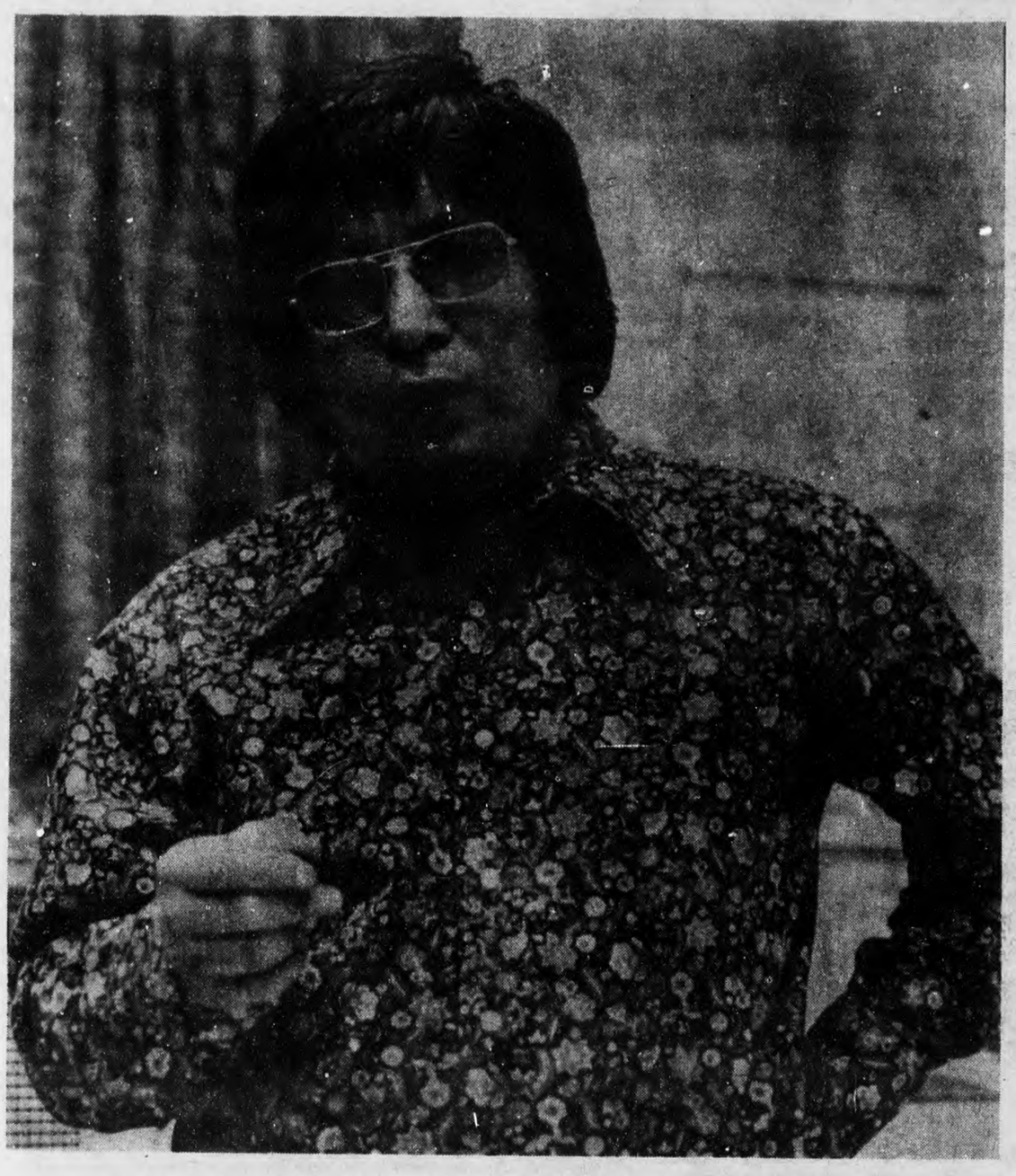
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Andrew Nicholas of the Union of New Brunswick Indians .

PHOTO BY SHEDD

By STEVE BELDING

The basic difference between Indians as an ethnic minority group from others (French, negroes, etc) is that they are traditionally a responsibility of the federal government as stated in the BNA Act. There are 4500 registered Indians in the province of NB, most of them living on 13 reserves (6 Maliseet, 7 Micmac tribes). Of these 60 percent are living on welfare. In education an estimated 80 percent - 90 percent drop out of public schools before finishing. The provincial government which accepts little responsibility for Indian conditions has no present treaties for its land.

When interviewed by the BRUNSWICKAN, District Superintendent of Indian Affairs, David Gorley thought that the federal government's attitude toward Indians was changing as reflected by the increase in expenditures (approximately $5 million in 1946 to over $260 million in 1971). However, he said, "there are certain problems which you have in any community. I don't think their's (NB Indians) are any different and that they are human problems." The main problem concerning the supposed job-shortage he thought was that "work is not available adjacent to the homes."

Gorley deals primarily with the Indian Chiefs of Councils and their councillors. These Band Councils are elected by the people in the reserves. Each reserve has a chief and one councillor per 100 Indians. At the St. Mary's Reserve in Devon there is one chief and three councillors.

Indians who were interviewed thought that generally they were still discriminated against when looking for a job. Indian chief Harold Sappier of the St. Mary's reserve said that ten years ago discrimination was open. Nobody would hire an Indian and they were not allowed in liquor stores, but treated as minors. Today a few Indians are "hired just to make it 'look good'," he said, but bias is still there.

Welfare, the chief thought, was killing initiative. Where before the dawn of the welfare state, his people would make baskets, canoes and simple artifacts to eek out a meagre living, today they just go on welfare and get more money.

On dealing with the federal government, Sappier said that first the Indians had to deal their projects with the District Superintendent's office in Fredericton, then the Regional Superintendent in Amherst, and finally with the bureaucrate in Ottawa. There was simply too much red tape to get any positive action.

In discussion with Andy Nicholas, Vice President of the Union of NB Indians, it was claimed that there was still "subtle discrimination" against Indians when they are job- seeking.

One of the main problems in this respect, he thought, was that there is "no incentive to make an economic viability" on the reservations. The union is pressing the Federal government to set-up programs where the Indians can establish craftshops and factories on the reserve where an Indian has more of an identity.

The Union of NB Indians is a political body formed about three years ago, elected by the Band Councils. It acts as a pressure group for Indian interests as well as educating the non-Indian public and does research in the area of aboriginal rights.

Nicholas thought Indians generally have developed "new attitudes" of late. They have begun to "organize" their platforms and for the first time "the Indian people are getting involved." Also for the first time the Indians are representing themselves, whereas before they were exempted by a white delegate appointed by the federal government.

One of the pet projects of the Union at the moment is a proposed Heritage Centre to be constructed on the site of an old Indian Village near Woodstock. The purpose of it is to present " a more accpetable image of an Indian", and to help preserve their culture and identity. It would consist of an old Indian fort, Artisan shops, A Christian church and a museum.

A feasibility study was made for the Heritage Centre after the architects had drawn up the plans. "Not a very favorable reaction to our request was made, " said President Anthony Francis. The government quibbled about lack of available funds.

"Loss of identity" of the Indians was something which everyone was