

Most native people see little reason to run in election

By Vicki White *Aug 21/90*
Expositor Staff

Elijah Harper has inspired an unprecedented number of native people to run in Manitoba's provincial election, but not in Ontario's Sept. 6 vote.

The New Democratic Party is alone among the three major parties with a native candidate vying for a seat at Queen's Park. Peter North, from the Oneida nation, is running in Elgin riding.

"There are a number of differences between Ontario and Manitoba," said Joe Miskokomon, grand chief of the Union of Ontario Indians, a native lobby group representing 44 bands.

Less appealing

"The proportion of native people to non-natives in Manitoba is far higher than in Ontario," which would make it less appealing for a native politician, he said.

Mr. Miskokomon believes there are only three Ontario ridings with "a significant proportion" of native people in the electorate. One of these is Brant-Haldimand, which has no native candidate.

Graham Smith, a Liberal party supporter who lives on the Six Nations Reserve, said that after having land claims ignored for years the community has come to associate the provincial government with racism and oppression.

He believes that is "99 per cent of the reason" that no native people have run in past elections.

"If there was something done

where the native people felt positive recognition from the government, then I think they'd be much more interested in running.

"It's changing now, not only with the provincial but also the federal government, but it's not going to be done tomorrow. It's going to take time."

Mr. Smith, who describes himself as a "senior-citizen plus some," said he would have considered running if he was younger.

Mr. Miskokomon suggested several other reasons for native people not being interested in provincial politics.

Native bands signed their treaties with the federal government and have fought to deal only with Ottawa, he said. "To run in the election would be recognizing the provincial government."

Question of power

He also questioned the political power a native politician would have.

"So we elect one Indian. What is that Indian supposed to do? Does that give us any more power within the government?"

In the 1985 provincial election, the Union of Ontario Indians encouraged several native people to run for nomination. None was chosen.

"It takes a lot of effort to do that, and since then we've been recovering. It takes a lot of time, energy and money — money that Indian people don't have," said Mr. Miskokomon.