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"A DESIRABLE PATTERN OF CO-OPERATIVE EFFORT FOR  
THE SERVICE AND ADVANCEMENT OF CANADIAN INDIANS"

by

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OCT 3 1963

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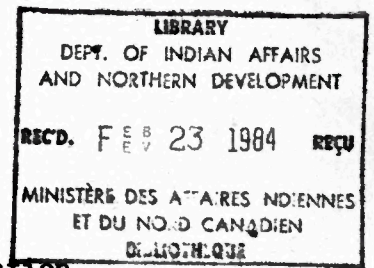
[A speech] presented at the Indian-Eskimo Association  
Conference, Sudbury, Ontario, October 31, 1962.

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Department of Citizenship and Immigration



Presented by

DR. G. F. DAVIDSON

Deputy Minister

at the

INDIAN-ESKIMO ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Sudbury, Ontario

October 31, 1962

"A Desirable Pattern of Co-operative Effort for  
the Service and Advancement of Canadian Indians"

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I was delighted to receive and accept John Melling's invitation to be your guest speaker this evening, as you prepare to open your Annual Conference of the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada.

Like the Association itself, I am a relative newcomer to the field of work with our Indian and Eskimo peoples, having assumed a measure of direct responsibility in respect of Indian Affairs less than three years ago. For the first year or so I decided that it would be better for me to speak as little as possible on subjects which could only reveal my ignorance, and to learn as quickly as I could. Now I have reached the point where I can no longer justify continued silence. Perhaps I am by this time slightly better informed than I was two years ago; perhaps I am just getting a little more careless about opening my mouth in public places. Whatever the reason, I think it is high time that I should find myself in attendance at an annual conference of the Indian-Eskimo Association. I hope that in what I have to say to you tonight I will be able to make some slight contribution to the success of your deliberations throughout the next few days.

I have searched in vain for a short descriptive title to give to my remarks. About all I can tell you in this connection is that I have been asked to speak about the forms of service, - both governmental and non-governmental, - now provided for the well-being and advancement of our Indian population; and to consider at the same time whether there are any clear trends developing in the patterns of service and policies by which the various levels of government and the voluntary agencies direct their activities for the benefit of Indians.

I shall do my best to meet the wishes of your Programme Committee and to direct my thinking for the next half-hour along the lines which they have suggested. But, since they could not suggest a specific title, I shall not try to do so either: when I am finished each one of you can call it by any name you wish.

What are the forms of governmental and non-governmental service down through the years? Has there been a pattern? Is there a trend discernible? If so, what is the nature of that trend? In what direction do we seem to be moving?

I imagine that most of you have had the same experience that I have had on numerous occasions, including this morning, as I left Ottawa to take the plane for Toronto and for Sudbury. As you drive to the airport, you seem to move through a confusion of traffic - cross roads and traffic going off in all different directions; buildings and fields and fences, piles of rock and bits of forest and water scattered aimlessly hither and yon as you make your way by car to the Airport. Everything seems disorderly confusion; nothing much makes order or good sense.

Then, as you take off in the aircraft and begin to gain altitude, suddenly you begin to discern a tidy, orderly array of roads and fields, fences and wood lots, farm-houses and streams. The landscape now has taken on a tidy, ordered look, - a quilted pattern. From the perspective of distance everything begins to take on that arranged and organized look. The higher you fly, the more clean-cut becomes the appearance of orderly arrangement.

In some degree, ladies and gentlemen, the moral of this story can also be applied to our programs in the field of Indian Affairs.



Reduced to its simplest terms, the moral of the story is this: if we could only get far enough away from the day-to-day confusion of our manifold overlapping activities in the field, - if we could only gain the perspective afforded by time and distance, perhaps in the field of work with Indians too a pattern might be seen to be emerging. Perhaps then some, if not all, of the things we are presently doing might begin to make sense.

I believe that there is a certain pattern to be discerned in the network of services provided over the years for our Indian people. I believe there is also a trend developing, - a historic trend which can be traced in some degree from past decades, and which, if traced, can point the way to some extent to the patterns which may be expected to develop for the future. I believe that the confusion and the bewilderment we all experience, as we try to make some sense out of present patterns and programs, arises to a large extent from our own close day-to-day proximity to the various pieces of the complex jigsaw puzzle we are trying to put together. In working on a jigsaw puzzle you can lose yourself in detail, trying to make sense out of a particular piece or a special segment of the total picture: in the field of Indian Affairs likewise you can become thoroughly confused, bewildered, and despair of progress by becoming obsessed with some particular need or program, and failing to relate it to the larger perspectives.

