Indian Affairs leak under investigation
Privacy Commissioner looking into leak of confidential letter

by Andrea Buma with CP files

OTTAWA - The issue of systemic problems in the Indian Affairs office has been raised by Reform Aboriginal Affairs critic Mike Scott.

The M.P. said in an interview with the *Teka*, "'Indian Affairs has set up a system that is failing on reserves. The system does tend to reward those in power. I believe that Indian Affairs is responsible for problems in fiscal and democratic accountability on reserves across Canada."

The comment was in response to a story, by the Winnipeg Free Press, concerning a confidential letter leaked by the Department of Indian Affairs.

On October 20, 1997 Bruce Starlight of the Tsuu T'ina Reserve in Alberta wrote a letter to the Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs. In the letter Starlight outlined serious concerns with respect to financial matters on the reserve and the conduct of Chief Roy Whitney and some of the Councillors responsible for handling band funds.

In early December, Starlight received a subpoena to appear in court, and a court order restraining him from talking to anyone in the Department of Indian Affairs. Chief Roy Whitney had commenced legal action against Starlight for defamation of character.

Starlight's confidential letter to the Minister of Indian Affairs bearing her office's official stamp was attached to the Statement of Claim issued by Chief Whitney's legal counsel.

M.P. Mike Scott says that under Canada's Privacy Act any correspondence directed to a minister must be kept confidential. A formal complaint and request for an investigation was sent by Scott's office to the Privacy Commissioner, Bruce Phillips, and the situation is now under investigation.

A copy of the complaint obtained by the *Teka* points out that, "to date, no one has been able to satisfactorily explain how Mr. Starlight's confidential letter ended up in the possession of Chief Roy Whitney *without the consent of the*