

## **FROM SHAME TO PRIDE**

**By Robert Laboucane**

**Our government's apology for Canada's shameful history in its residential school experiment with our founding peoples was obviously long overdue. For once, I see a glimmer of hope in what has been a century of shame for all Canadians.**

**As a Métis citizen of Calgary and owner of a firm that trains companies (from frontline workers to CEOs), students, journalists, and even politicians about Aboriginal awareness, I have been a frequent and outspoken critic of our government's unwillingness to address this long-simmering legacy of the despised Indian residential schools.**

**Today, we took a step forward. The Canadian government this week made a sincere and honest effort to express their true feelings of regret for their shameful behaviour over the past 200 years.**

**I have been teaching Canadians far and wide about the residential school legacy for 25 years, and am always surprised by the expressions of shock, shame and by the fact these citizens know absolutely nothing about these most tragic events. Tears, yes, lots of that. Anger, very much so.**

**“Why were we kept in the dark about this terrible history”? “Why is it that this is not part of our children's education”? “Can this really be true”?**

**Our current sanitized history lessons must be re-written.**

**There is a significant disconnect in the minds of Canadians between why the Aboriginal people are where they are today and how they got there. Compassion, understanding, empathy and inclusion are not part of the relationship between Canadians and the Aboriginal people of Canada. Blame, guilt, name-calling and finger pointing are the rules of the day.**

**Based on the current laws, policies and various other race-based legislation such as the hugely outdated federal Indian Act, Aboriginal**

**people and their circumstances are exactly where our governments have brought them. So why would anyone be surprised by this?**

**Are Aboriginal people who were oppressed and abused in the past and the many suffering the same thing right now, to believe that Canadians did not know what their governments have been doing to the Aboriginal people on their behalf? I know the Aboriginal people find this almost unbelievable, how could Canadians not know of their oppression and abuse at the hands of Canada's government.**

**Whenever anyone expresses sorrow and regret and apologizes for their discretions, the expectation is that this behaviour will end and never be repeated. The listener must believe that a change will occur and that if this behaviour and/or attitude persists, then another apology will be necessary right away and over and over again. Any future additional apologies required will have to come from the Queen herself. I have experienced this whenever I have had addicts in my life. Is our government addicted to their current attitudes and behaviours? Are these apologies just a distraction? Will real sincere changes be forthcoming?**

**I have spent my life feeling shame for being a Canadian knowing what we as Canadians have allowed to happen to our fellow Aboriginal Canadians. Either not knowing, turning a blind eye, blaming and condemning, separating, excluding or worst of all, being indifferent, can now end. I am feeling a sense of relief, hope, optimism and pride now that a new beginning can begin.**

**Everyone I know will be watching for the positive changes in relationships between our governments and the Aboriginal people. Much more important will be the building of kind, caring and respectful relationships between Aboriginal Canadians and all other Canadians. That will be the true measure of the sincerity expressed.**

**As citizens of a country that has come under international criticism for the Third World living conditions of our founding peoples, we must now all demand that the federal government walks the talk.**

**624 Words**