It is not my intention to trace in any detail the history of our slowly-awakening concern, as citizens of Canada, for the needs of our Indian fellow citizens. That awakening has been sadly slow in coming; it has been tragically delayed. It is not so very many decades since Canadian governments and the bulk of the Canadian people salved their consciences and assuaged their sense of guilt and responsibility, - if indeed they had any feeling of guilt and responsibility, - by supporting in meagre fashion the work of the churches, church schools and voluntary "do-good" organizations in the field of Indian Affairs. Government, as such, contented itself with the most limited discharge of its bare responsibilities under the treaties contracted with various Indian bands; with the introduction of the rule of law through all parts of the country

through the R.C.M.P.; and with a strictly limited range of administrative, health and other services, designed to spend as little public money as possible, - enough perhaps to keep our Indian population from falling back too far, but not enough certainly to assure even the barest minimum of progress or recovery from the pathetic state in which they had been left, as a result of the white man's take-over of the country.

[ As the years have gone by, and the Canadian conscience has begun to stir, government has gradually begun to assume a larger measure of responsibility for those services which governments everywhere have recognized as being the responsibility of the public authority. In fields such as education, hospitals, and other health and social services, our 20th century society has recognized now for a generation or more that the public authority, acting through the various levels of government, has a basic responsibility for establishing, administering and maintaining minimum standards of service. ]

Now, as it happens, under our constitution, basic services in these fields are in large part the responsibility of the provincial and local authorities. This creates a problem when it comes to establishing the pattern by which the public authority undertakes to extend these same basic services to our Indian population. For many years, - in fact until relatively recent years, - provincial and local authorities have taken the position, - relying on the existence of the treaty provisions, the Indian Act itself and the traditional role of the federal authority in the field of Indian Affairs, - that provincial and municipal authorities had no responsibility whatever for providing to the Indian residents of the province or municipality the basic public services provided otherwise routinely to all other sections of the community. As a consequence of this position, the federal authority was left in the well-nigh impossible position of having to extend a wide range of basic educational, hospital, health and other social services over the entire expanse of the Canadian sub-continent to serve the needs of 150,000-200,000 people of Indian status.

It requires no genius of comprehension to see that the



establishment under federal auspices of a separate range of nation-wide services for a relatively small segment of our population involved, - and still involves, - an unnecessarily large and uneconomical administrative structure, as well as duplication of service and unevenness in the quality and quantity of services made available in relation to provincial services operating alongside of them. But the administrative weaknesses of this arrangement were not the only, - or the most, - unfortunate part of it. What was even more unfortunate was the result of this unwieldy arrangement, so far as the Indian people themselves were concerned.

Quite clearly, the original intent and purpose of the treaty arrangements, the Indian Act itself and the special responsibilities assumed by the federal authority with respect to Indians was that these should be special and additional measures of protection, - designed for a group of Canada's population who were specially in need of help. It was not intended surely that the purpose or the result of these special measures should be to deprive our Indian people of the ordinary protection provided by those measures and made available under ordinary government auspices to all Canadians.

Yet, whether this was the intention or not, for many years it was the practical result. Because of the treaty provisions, the Indian Act and other special federal measures designed to deal with Indian problems in a special way, there developed an attitude, - almost universally accepted for many years and still widely held, - that Indians were in some way wards of the federal government. Not only were they wards, but by that very fact they were the sole and exclusive responsibility of the federal authority with respect to the entire range of services normally provided to provincial and local residents by the provincial and municipal governments. This meant that local authorities considered themselves relieved of any responsibility for providing to Indian residents of the local area or province those normal services which automatically were available to all other members of the community. The Indians, as a consequence, found themselves in a less favourable position than their local neighbours, instead of the more favourable position which it must surely have been the original intention to provide for them. In many places, for

many years, over wide areas of the country they were denied access to the normal services of the local and provincial authority, and left to rely on the remote, thinly-spread and widely-scattered alternative services provided, under less than satisfactory administrative arrangements from far-off Ottawa. What is more, the Indian people had no vote: they were widely scattered and few in number: they had few powerful or authoritative voices to speak with knowledge and understanding on their behalf. Little wonder then that for many years their needs and interests were sadly neglected, - and that the treatment and service they received was in all too many instances second-best or even worse.

