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CREE LEADERS OF TODAY AND TOMORROW



COMMUNITY LEADERS

In 1999, the Crees held an election to replace Matthew Coon Come, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees, who had led them through the international fight against the Great Whale Project. By a huge majority over other candidates, they chose Dr. Ted Moses. Moses is from Eastmain and for many years had been the Cree ambassador to the United Nations. He began his career as band manager in Eastmain within the administration of Chief Matthew Shanush.

Moses became prominent in the early 1970s as the Cree interpreter in their court case to stop the Province of Quebec's La Grande hydroelectric development project. Later, during the negotiation of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, he was the chief Cree negotiator. After signature of the Agreement, he became the first Director General of the newly formed Cree School Board and was later elected chief of his own community.

In the early 1980s, at the time of the gastroenteritis epidemic in the Cree communities, the Crees decided to take their treaty rights to the international community. Moses was chosen by the leadership to represent them and to fight for the international rights of Aboriginal peoples. Then when Billy Diamond completed his last term as Grand Chief in 1984, Ted Moses was elected to replace him, a position he held until 1987. Throughout the 1990s, he continued his work in the international arena, becoming a very influential Aboriginal leader at the United Nations.

For his international work on the rights of Aboriginal peoples, the University of Saskatchewan awarded Ted Moses an honorary doctorate of laws in 1996. He was described as having served in "many stressful roles" of Cree leadership—as court interpreter, band manager, teacher, negotiator, chief, director general, grand chief, diplomat, and ambassador. At the ceremony to confer the honorary degree, Chief Leroy Littlebear said

of Moses that “his daily struggle to keep internal and Canadian constitutional and human rights respected has been an inspiring example to Indigenous people. In a realm of suspicion, racism, intolerance, and an extravagant hunger for power, Ambassador Moses has proven himself a human of profound decency, tolerance, understanding, humility, and wisdom.”

Interviewed in 1999, Moses offered his personal reflections on his years of political involvement and on the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. The Grand Chief was interviewed again in early 2002, after the Peace of the Brave—the New Agreement between the Crees and the Province of Quebec—had been negotiated. Together, the two interviews offer a personal and historical record of the significant steps taken toward fulfilling an Aboriginal peoples’ political dream—self-determination in the development of their communities and economy.

Following the interviews with Grand Chief Ted Moses is an interview with Romeo Saganash, the Grand Council of the Crees’ Director of Quebec Relations. Saganash was interviewed in 2002, after the signing of the New Agreement. Saganash has been involved in Cree politics since his early twenties. He was inspired to study law by James O’Reilly, the lawyer who defended the Crees in the early 1970s in their battle against Quebec’s first hydroelectric development incursion into Cree territory. The Crees won their case in the Quebec Superior Court, but the judgment was reversed by the Quebec Court of Appeal. However, this case established that the Crees had rights that should not be ignored. Through the study of law, Saganash saw both the value and the limitations inherent in pursuing legal means to secure Cree rights. He was Deputy Grand Chief from 1990 to 1993, and he has been the Grand Council of the Crees’ Director of Quebec Relations since 1995.

What both Moses and Saganash have in common is that they were brought up in the bush life. Their traditional Cree parents were aware of the importance of ensuring that their sons were educated in both the bush and school—for their own sake and for the future of the Cree people.

These leaders talk about their lives and their visions of the Cree future.

Dr. Ted Moses, 49

Grand Chief, interviewed in 1999

I was born at the Nemaska post. There were no clinics in those days. My parents just came off the trapline. They decided to spend the summer at the post. A few weeks after I was born, they paddled back to the trapline. I was in the front of the canoe, carried on my mother’s back over the portages. I was raised in my earlier years in the bush, on the trapline. I was about nine when I went off to residential school. It was time for me to learn English. I went down to Moose Factory [Ontario]; stayed there for a number of years.

When I was in the shower one day they called my name. I said, “Here I am,” and they said, “Okay, you’re leaving tomorrow morning; you’re taking the train and going to Brantford, Ontario.” After that I went up to Sault Ste. Marie. I left school when I was 19, went home. Did some work, then

