

The Compensation Process of First Nations Survivors of Residential Schools Part Two

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In the initial stages, after a decision to compensate survivors had been made, many were not aware of this. I know I wasn't at that time. I heard it on the street, not through an advertised message in any media. I heard it directly from another survivor who had applied for compensation through the ADR and was then waiting for the monies to come through. Word spread through the Moccasin Telegraph Wire! The smoke signals were spiralling up all over the place! Otherwise, many of us would not have known. So, there definitely was a lack of communication between the Federal Government and the First Nations survivors of residential schools here in Canada. That amazes me! We have radio, television, telephones, Internet, newspapers---we live in a technological age! Yes, it simply amazes. We were all mushrooms. If we survivors did not help each other, we would not have known at the onset of all this. Truly, the proverbial can of worms was opened. The churches and the federal government could not tolerate the stink. And we continue to help one another. If one hears something or finds out a link, that one tells another, and the internal communication goes on.

Oh sure, they, the government, sent around a crew of people (hired by THEM) to inform us about the Truth and Reconciliation. Their show, their way. There is one organization, here in British Columbia, (based in Vancouver) that tries to keep us informed. They do so through funds obtained from the Federal Government, but their workshops on the road are costly, and most times, not as informative as we the survivors would like. Those without telephones or computers are out of luck---they depend on others to keep them informed. With the limited information trickling out of Ottawa, the residential schools survivors unit in Vancouver find their hands tied---they can do so little in the way of practical information.

Meanwhile, the basic agreement to compensate has changed its application process. At the onset, they had the Alternate Dispute Resolution. Now, it is the Independent Assessment Process. It is a good thing in itself, in that it now includes other factors to be considered in order to compensate victims more fully. But again, the lack of communication from the Federal Government is a detrimental factor to inform the survivors is sorely remiss. Time for more smoke signals! Maybe we should teach them about real communication. I mean, they certainly tried hard to 'educate' us! Anyway, the new process is in place, but the application forms are noticeably absent from pertinent organizations around the Prince George area. I approached one for these forms, which they said they had, so I got copies. I bring one home, after I had handed out the other two to someone who needed them, and discover the forms were of the old Alternate Dispute Resolution! So to the Internet I go, get a phone number or two, tried them, connected with the unit in Vancouver who gave me another phone number! I phoned this last number and finally connect to Ottawa who say they will mail the form and guide to me. That was two weeks ago, and I am still waiting. It is

our waiting time. Always has been. And probably always will be. We wait for them to deal with all our issues.

I mentioned the meagre amounts in the compensation. I heard of some foreigner who had been tortured for one year and was compensated by the Canadian Federal Government to the tune of eleven-point-two million dollars! One year! And a whopping eleven-point-two million dollars! I cannot imagine that amount. It boggles my mind. Is that fair?

Another thing is that there seems to be sexual discrimination. To wit, men are compensated far more than women. I wonder if it is because the penis is visible and the vagina is not? What were the determining factors in this? I wonder.

The other thing about this whole business is that the eastern component of survivors is compensated far more quickly, and the timeline is out of whack. Their compensation period begins earlier than those of the western regions. Again, why? A timeline is a timeline---there should not be any discrimination. Were the western factions consulted about this? Can anyone answer that? I certainly would like to know.

The most recent thing I heard is that the Catholic Church finally kicked in some money to add to the compensation funds. Does the Federal Government tell us about that? No. Does the Assembly of First Nations tell us about that? No. What about truth and reconciliation? Is it any wonder that we survivors do not believe and trust the government and the church officials? Why couldn't the churches involved in this dispute compensate the survivors directly? Were they afraid to face their victims? In this day of technology, it would have been a simple matter to obtain pertinent data on survivors to execute this. And perhaps, facing one another, both the church officials and the survivors may have come to some kind of reconciliation. Some understanding and forgiveness.

I must conclude. There probably are other points of concern that I have not covered. I can only speak from my own experiences.

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