Someone has said that recognition of weakness or short-coming is the first step on the road to a solution of the problem. If this be true, then I think that within the last two decades we have seen a good deal of evidence that the corner has been turned and that we are now on the road to an improved pattern of service, under governmental auspices, to the Indian people of our nation. This has involved a change of attitude on the part of all levels of government. First of all the federal government, which has unquestionably the prime responsibility in this matter, has reflected the growing concern of the Canadian people through an unprecedented extension of the range of services which it provides for the benefit of the Indian people. Ample details can be provided to document this assertion, - the most notable being that, whereas in the 1930's total annual federal expenditures on behalf of the Indians of Canada barely exceeded \$1 million, the federal budget now carries in the two branches of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Services annual expenditures totalling almost \$75 million. This does not include expenditures in such fields as family allowances, unemployment insurance, war veterans' benefits, old age security or other assistance provisions in which the federal government shares. Taken altogether, it can fairly be said that federal expenditures from all sources on behalf of Indians will shortly be approaching a figure of \$100,000,000 annually.

More reassuring than this, by far, in my opinion at least, is the growing evidence that provincial governments, and to a



lesser extent municipal governments, are now coming to regard the Indian people of their areas, not as federal wards, but as an integral part of their own people for whom they have, and willingly accept, a responsibility. As a result, the Indian people in many areas across Canada today are coming to be accepted more and more as a part of the community in which they live: less and less are they seen, and treated, as a race or group apart. Increasingly, in a wide variety of public undertakings, provincial and local authorities are joining in effective operating partnership with the federal government to ensure the provision of provincial and local services to Indians on the same basis as to other members of the community, - and to ensure by the same token the same quality of service as others receive.

Let me give three illustrations of what I mean. From 1927 to 1952 federal-provincial old age and blind pension benefits were not available to Indians. Indians were specifically declared to be ineligible by a provision in the federal law, inserted at the request of the provinces, who argued that, since Indians were a federal responsibility, they should not be eligible for assistance which the provincial government would have to share.

That was the situation up until 1952. Since 1952, however, the federal and provincial governments have joined together in recognizing Indians as eligible for assistance under the Old Age Assistance Act, the Blind Persons Act, the Disabled Persons Act, on the same basis as any other citizens of the community.

I should perhaps have mentioned also, in passing, that since 1940 the Unemployment Insurance Act, since 1945 the Family Allowances Act, and since 1952 the Old Age Security Act, have provided federal benefits for eligible Indians on the same basis as other members of the population.

Item 2: In the field of education, municipal and provincial school authorities within the past ten years have entered into partnership arrangements with the federal government to provide under joint school agreements for the education of our Indian children



side by side with other children of the community. Education under the B.N.A. Act is a matter of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. Over the years provincial and local school authorities, by virtue of this constitutional responsibility, have acquired a competence, a standard of excellence, a degree of experience and an array of qualified personnel which it would be difficult and uneconomical for any national authority to attempt to duplicate for the purpose of providing educational facilities and services to 45,000 Indian children scattered throughout the length and breadth of Canada. Yet Indian children, if they are to grow up and live side by side as equals with their fellow Canadians, must be assured of the same opportunity of education, - and equally of the same quality of education, - as other Canadian children. Surely the best way to ensure that this objective is attained is to make arrangements with the authorities best equipped to provide the service, - that is to say the established provincial and local school authorities, - under shared financial arrangements, - both capital and operational, - that are suitable to both.

That is what is being attempted through the joint school agreements. Whereas, only a few years ago, the number of Indian children receiving their education together with white children in local schools was relatively small, it has risen by leaps and bounds in recent years and stands today at almost 15,000. This figure in itself is an increase of almost one-third over the preceding year. Integrated education is being extended increasingly to the high school level and the number of Indian students attending non-Indian high schools has risen correspondingly by almost 100% in the last three years, - from 1457 in 1959 to 2755 in 1962.