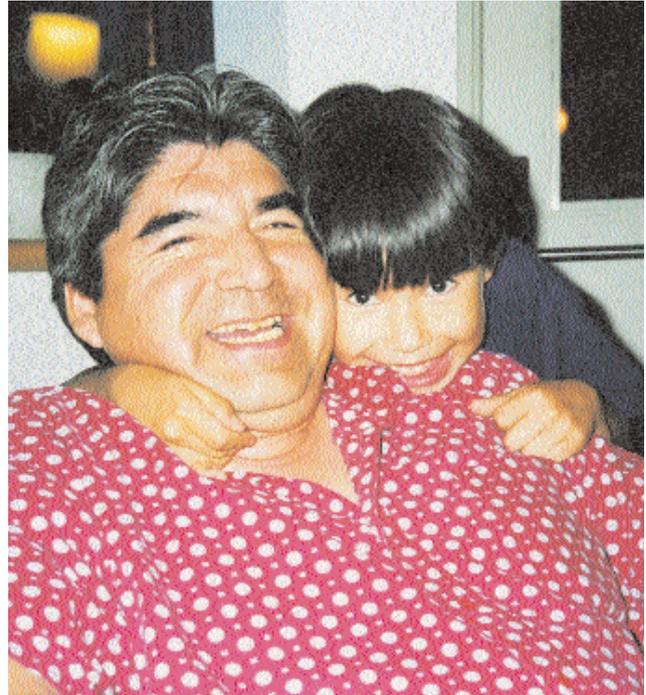
Because I lived in the bush with my parents, I consider myself to be very articulate in Cree. I can do a speech or make presentations without having to resort to an English word.

did some courses at Ryerson and some studies at McGill.

I became band manager at Eastmain. Then I got a call from Robert Kanatewat, chief of Fort George at the time, and he told me over the bush phone that he would like me to come down and translate in the James Bay court case. I had always been translating for the elders in Eastmain. The late Chief Matthew Shanush and the two councillors in Eastmain didn’t speak any English, so I did all the reading and writing of correspondence and translated for them for Indian Affairs. I translated for public meetings and for people coming in and getting the plane.

In the court case, it was a bit scary because there were all sorts of rules that we weren’t familiar with—for example, when the person you were translating for asked you a question but should have been asking the court. But I was quite impressed with the judge (Mr. Justice Albert Malouf). I found him to be a very serious person who listened. Oftentimes it’s hard for people to do that. I found him very meticulous; he took notes and he asked questions. Of course, he was a clean judge and he wanted a clean record. He came from a minority and believed that they had a place in society, and he protected minority rights. He had moral values in the work that he did.

Our communities had been run by the Hudson’s Bay Company or [by the federal government department that handled] Indian Affairs from down south. When people were still going out onto the land they removed our kids, took us away from our parents. It was part of a cultural assimilation plan. What the [James Bay and Northern Quebec] Agreement brought was self-confidence, without having to buy into the assimilation. People have got to think of their culture and their way of life, and we have the land. The land has provided for us and we can continue our way of life and keep our language. But we still want to be able to accept some things that people in other parts of Canada have as a standard, such as new houses, sewage treatment, and so on.



I think the Agreement at that time was well thought out, considering the circumstances and considering the pressures we were under. I don't know if I can really call it a mistake, by the idea of having Aboriginal title extinguished, as a negotiable clause for the government at that time. On the other hand, the project was already going on. A road was going through with the construction projects, workers. We were seeing what was going to happen for the next 40 or 50 years, for our lifetime. They've never stopped building.

Now I speak out against extinguishment because I think it's a violation of international human rights. There's no other group that is subjected to that kind of policy; nobody else has to extinguish their rights in order to receive certain benefits that everybody else has got.

We have to realize where we were at that time. We wanted to get control over our education and health and I think Crees were really the ones who broke new ground and developed policies for Canadian Aboriginal people.

I know some people said we needed the project as a jolt to get us moving. But we didn't need the project. You know Crees have increased in population, they have gotten better educated. Now people's aspirations—I wouldn't say have changed—but now we are talking about not only controlling our own education and health but trying to influence Canadian or Quebec policy. Then, we wouldn't have had the bargaining power to do that. Considering the bargaining position we were in at the time, we were able to advance these things. Then we really developed very quickly. Most groups in the country would take a hundred years to sort through and get where we are.

We accepted what already existed but tried to make it more compatible with the Crees so that the Crees could do something with it.

I was one of the people involved in the negotiation. We could have said okay, we'll just have a deal on land compensation, remedial works . . . that type of thing. But we brought in many things while we were able to and while the governments were interested. We were going to get as much as we could out of it. It's what you do with it that really matters. I'd say, after the 25 years we've gone through, it's an evolution. It's like raising a young child: first, you're taught how to snare small game and when you are growing up you learn how to snare a lynx, then trap a beaver, then you move on to the moose.

I've visited the Cree communities and I've talked to the trappers, the elders; they

I'm sure we could have more Cree content in the schools. Now that we've developed our communities, including the language, we have TV and radio broadcasts in Cree. People can communicate with each other. It's part of this process of self-confidence. It's no longer a power from outside that tries to make you into something. You know you're a Cree. You have a land, a way of life; you can take off tomorrow and go trapping if you want and nobody is going to bother you. You can use your language. That's part and parcel of preserving the land, the traditions, a way of life.

still have a lot of resentment towards the hydro project about the loss of the land. People don't like that. The land that we were raised on and grew up on. There are a certain category of people like trappers and the older people who had a much closer relationship with the land than the younger generation.



