

Protest rally attracted a large crowd

OHSWEKEN — Recently, I was invited to attend a protest rally in Brantford. The federal government had decided to cut back on educational funding for native students going to a college or university. As usual, it was a unilateral decision. There was little or no consultation with the native people.

When the native people got wind of the proposed cutbacks, they reminded the government that education was a treaty right which the natives were to receive in exchange for their loss of land and all the other resources that went with the land. One speaker said that if they don't want to pay for our education, they should give us back our land. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

The protest caravan left New Credit at 8.30 a.m. and proceeded to the village of Ohsweken. Another large group waited at the main corner and together they proceeded to the J.C. Hill School gymnasium. There was now a large crowd and they were addressed by educational counsellor Steve Hill. As an employee of Indian Affairs, he was expected to help implement the new educational policy. He was not willing to do this because he considered the new policy unfair to native people.

Another speaker was Six Nations Chief Coun. Bill Montour. Now in his fourth year as

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the chief, Bill has become a very good public speaker. He offered the protesters his moral support. He could not accompany them that morning, as he was going to Ottawa. We then headed for Brantford.

The parking lot had been packed so I had parked in front of the Six Nations Library. I got into my car and waited for the procession of cars to pass. I idly began to count the cars passing. There were about 70. We had been instructed to fly a red ribbon from each car and to turn on our lights. I had tied my ribbon to my outside mirror. When all the other cars had passed, I began to bring up the rear.

As we wended our way down Sour Springs Road, other cars joined in. By the time we got to the big hills near Brantford, there was a long line of cars behind me. The day was mild and

sunny and I thought of my ancestors who have gone out to fight their enemies many times on days just like this.

But we were not going out to fight. Not in a physical way. We had been reminded that this was to be a peaceful protest. We were even going to stop for stop signs. We only wanted to get our point across and to show our support for the real fighters in Ottawa. Some native students had been on a three-week-long hunger strike to try to get the government to negotiate. Real fighters are the ones who are ready to give up their lives.

We walked from the Woodland Indian Cultural and Educational Centre on Mohawk Street all the way to downtown Brantford. I think a lot of us middle-class, middle-aged people were surprised we could do it. Or would do it.

One little native boy was struggling with a sign that said "I want to be a doctor." Fat chance, I thought, if this educational policy stays.