I do not know what you think of this trend, ladies and gentlemen, but to me this is the most hopeful sign in the entire picture, so far as the future of our Indian children and people is concerned. Here is the real hope, as I see it, of ensuring at long last over the next few decades an equal place for the individual of Indian origin in our Canadian society.



Item 3: In the field of hospital care too, - very largely through the medium of our public hospital insurance program, - a giant step has been taken in building a federal-provincial-local partnership in the provision of hospital care to our Indian population. Specialized Indian hospitals continue to operate in some areas: specialized public health and other health services continue to be provided as a supplement to basic health services of the kind that provincial and local health departments generally provide. But more and more, in the health, education, social welfare, pension, child welfare and other fields, the principle is being established that Indians are full-fledged citizens of the community, equal in status to others, entitled to equal treatment in terms of normal provincial and local basic community services; and that, in addition to that, as a supplement to that, - not as a substitute for that, - they are also entitled by virtue of their Indian status to certain additional benefits, services and forms of protection at the hands of the federal government.

I would not wish anyone to form the impression, from anything I have said, that I believe the task has been completed, - the victory won, - and that equality of treatment on all fronts has now been assured for our native peoples. Far from it: the millennium has by no means arrived: the struggle continues. It must and will continue, day after day, on a piece-meal basis, - with an inch of progress here today, and another inch there tomorrow. I would be an optimist indeed if I were to venture the prediction that the task will be completed in my lifetime or in yours. But the trend is unmistakeable: and the fact of progress and the forward direction of that progress is there for all to see. It is the joint task of all of us, - our joint responsibility to see that the pace of that progress does not slacken, - that it accelerates by every means consistent with the true interests of the Indian people of Canada. A century of indifference and neglect cannot be overtaken in a decade, or even in two decades. But it is something to recognize that the determination to overtake the lost decades of the past exists, and that the task will be persisted in until it is accomplished.



I have said nothing, Mr. Chairman, up to this point about the contribution or the function of the voluntary agencies in this field. That would indeed be the subject of a separate paper. You will be spending the greater portion of your time, I understand, in the succeeding meetings of this conference, assessing the role and function of voluntary agencies such as your own in work with our native peoples. I do not think it would be wise for me tonight to trespass on your time by trying to offer solutions to all the problems you will be grappling with tomorrow. But may I say just two things which to me are of vital importance in assessing the contribution, past and present, of the non-governmental agencies in the field of Indian Affairs.

It is well for all of us to remember, - especially for those of us who work in the public service, - that it was the non-governmental agencies, - the churches and other volunteer groups, - which kept alive the flame of humanitarian concern for improving the lot of our Indian people, during the long decades when the public authorities had failed as yet to hear or to respond to the first faint stirrings of the Canadian conscience. It was the voluntary agencies and groups who first served their Indian brethren in the absence of any adequate governmental services: it was they who stood by them, spoke on their behalf and sought to stir the consciences of Canadian citizens generally, as well as of their governments.

What governments have begun to do in recent decades is in large part the result of the earlier efforts of those volunteer groups. This is a fact which I know the Indian people themselves do not forget, and which governments and those who serve in positions of public authority would do well never to forget.

My second and last point is that, if we are to persist in our progress, - in our efforts to achieve, if not the millennium, at least our objective of equality of status for our Indian people, the responsibility for stimulation, criticism and encouragement, - for persistent effort, - for never being satisfied with past accomplishments, - must continue to rest very heavily on the shoulders of volunteer groups



and leaders. As one who has served in governmental departments now for 28 years, I can say that it is very easy for public servants like myself to become complacent, to be content with what we have accomplished or think we are accomplishing. The voluntary agencies must always have within themselves, and be prepared to manifest publicly, that feeling of "divine discontent" to which Cardinal Newman, I believe it was, referred, and which is at the heart of all true progress in a democratic society.

The only slightly irreverent comment which I would like to add as a final word, - in order to protect the hides and the ears of the poor public servants whom I represent, - is that, in the interests of all concerned, the expression of that divine discontent should perhaps be accompanied by a minimum of profanity, if best results are to be achieved.

October 31, 1962.