We're not just isolated communities. We have access to the world and we're known around the world and we're recognized. We're one of the strongest Aboriginal nations—people know the Crees. It's because of public awareness.

It's a big challenge to bring Cree values to other people. I think there is some hope. But we are going against a fast-growing stream. A big tidal wave. We have governments who think that protection of the environment and protection of Indigenous rights are at the lower end of the spectrum.

People have seen the impact of what has happened. I'm sure there are benefits but the benefits are being held back, governments are stalling. I've been involved in these negotiations for a number of years, and I've seen it in other parts of the country: it's not written government policy but it's current practice. Once they've got a deal, once they've got extinguishment, then they try and go for more, by getting a group to sign off: go away and don't come back no more.

I've seen situations like in Manitoba, the same things that have been directed toward us: they've had an agreement, they've had a similar organization to the Grand Council, and now the governments are trying to break it down, to go around it and weaken the strength, and then pick them off, band by band. Out of the five bands in northern Manitoba, four have already signed off under the pretense that they are signing a comprehensive agreement. But there's no reference to the main agreement, only the implementation agreement. Every time they deliver something, you sign on the paper to say that they've fulfilled their obligations. I think this is where leaders are wrong: we don't have the right to sign off rights.

We Crees have to be strong, but we are starting to fragment. Different councils are going off in different directions. People are not being listened to; we are not a united and strong nation. The Agreement is there and we can make it work. My approach is to try and have them implement their obligations without putting the Crees in a situation where we have to sign off. So I'm very hesitant about having another agreement on top of the existing agreement. Let's get down to fulfilling that first agreement before we move on to another one. For example, Hydro-Québec promised us 150 jobs in 1986. They never did that. Then they offered the Crees the concept of partnership with jobs. They are offering jobs today and they haven't even delivered on the first round of jobs.

I remember when the only form of communication was to send a letter. Stamps were five cents at the time and you waited for a couple of months before you got a response. There were no telephones, no other means of communication, except to fly out. If it was urgent, there were radiograms, which were expensive, but you had to keep your message short and simple because it was a radio telephone. Now we have telephone, we have teleconference, we have fax machines, we have Internet.

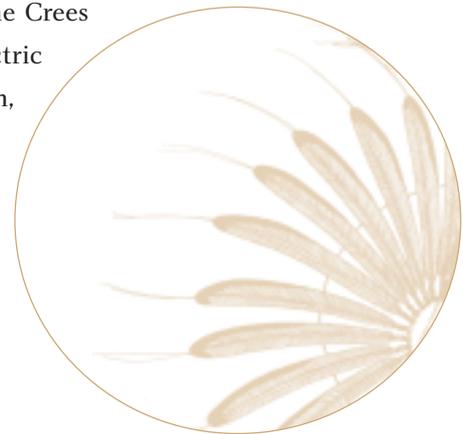
At one point I was talking to an African ambassador; this was when I was lobbying to have a treaty study carried out by the United Nations. I was lobbying the members of the commission and I was getting them documentation. The ambassador said, "Ted, when you first came up to me and you told me that you were a Cree, an Indian, I was shocked by the fact that you are standing in front of me. In my mind there were no more Indians—they were killed off or assimilated. You've informed me that there are over 300 million Indigenous people in the world. I thought they had already disappeared."

If we are not practising the culture, it has no meaning, and we don't have much chance. What the Crees had was the land, a way of life, a group of people who were still practising hunting, fishing and trapping, which had a value and meaning to them.

Especially, the spirituality that was attached to this tradition and culture. If we didn't have that, we wouldn't be a community.

A lot of elders and trappers who have come up to me when I've been in meetings have been saying, "We don't want any more hydroelectric development, we don't want any more forestry, we don't want any mining. We don't want to see all the benefits of the land that we've owned going out and serving other people. Is someone trying to make us poor?"

Now we have Hydro-Québec coming in and offering partnership to the Crees and jobs and all of these benefits, but I don't think the people see hydroelectric development as being beneficial to them. Sure, we get some compensation, but all in all, if you add up forestry, hydroelectric development, mining, several billion dollars go out every year. It's a great deal for them when they can give out a one-time payment as compensation to the Crees. And they extinguished our rights. It's a violation of human rights to take a group of people and make them poor.



Dr. Ted Moses, 51

Grand Chief, interviewed February 2002

The New Agreement that we have signed with Quebec, it's a combination of many things—past efforts in international forums, Cree campaigns, roadblocks, and legal battles. The fact that we had filed close to 30 legal proceedings against Quebec was certainly seen as a threat. The differences between the Crees and Quebec were getting wider, and we live in the same province. At some point, you have to stop and ask yourself whether we will let our differences divide us forever.

