

# Your Opinion

## Self-government not stopped by no vote

by Larry Sanders

"Whatever progress we make will depend upon us, as the people that belong to these First Nations and how aggressively we want to promote this question of self-government."

Dennis Cromartie, Chief Negotiator for the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation

reaching agreements with the federal and provincial governments with respect to lands, resources, or governance. Because (governments) can still create laws which will put into effect any agreements that we reach. Those agreements could get constitutional protection under the existing Section 35 (of the constitution)."



**NORTHERN INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



On referendum night, October 26, national leaders of aboriginal organizations lit up television sets with their bitter reactions to Canadians' rejection of the Charlottetown Accord. Ron George, the national leader of Metis and non-status Indians, screamed that Canadians had voted to accept "more Okas, more barricades. You've kept apartheid alive in Canada." Ovide Mercredi of the Assembly of First Nations said "Canadians blew it. We've said yes to the status quo, which is racist. We can't wait any longer for you (non-native people) to accept us. We have law-making ability in our own territory, we should use it. We can also take our case to an international forum to secure our rights."

But here in northwestern Ontario, the reaction of regional native leaders is much more accepting, much more upbeat. I had an opportunity recently to interview Dennis Cromartie, Chief Negotiator on self-government for the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN) and Aime Bouchard, Chief Negotiator of the Pays Plat First Nation. Bouchard is also chairman of the board of the Ojibway 1850 Treaty Council, which takes in most First Nations on the north shore of Lake Superior. Both leaders made it very clear that there were already processes in place long before the Charlottetown Accord was invented which laid out a negotiation process on self-government and treaty rights.

Cromartie said, in the case of NAN, "We had already identified what it was that we wanted in the constitutional discussions that took place between 1983 and 1987 and the recognition of the right to self-government was one of those goals that we were trying to achieve in the constitutional discussions." The problem with the Charlottetown Accord put qualifications on the declaration.

Cromartie admitted that "it would have been a lot easier to deal with governments if there had been a yes vote. But it doesn't stop or prevent us from

Aime Bouchard said he personally voted yes because he thought the Accord would "move us ahead." However, his community of Pays Plat voted an overwhelming no, just like the non-native communities, by a margin of more than two-to-one. Bouchard thinks the no vote happened because "people just didn't understand the agreement." He admits there was some anti-native sentiment in the rejection of the Charlottetown Accord by non-native Canadians, but "only some. People were saying: you didn't give us enough time, we don't understand it, we're not voting for it." Despite the vote, Bouchard is convinced that self-government will go ahead at whatever pace the negotiators want to set.

Bouchard explained that, at the moment, the Ojibway 1850 Treaty Council is conducting internal discussions about the

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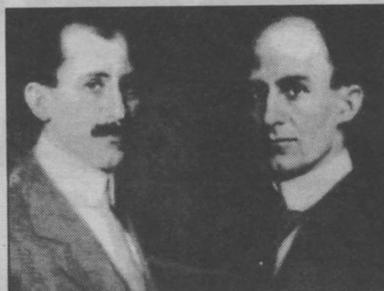
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