a person willing to fight to be free and independent again. In this way, colonialism is against world peace.

Canadian colonialism is also based on racial discrimination, which is deeply engrained in the entire constitutional and legal fabric of Canada. Indigenous Peoples need to be careful NOT to honour the 150 years of colonization because this will validate the racism that is implicit in Canadian colonialism. Instead, Indigenous Peoples and Canadians who believe in human rights need look at Canada's 150th Birthday Party as period to undertake a commitment to decolonize Canada and recognize the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination.

In practical terms we need to look first at the results of colonial dispossession: the minuscule land-base that Indigenous Peoples have in contrast to

settler Canadians. Our Indian reserves are only 0.2% of Canada's land mass yet Indigenous Peoples are expected to survive on that land-base. This has led to the systematic impoverishment of Indigenous Peoples and this impoverishment is a big part of the crippling oppression Indigenous Peoples suffer under the existing Canadian colonial system.

This 0.2% systemic impoverishment is used as a weapon by Canada to keep us too poor and weak to fight back. It is used to bribe and co-opt Indigenous leadership into becoming neo-colonial partners to treat the symptoms of poverty on the Indian reserve without addressing the root cause of the problem, which is the dispossession of all of the Indigenous Peoples' territory by Canada and the provinces.

Settler Canadians, on the other hand, enjoy and benefit from 99.8% of our Indigenous land base under the federal and provincial governments. That is what the first Canadian Constitution established under the British North America Act 1867. Our lands were put under Crown title and we were left with 0.2% of the land on our Indian Reserves. Indigenous Peoples living on “Indian Reserves” do NOT get equal programs and services that settler Canadians get. There has always been a battle between the federal and provincial governments about what order of government is responsible for programs and services on Indian Reserves. Even in these practical terms we seem to belong to neither, and the question again is “Are Indigenous Peoples Canadians?”

Does this make us Canadians when programs and services are NOT available to us when we live on our Indian Reserves? Indeed 50% of Indian people live off their Indian reserves because of the lack of land, employment and education opportunities on our existing Indian Reserves. Indigenous Peoples only become Canadians by migrating to Canada based on need and not because they want to. These 0.2% Indian Reserves are in constant turmoil with their colonial masters and this is really spelled out in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report 1996.