Our New Agreement with Quebec accomplishes much more than I have seen in any other agreement with Aboriginal peoples in Canada. We still have to fight, I have no doubt about that. There is much more to be done. No one is claiming that we have everything we need. But I sincerely believe that the New Agreement will help us solve our job and housing problems. This, by itself, is a huge accomplishment.

Some people would have you believe that traditional Crees are against the New Agreement. Before we signed it, the Grand Council went around to all the communities to listen to the people. During the community consultations, I heard from many traditional people—trappers and elders. They had a lot to say. They have a lot of wisdom, and they are very practical people. With very few exceptions, the elders and the trappers spoke in favour of the New Agreement. They reminded us that the trapping life is not easy. They said that the cost of trapping and the price of furs make it difficult to be a trapper now. They spoke about a time when furs had much greater value. They are sorry that so few young people now hunt, fish, and trap for a living. But they are concerned about the future for our Cree young people. They spoke of their responsibilities for their

The hardest part was deciding whether we could try to resolve our disputes. In the end, we showed we would rather negotiate than litigate.

families and their concern for how the young people would support their families. They want to do what is best for most of the Crees.

It has also been said that I, as Grand Chief, am selling out our Cree culture for money. But when I visited the communities to talk about the New Agreement, people showed me a lot of respect. These people know me and my family. They know that my own family's trapline will be right in the middle of this development. I have thought a lot about this. I could easily have said: "I don't care if this New Agreement saves a huge amount of Eeyou Istchee from flooding. I don't care if it creates jobs for Crees or gives us economic development or housing. I was with my father on our trapline, and I don't want it touched." My family is one of the small number of families that will see flooding on their traplines. So does that mean I should have refused this deal?

Why should we have to invest in Hydro-Québec to gain equity in something all of us already own? We already have equity. Our Cree equity is our consent for the diversion of the Rupert River.

We have to decide our future with our minds, not our hearts. I learned that from my late dad, a trapper. Sometimes you have to use your head. You might want something very much. Your emotions might push you; your feelings might try to take over. That's okay when you are in love, or you look out on a beautiful fall morning and feel the power of the Creator. But you have to keep reason in the picture. God gave us our intelligence to use it, to figure things out. We also have to use that part of our being. When we live on the land, we constantly use our minds to observe, to know what to do. We don't allow our intelligence to be drowned by our emotions. We wouldn't make it through one day if we did that on the land.

When I have said we need money to develop our communities, people have argued that we would have been wiser to invest in Hydro-Québec than to go with this New Agreement. We don't have to invest: we already own the rights. Why else is Quebec seeking Cree consent? Under the New Agreement, we will obtain a direct percentage of Hydro-Québec's resources without any requirement for us to invest directly. With our own source of revenue, we can do whatever we want, including investing in Hydro-Québec.

I've faced a lot of criticism over this New Agreement with Quebec. I used to joke that if you don't try to do anything, you will never get into any trouble. But, no one fights just to be fighting. We have always been fighting for something—full respect for our rights. I used to be criticized for fighting for rights. Some people said, "Forget about rights. You can't eat rights." I always said, "Rights are the only thing you can eat, because if people don't respect your rights, you won't have anything to eat." We need our rights to be respected.

Think about the history of Aboriginal people on this land since the Europeans came. If valuable minerals are found on our land, if trees grow in our territory, or if rivers flow across our lands, our ownership of these resources has not been legally acknowledged. We have been expected to move out of the way of development so that others could enjoy the benefits of the resources on our ancestral lands. It has only been in very recent years that the idea of compensating Aboriginal people has been recognized, and even then compen-

sation for loss was very minimal in comparison to the vast wealth and resources taken away.

So we fight for our rights, and we fight for our lands and our rights to the resources on them. This New Agreement with Quebec, it acknowledges our right to benefit from the wealth of our lands, to participate in and to actually control its development. The Crees are breaking trail again in Canada. No Aboriginal people has ever had an opportunity like the one we have with Quebec. I think Premier [Bernard] Landry really understands who we are and how we fit into Quebec and Canada. At the same time, Quebec is showing its respect for the fundamental principles of international law. You know, this is the only example in Canada of a government authority recognizing and implementing the principles of self-determination that are called for by the United Nations Human Rights Committee. We have told the United Nations that this Agreement with Quebec represents a significant step forward in the relations between states and Indigenous peoples.

Now, if we could just get the Government of Canada to show the same respect for those same fundamental principles of international law. Like I said, we still have to fight, but in the meantime, we can move ahead with building houses and creating jobs for our people.



Romeo Saganash, 39

*Director of Quebec Relations, Grand Council of the Crees,
interviewed April 2002*

I'm from Waswanipi. I was born in the forest near Waswanipi and I lived the first six years of my life with my family in the bush. By the age of seven I was taken away to residential school. We were 14 in my family and most of us, except the four older ones, were sent to residential schools. I was sent to the one in La Tuque. I believe Matthew Coon Come and Abel Bosum were there as well, during my time. I spent the next 10 years at the residential school in La Tuque, a place between Three Rivers and Chicoutimi [Quebec]. That was probably the most disturbing part of my life. Essentially, you are taken away from your family, taken away from your territory, your culture, your language, and put into a setting that's very unfamiliar and strange for you, especially at that age.

