

## ENVIRONMENT

# Saskatoon: A hotbed of radical human ecology?



PAUL HANLEY

Who knew? Saskatoon is a hotbed for the emerging radical human ecology movement. The international movement, launched by two Saskatoon women, aims to broaden human ecology — the discipline that studies the relationship between people and the environment — by infusing it with indigenous world views.

Indigenous people have traditionally seen man and the ecosphere as one interconnected whole, while conventional human ecology, grounded in the western scientific world view, has seen people as disconnected and separate from nature.

The academics are both Saskatoon-based indigenous women. Lewis Wil-

liams, a New Zealander of Maori/Scots background, is an adjunct professor of public health at the University of Saskatchewan. Rose Roberts, of Woodland Cree/Scots ancestry, was formerly with the university and is currently CEO of Saskatchewan's Northern Intertribal Health Authority.

Together, they have published a major academic book titled *Radical Human Ecology: Intercultural and Indigenous Approaches*. It will be launched in Saskatoon this week. (See the events list at the end of this column.)

Williams and Roberts have also created the organization KIN (kinincommon.com) to develop solutions to environmental and social problems from "a place of interconnectedness."

Culture has been described as "the sum of all social processes that make the artificial (or human constructed) seem natural." Our own materialistic culture is so normal to us

we don't realize it has been constructed — it seems natural, the way things are meant to be. That it is just one possible way of seeing and doing things, and one that was constructed for a purpose inimical to the public interest — and especially minority cultures — generally escapes our awareness.

For the past few hundred years, western culture, with its focus on materialism, rationality, and technology, has come to control the way almost everyone sees life and measures well-being.

Now, it is becoming increasingly apparent that western culture doesn't have all the answers, that the socioeconomic system it has created pits humans against nature, making it unsustainable.

The book aims to complement the dominant western paradigm with world views of deep interconnectedness, particularly those of indigenous and other tra-

ditional peoples. Although these cultures have been under attack, they continue to offer rich sources for alternative understandings of the world that are newly relevant as we come to terms with climate change, collapsing biodiversity and depleted resources.

Radical Human Ecology pioneers new directions in human-environmental relationships. With 22 international contributors — more than half being women and indigenous — it explores the power of indigenous and traditional peoples' world views to critique and complement the approach of western-style science. The book considers and compares theories of human ecology, indigenous and wisdom traditions, eco-spiritual and feminist perspectives and proposes some practical applications in education and community development.

Addressing human environmental well-being is a collective project, the

authors argue, requiring the involvement of all cultures, all generations, all disciplines and sectors of society.

Three local book launch/community conversation events will occur this week in Saskatoon, and everyone is invited to take part in the conversation:

- A Radical Human Ecology contributors' presentation and discussion will occur tonight from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Root Down Workers' Co-operative Café inside the Farmers' Market. It will feature talks by Williams and Roberts, and two other local contributors to the book, Nayyar Javed and Marie Lovrod.

- Radical Human Ecology: Student Perspectives will be held Wednesday at 4:30 p.m. at the University of Saskatchewan, ARTS 214. It will feature presentations by students Jeri Alderman-Hanson, Jared Brown, President, University of Saskatchewan Students' Union, and Tomas Borsa, vice-president of the

Saskatoon Psychology Students Association.

- Radical Human Ecology at the Grassroots will occur on Thursday from 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at CUM (Central Urban Metis Federation Incorporated), 8 Avenue M South. Speakers include poet Louise Hal Karen Archibald and Cleen Hamilton, CEO and Director, Aboriginal Relationships, Child Hunger Education Program; Johanna Bergerman, co-founder The Mothers Room; Lal Bharadwaj, toxicologist University of Saskatchewan. Families are welcome and a light supper will be provided.

The series is a community undertaking, with support from Affinity Cre Union, Community University Institute for Social Research, Saskatoon Health Region, School of Public Health — Women and Gender Studies Program, University of Saskatchewan KIN and Turning the T Bookstore.