

March 4, 1996

An Open Letter

This letter is written to passionately express the need to restore a community's faith in Canadian Government's commitment to its people.

All communities function productively for the good of its members when the rights and obligations are clearly defined. Law and order are fundamental to ensure that individual rights are balanced with the needs of the community. The Ipperwash community is a grand example of a society gone amok because of the lack of leadership by all levels of government.

September 1995, some members of the community took it upon themselves to determine what was rightfully theirs without the benefit of the official judicial body. These members acting as they did, are by any definition lawbreakers. Whether the law is correct or not, lawbreaking is simply that, lawbreaking.

These lawbreakers like so many who break the law, were crying out for answers to their frustrations. Their criminal act should have invoked the peacekeepers of the society to restore law and order and provide a forum where answers could be found. This did not happen. A further reaction to the inaction was more criminal behaviour that escalated to violence and death for one of the lawbreakers. Still no evidence that the society's peacekeepers would interfere and restore law and order. The unchecked behaviour was, by default, condoned. To this day, the lawbreakers continue to occupy the land without the benefit of proper land transfer agreements. The lawbreakers continue to harass persons living near the land. The lawbreakers threaten workers who are assigned public works projects near the property and they generally conduct themselves in a manner that is in discord with the rest of the community.

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The lawbreakers claim that they are the rightful owners of the land, that they hold the land sacred and dear to their hearts. Yet to the casual observer the land is filled with all sorts of trashed vehicles, trees are felled willy-nilly and the buildings are vandalized. Once more this calls for government action, this time the Ministry of the Environment and yet another arm of the government is silent. Is the "environmentally sensitive" land only a figment of the government's dream world to be waved at citizens when it suits them.

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Meanwhile, the Ipperwash community gets on with the day to day living. The law-abiding citizens feel victimized by the lawbreakers and the no action government. They are rewarded for their behaviour with unrelenting verbal abuse. The law-abiding citizens do not feel safe. The peacekeepers maintain their authority to restrain or otherwise interfere with the actions of the lawbreakers is not clear. The lack of clarity for action permits a perception that the lawbreakers may, at any given moment, decide to go on a rampage, vandalizing everything in their path, terrorizing the children and the elderly without fear of intervention. Those entrusted to maintain the public peace are prevented by government from doing their job. All the lawbreakers have to do is to retreat to their illegally occupied land and they are home free. Real or imagined, the perception has the same effect, the law-abiding citizens are victims. Victims without refuge or the safety net that they trusted government to provide.

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A further frustration is that the value of property has plummeted. There are a variety of conditions that give the lawbidders rights to live on and use Ipperwash area lands. Who would spend money to live with this civil unrest, or open a business where the market for their goods is so unstable. Regardless of whether land is owned, rented or given according to treaties, law-abiding citizens take pride in it, and all suffer because of the lack of government leadership, leadership that looks out for the best interests of the whole community.

Law-abiding citizens expect the government to maintain a safe and healthy environment for its citizens. Law-abiding citizens know that they have civic duties and must be responsible for many parts of their society. They know also that they are supposed to invoke the system set up by government when there is a dispute that is beyond their realm. The land claim dispute is not within the realm of ordinary citizens to resolve. Clearly, it is a government responsibility. The lack of government leadership in this dispute

leads to the conclusion that the government has another agenda, that the health and safety of all its citizens is not important. Is this inaction worth the risk of this serious breach of public trust.

Real leaders set the pace, keep it going and in communities that have been devastated like the Ipperwash community, real leaders take action. Real leaders know not every decision is going to be popular with everyone. Real leaders know that inertia does hurt everyone. Surely the governments of Canada can see the benefit of parachuting in a leader who will lead. A leader who will set the ground rules for negotiations for all interested parties. A leader who will look at the best solution for the whole community. A leader who will restore the faith in the law-abiding citizens that governments are willing and able to act to keep communities safe and healthy.

Just do it.

Later, when the Ipperwash conflict is successfully resolved, use it as a model to resolve similar disputes throughout the entire country. Give Canadians something that makes them proud to be CANADIAN!

Waiting for government,