I always wanted to be like my grandfather and my father. I wanted to be a hunter. For the first six years of my life that's what I did. I never wanted to go out of the bush. As a matter of fact, we always stayed in the bush and rarely went to the central village where everybody else gathered during the summertimes. So, that was the objective of my life—to become like my father and my grandfather. But I guess that others felt that was not my destiny and I was sent away to residential school.

At around 16, after my high school years, I came out of the residential school and I went back into the bush for two years before going to college. I spent those two years in the bush with my oldest brother, essentially because I missed the way of life, the Cree way of life. Then I went to college, what they call CEGEP in Quebec, and I did two years of that and then went back to the bush for another year and a half. So, by the time I was 20



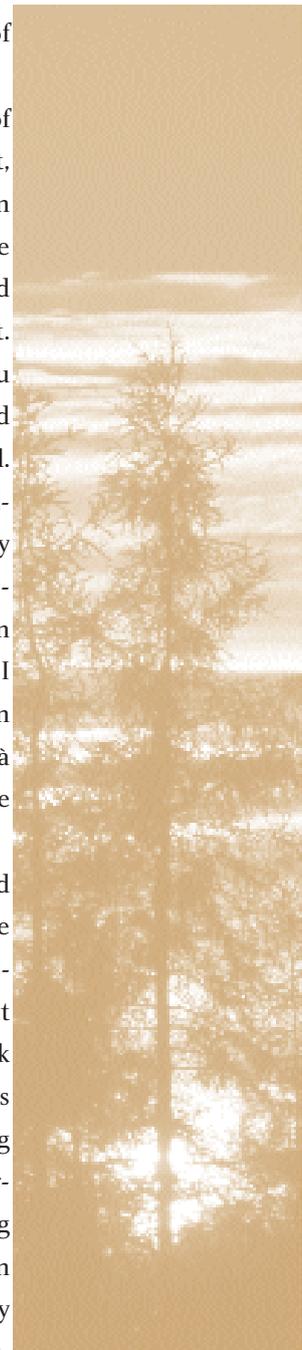
At La Tuque, I spoke Cree as my first language, the personnel at the residential schools were English-speaking people, but we were at French schools during the daytime. I was still learning Cree in the summer when I was with my parents. So when you have to learn three languages at the same time, you end up learning none of them very well. Nevertheless, I made it to university.

I had spent at least half of my lifetime in the bush and half of my lifetime studying.

In 1985 there was a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, and a symposium on the 1975 Agreement was organized in Montreal. I happened to be walking in the community in the fall of 1985 and bumped into the then-chief, Abel Kitchen, and he informed me of this important symposium on the Agreement. He said, "Romeo, I think this would be interesting for you. You should attend and we'll pay for your costs to go." So I went. And at that time I took the decision I was going to attend law school. I had heard about James O'Reilly [the lawyer], who had defended the Crees in court in the early 1970s, during the James Bay battle, and here he was on this panel at the symposium, debating about the role of the courts in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement negotiations. I saw him, I heard him, and I said, that's what I'm going to do. The following September, in 1986, I entered law school at the Université du Québec à Montreal. I graduated in 1989, and shortly after that I became Deputy Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees.

During that time, when we were waging our political and legal war against the Great Whale development project, the Meech Lake Accord had just died, and there were also negotiations in the context of the Charlottetown Accord. So I think it was an appropriate time for a Cree leader who could speak French. It was important for the Grand Council and the Crees to have someone to express himself or herself in French during that time of turmoil. I guess, to a certain extent, my role was important because of that. I don't necessarily take credit for anything else, but at least for that. When you can communicate in Quebec on these types of issues in the language of the majority of Quebecers, I guess your message is easier for others to understand.

I was Deputy Grand Chief from 1990 to 1993, when Matthew Coon Come was still Grand Chief. For a time, after 1993, I worked as a consultant with other First Nations in Quebec, on Aboriginal constitutional and environmental negotiations and issues. Then I came back in 1995 as the Director of Quebec Relations for the Grand Council, and that's where I am still.



I would hope that we can achieve the same thing with the federal government as we have with this agreement with Quebec. If we can do the same with the federal government, then we will have completed the circle.

After the signing of the AIP in October, when I was talking to the media people outside the National Assembly, I said that I sure hope that my sons and daughters will not be before your sons and daughters saying the same things and arguing the same things and complaining about the lack of implementation of this agreement.