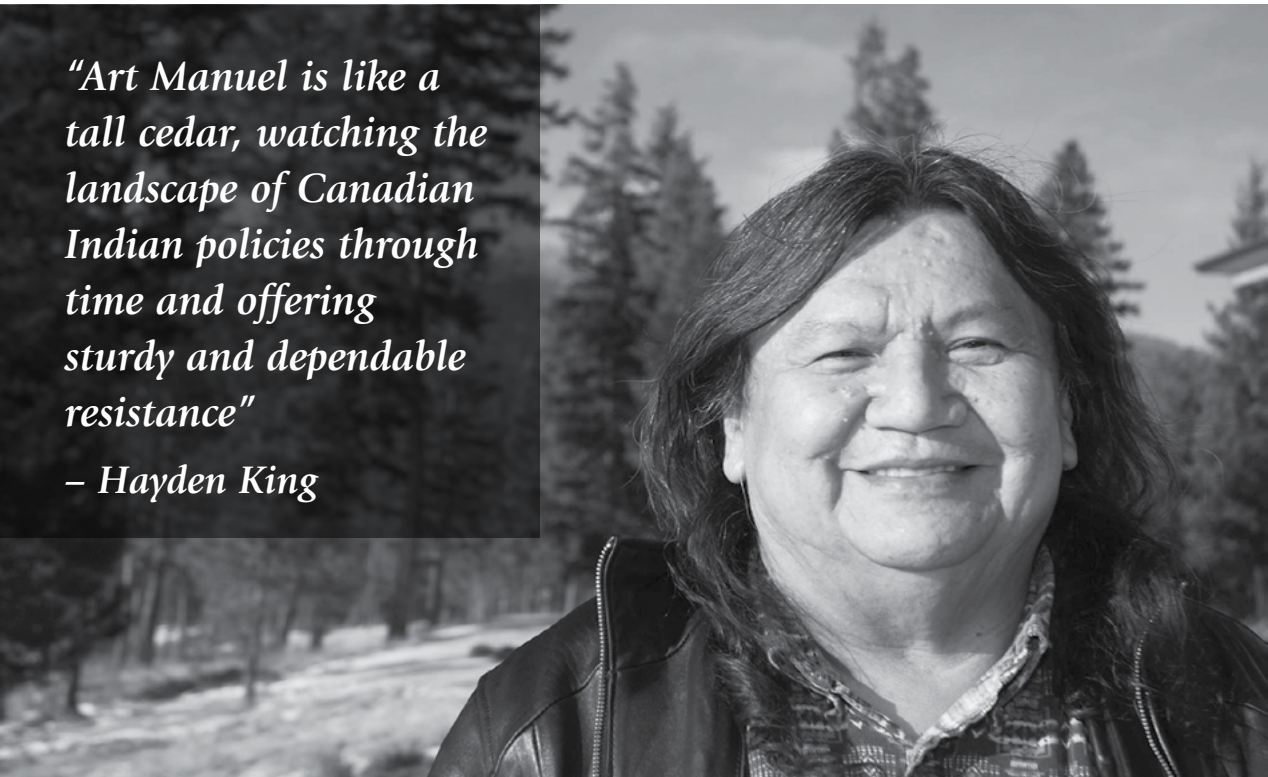


Photo: Arthur Manuel, Facebook

*“Art Manuel is like a tall cedar, watching the landscape of Canadian Indian policies through time and offering sturdy and dependable resistance”  
– Hayden King*

*Canada has ignored these human rights recommendations because Canada's existing policy is to terminate Indigenous constitutional and legal rights and assimilate Indigenous peoples into Canada as a settler state.*

The United Nations human rights bodies under the human rights treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) have made many human rights recommendations to Canada. Canada has ignored these human rights recommendations because Canada's existing policy is to terminate Indigenous constitutional and legal rights and assimilate Indigenous peoples into Canada as a settler state.

I was an elected 0.2% Chief of my reserve for 8 years. I found out very early how futile it is to tinker with programs and services within the 0.2% land base. Canada and the provinces have never seriously wanted to increase the land base of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and Indigenous Peoples have always had to depend on the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) to put pressure on the government to address the land issues of Indigenous Peoples. In this regard the SCC has also been very slow and expensive. The SCC only found Aboriginal Title in one case after 147 years after Canada's confederation. In 2014, the SCC found the Tsilhqot'in people have Aboriginal Title over 1,750 square kilometers.

Everyone needs to take

into consideration that Canada is the second largest country in the world with a population of 35 million people of which one million are Indigenous. British Columbia is as large as California, Oregon and Washington States combined, which have a population of more than 40 million people, and BC has a population of only 4.6 million people of which 200,000 are Indigenous people. In Canada the size, population, constitutional and legal framework could accommodate fundamental change in expanding the land base of Indigenous Peoples from 0.2% to a size that could accommodate our right to self-determination.

The new land-base has to be based on the human rights of Indigenous Peoples to enjoy self-determination as Indigenous nations. These land-bases need to be large enough to protect our languages, cultures, laws and economies. Canadians must accept that the existing 0.2% model does not work. That fundamental increase must be made to accommodate Aboriginal and Treaty rights to land. These larger land-bases will ultimately be part of Canada's economy. It will provide Indigenous Peoples with the right to make and influence economic development choices because of our increased governance over our larger land base.

These are the broad fundamental arrangements that need to be interpreted in the

context of our international right to self-determination as set out in Article 3 of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Article 1 of the ICCPR and ICESCR. The Supreme Court of Canada must understand the international context of our Aboriginal and Treaty Rights as the grounds to decolonize Canada. The Supreme Court of Canada must take a broader view of these rights and it is up to the executive branches of Canada and provinces to manifest these legal directions in terms of consistent policies on Canada's constitution and land rights of Indigenous Peoples which were set out in section 35(1) in Canada's Constitution 1982.

These broader issues are going to manifest themselves in the struggle of Indigenous Peoples to find land settlements in British Columbia and to come to some decision regarding climate change and the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Expansion project. Canada's existing Indigenous land policies have been a failure in British Columbia and across the country. It is apparent that the Justin Trudeau government is trying to circumvent dealing with the 0.2% problem by giving more money for programs and services. This may help our Band Administrations to bandage up the 0.2% system but it will not address the root cause of the poverty the 0.2% system generates day-after-day in

our families.

The first step is to repudiate the concepts behind the Colonial Doctrines of Discovery and recognize that every Indigenous nation in Canada has underlying title to their entire territory. Plus recognize we have exclusive rights to a land base starting from 3–5 million acres so we can protect our language, culture, laws and economy. The United States was much more open in giving tribes larger Indian Reserves than Canada. The large reserves in the USA provide a greater economic independence for the tribes, but they are still part of the USA economies. Canadians need to realize that we must embark on a new direction after 150 years of colonization of Indigenous Peoples. It must be a system based on the international human rights of Indigenous peoples as nations.

I believe that under the existing colonial system in Canada, Indigenous Peoples are not Canadian because of the systemic impoverishment we are forced live in because we are alienated from our traditional territories. If we accept colonization as a foundation of our relationship to Canada we are endorsing our own impoverishment. You cannot have reconciliation under the colonial 0.2% Indian Reserve System. It is impossible. Nothing can justify that kind of human degradation. The land issue must be addressed before reconciliation can begin.