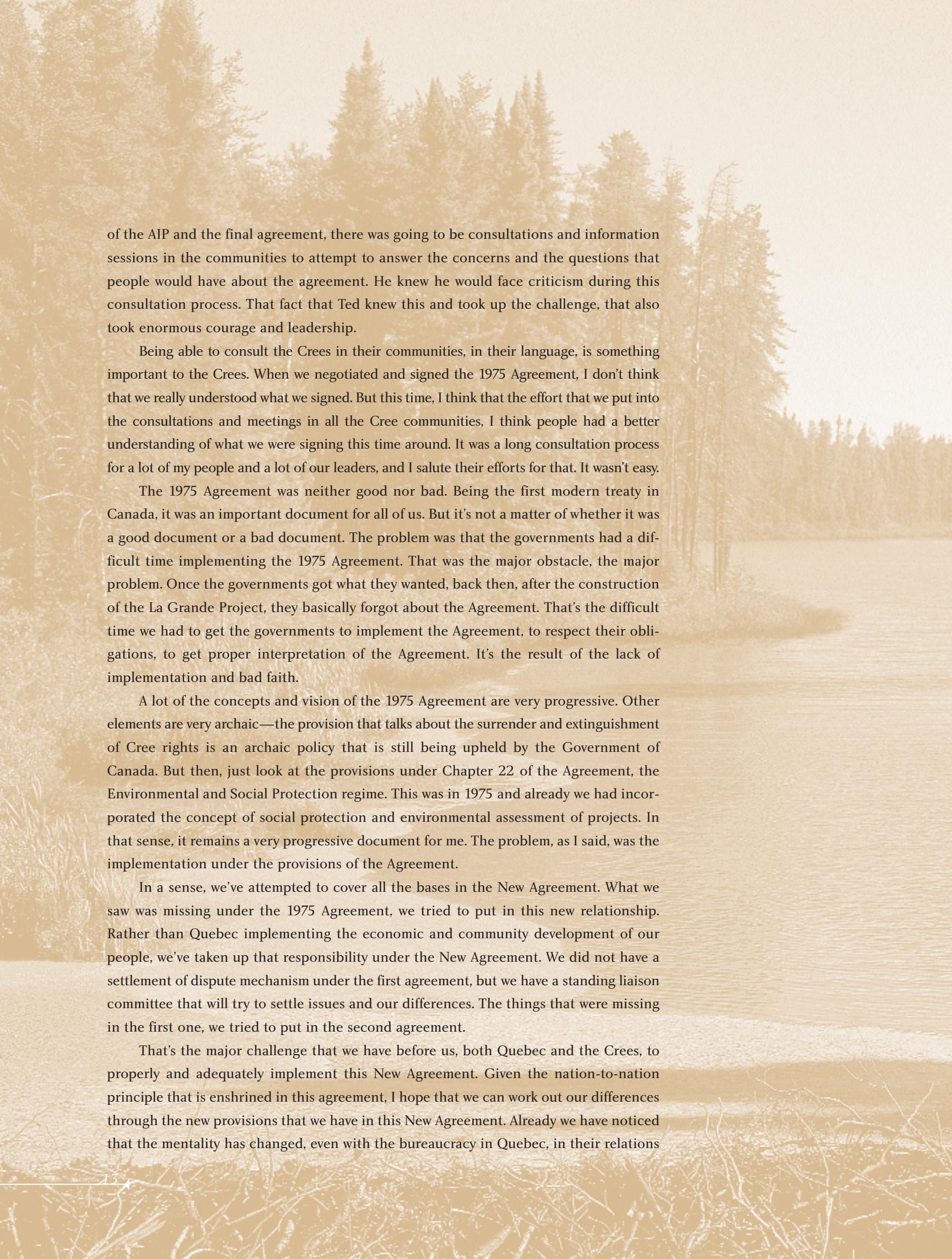
I was not involved in the negotiations to get to the Agreement in Principle for the New Agreement, but I did act as negotiator to get to the final agreement. I was the head negotiator on the forestry file. It was highly technical and very tough negotiations. The counterparts on either side of the table were pretty tough in their positions with respect to this agreement, with respect to what we each wanted around forestry. I was also involved in discussions at the central table whenever it touched on forestry.

I think the most fundamental change is the fact that we will be responsible for our economic and community development. It is a recognition of autonomy for the Crees, but certainly with autonomy come whole aspects of responsibility. So, it is said that self-government and self-determination is a matter of trial and error, and we've embarked on that path. We will surely make mistakes. This New Agreement is not a perfect agreement. A lot of the achievements that we accomplished with this agreement are a result of the past 25 years of work that was carried out and positions that were taken by the Crees in the past. This New Agreement is as much a contribution of Ted Moses today as it is a contribution of Matthew Coon Come and Billy Diamond, and even of Ted's early involvement in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

It's a long struggle and this is where we are now. Perhaps in the next 25 years there will be some room for improvement in this agreement as well. Obviously, those who think we should wait for the perfect agreement before signing anything, they'll have to wait for a long time because it never happens. A negotiated agreement is what it is, a "negotiated agreement." It's a matter of give and take and all that.

So, in my view, taking up responsibilities in this new agreement is something that reflects upon the maturity of your society and your people. We know what our problems are, we know what our challenges are, we know where our needs are. We should know by this time what our priorities should be. So we're taking up these responsibilities and it's not a question of whether or not Quebec will implement its obligations under the 1975 Agreement, it's a question of whether the Crees will now fulfill the hopes and dreams and aspirations of their own people. If it doesn't work out, we'll only have ourselves to blame and nobody else. That's what I like about this New Agreement, that's the major change.

What I've said since the time the AIP [Agreement in Principle] was signed in October 2001 is that I saw in Ted Moses enormous leadership and courage and I saw in Premier Bernard Landry a lot of political imagination and courage as well. To do what Ted did, negotiating the AIP, took a lot of leadership, and that's what I like about Ted Moses. That's what leadership is all about, it's what we expect of our leaders. The other thing in all this that I like is not only did Ted know that he was going to get criticized for the way he negotiated the AIP, in secrecy and all that, he knew that between the signing

A sepia-toned photograph of a forest with a path leading to a lake. The path is made of dirt and is flanked by tall grasses and trees. The lake is in the background, and the sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall tone is warm and nostalgic.

of the AIP and the final agreement, there was going to be consultations and information sessions in the communities to attempt to answer the concerns and the questions that people would have about the agreement. He knew he would face criticism during this consultation process. That fact that Ted knew this and took up the challenge, that also took enormous courage and leadership.

Being able to consult the Crees in their communities, in their language, is something important to the Crees. When we negotiated and signed the 1975 Agreement, I don't think that we really understood what we signed. But this time, I think that the effort that we put into the consultations and meetings in all the Cree communities, I think people had a better understanding of what we were signing this time around. It was a long consultation process for a lot of my people and a lot of our leaders, and I salute their efforts for that. It wasn't easy.

The 1975 Agreement was neither good nor bad. Being the first modern treaty in Canada, it was an important document for all of us. But it's not a matter of whether it was a good document or a bad document. The problem was that the governments had a difficult time implementing the 1975 Agreement. That was the major obstacle, the major problem. Once the governments got what they wanted, back then, after the construction of the La Grande Project, they basically forgot about the Agreement. That's the difficult time we had to get the governments to implement the Agreement, to respect their obligations, to get proper interpretation of the Agreement. It's the result of the lack of implementation and bad faith.

A lot of the concepts and vision of the 1975 Agreement are very progressive. Other elements are very archaic—the provision that talks about the surrender and extinguishment of Cree rights is an archaic policy that is still being upheld by the Government of Canada. But then, just look at the provisions under Chapter 22 of the Agreement, the Environmental and Social Protection regime. This was in 1975 and already we had incorporated the concept of social protection and environmental assessment of projects. In that sense, it remains a very progressive document for me. The problem, as I said, was the implementation under the provisions of the Agreement.

In a sense, we've attempted to cover all the bases in the New Agreement. What we saw was missing under the 1975 Agreement, we tried to put in this new relationship. Rather than Quebec implementing the economic and community development of our people, we've taken up that responsibility under the New Agreement. We did not have a settlement of dispute mechanism under the first agreement, but we have a standing liaison committee that will try to settle issues and our differences. The things that were missing in the first one, we tried to put in the second agreement.

That's the major challenge that we have before us, both Quebec and the Crees, to properly and adequately implement this New Agreement. Given the nation-to-nation principle that is enshrined in this agreement, I hope that we can work out our differences through the new provisions that we have in this New Agreement. Already we have noticed that the mentality has changed, even with the bureaucracy in Quebec, in their relations

with the Crees and the Cree problems.

It's going to take time to get everything into gear, but I think we're on the right path with respect to all this. There are different schedules in the New Agreement, and things will get gradually implemented over the first year. Already we have started to implement some of the forestry provisions through consultations with the local trappers. A lot of committees and boards are being set up under the New Agreement and things are being carried out on both sides, and it's going smoothly. There are no major obstacles yet.

Of course we expect resistance from, for instance, the forestry industry. If you take it from the perspective that this a nation-to-nation agreement, and what the two nations have decided the industry has to follow, then the new measures that will be in place, the new norms and standards that are in the agreement, will have to be respected. I'm confident that the industry will collaborate with the Crees and Quebec in implementing and respecting these new standards that we have established. That's their obligation. I don't think we should renegotiate with the industry as to how these measures can be implemented over a certain period of time. The standards are there, we negotiated them on a nation-to-nation basis, and they have to be followed. We've noticed that the Quebec government has tried to implement similar measures elsewhere in the province, but because of the reluctance and resistance of the forestry industry, the government had to back off. That's something that the government cannot do with this agreement. The industry will have to understand that and collaborate with the Crees and the government to implement these measures.

The Cree Government Working Group has been around for a couple of years. It's a group whose members are appointed by the Grand Council. This group has a mandate to suggest recommendations to adapt our traditional institutions to the challenges of today. In 1974 we created the Grand Council of the Crees for a purpose, to defend Cree rights and interests. Over the years, the Grand Council has evolved, but a lot of the other institutions that we have in Cree territory have not adapted to the changes over the years. In that sense, 27 years after the signing of the 1975 Agreement, I think it is more than appropriate and relevant that we have the Cree Government Working Group to take a serious look at our institutions and to think about how to adapt them to our needs today. This New Agreement with Quebec sort of adds to their mandate. It brings in a whole new context, a whole new perspective from which we have to consider and assess the institutions and adapt them to our contemporary needs.

Sure, we have traditional values, we have traditions and traditional norms that we used in response to the challenges that we had 400 or 1,000 years ago, or even 100 or 200 years ago. But these traditions haven't adapted to the problems and the environment that we are in today. These traditional institutions cannot possibly have the answers to all the problems and challenges that we have today. We are in a completely new context, a completely new environment where there are several other governments that we have to interact with, there is development taking place in the territory, the territory is occupied by others who are not Cree. So, we have to adapt our own institutions, even our tradi-

tional ones, to the realities of today. All societies and all peoples on this planet have to go through that eventually. So that's what we have to do. It's not a question of denying or rejecting our traditions, our traditional values, and our traditional institutions. It's just a matter of adapting to a modern setting where we have to strive to survive as a people, a distinct nation, a distinct society.

When we talk about the need for jobs for our youth, we know that many youth will continue to come on the job market for the next while. If we don't do anything in that regard, then we are heading for a major social crisis in our communities. Despite the fact that the Crees are perceived as a fairly developed people compared with other First Nations in this country, because of the 1975 agreement that we signed, if you look at the social, economic and other indicators, you'll notice that our suicide rate is only slightly lower than that of other First Nations, our psychosocial problems are similar, and so on. So, in that respect, nothing really has changed. In my view, that comes from the fact that we never had access to our own resources for our own development. Our development potential was limited to Category 1A reserve lands, and that's it. With very little of our own resources, with no benefits from the development of our own resources in the vast majority of our traditional territory, that's been a problem. When the Government of Canada announced its Healing Fund for First Nations, a fund of \$350 million, my first reaction was, well, once you heal these people, what are they going to do then?

I think Crees have this challenge. Given the fact that we still have people who are living the Cree traditional way of life, we will have to strike a balance between those who have chosen this way of life and want to continue it and those who want to get into the mainstream economy and get jobs. The economic development provisions of the New Agreement allow for that. Development in the territory will take place. I believe there is a need for it. But development will have to take place while respecting the environment, and respecting the Cree way of life, which a large percentage of our people still consider important.

That's going to be a major difference in the future. The annual funds that we will be getting will provide for development and opportunities for our young people. Another challenge will come from the outside. A lot of people will be looking at the Crees and seriously looking at how the Cree Nation will fare in the context of this New Agreement and this new direction we have chosen for ourselves. That's an important role, because other First Nations will be looking our way when trying to find solutions for their own people. We've said since the signing of this agreement that we believe that this is the direction that other First Nations should take. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended this direction when they said that, fundamentally, First Nations people need to have access to their own resources for their own development. That's what modernity is all about. Octavio Paz, a South American author, said that modernity is a question of adapting, adopting and reinventing your way of life. That's what the Crees are doing.

I only can speak for myself, but a lot of us, in a way, by being born Cree and being born Indian, were born into politics. Sadly, our best resources in all our communities, not just the Crees, but across the country, are thrown into politics and never got a chance to do something else, something that they would have preferred, because they are all dragged and thrown into politics. With this New Agreement, some of us can concentrate on what's good for our people, on not being involved in political battles and legal battles with governments but putting our efforts, our energies, our emotions on people and developing our nation and society. It's time to work for ourselves and for our people and not fight and argue all the time with governments. I'm pretty sure that if it hadn't been for our political struggles and legal battles with governments, we'd probably have had more artists and musicians and authors in our communities. But our best resources were all involved in politics because we had no choice. So that's a major change. We'll have more time for our own people, our families, and for this new relationship with Quebec. It will take time and effort to implement this New Agreement properly, but I think this is a major personal change for a lot of us.

In my case, this agreement brings a sense of great relief, especially as Director of Quebec Relations. I have been at this for more than 20 years now. I started working with the Cree organization back in 1981. This is the beginning of a new direction and it's a relief in that sense. The Agreement was signed in February [2002], and we expect that it will be adopted in legislation by the Quebec National Assembly before the summer recess at the end of June [2002].