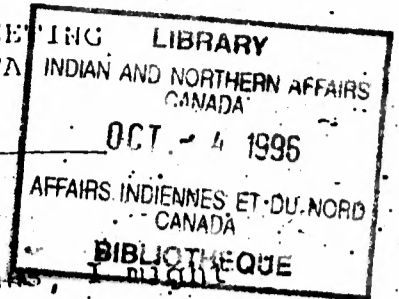


Statement by the Prime Minister at a
meeting with the Indian Association
of Alberta and the National Indian
Brotherhood, Ottawa, June 4, 1970

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GEORGE BROWN.

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT A MEETING
WITH THE INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA
AND THE NATIONAL INDIAN BROTHERHOOD
OTTAWA, JUNE 4, 1970.



Well, Mr. Chairman, and fellow Canadians, I might begin with something that your Vice-Chairman, Mr. Courchene referred to, the hundred years of frustration and dissatisfaction and slowness and injustice. We recognize that, we all recognize that, and that is why I think that the problem of the Canadian Indian has become an issue, that is why during the last election-campaign it was discussed at such great length by Canadians in many of the meetings which I attended, not only with Indians, and there were several, but also with the white people in Canada.

We were very frequently asked: "what are you going to do after a hundred years in order to give the Indian man his equality. What are you going to do after a hundred years to make sure there's no discrimination against him, that he will become a full Canadian, not a special Canadian, and so on".

And it is with this in mind ... It was I repeat an election issue not created by us or indeed only by you but by the Canadian people. I think it is something which has come to the surface of the conscience of the Canadian people. We realize that for a hundred years, generally not because of ill will, but because of, as you say in your red paper, perhaps a lack of understanding or of ignorance, or lack of an occasion to come to grips with the problem. But we do realize that the issue of Indian rights is very much on the conscience of the Canadian people and that it has to be solved.

And that is why one of the very first priorities of the government which was elected after that campaign was to appoint a minister -- and a young minister who also belonged to a minority in Canada and who had no prejudices and who honestly didn't think he was up to the job, but who had courage and determination and

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who had no vested interests in any particular solution -- we asked him to come to grips with this problem and to come to grips quickly with it. So, within a year, a little less, he did propose to Cabinet a statement of policy which perhaps hadn't been preceded by the kind of consultation which would satisfy everybody but which had come after a series of meetings in all provinces and with as many people as he had the time and energy to meet, in order to try to understand this problem which you yourselves say has not been understood by the Canadian people for a hundred years. So we gave him a year to try to understand it and to explain it to the government, and we had another very able minister, Mr. Andras to assist him, and we had many able people assist him, and the Cabinet discussed this policy.

Now here I can only repeat what the minister just said a moment ago, we came up with a policy proposal. We said the Canadian people, not only the Indian people, but the Canadian people are at a crossroads, that we have to decide now where we're going; if we don't take some steps it will be another hundred years before we come to grips with the problem. So let's do something which may not be perfect, which may not be final, but which is in the way of a proposal, a suggestion, so that Canadians, not only Indian Canadians, but all Canadians can come to face with this problem. And I'm very thankful that Mr. Courchene did recognize this, and he did say, well at least you came up with something and we hear it's not good and it's not satisfactory and won't be accepted. But at least, and I repeat what the minister said, we did do our best to come to grips with this problem with the means, and the minds, and the tools and the assistance we had at our disposal.

Well, now the next phase has arrived, the phase where the Indian people have looked at this and they have said, it's not good. And I'm sure that we were very naive in some of the statements we made in the paper. We had perhaps the prejudices

of small "L" liberals and white men at that who thought that equality meant the same law for everybody, and that's why as a result of this we said, "well let's abolish the Indian Act and make Indians citizens of Canada like everyone else. And let's let Indians dispose of their lands just like every other Canadian. And let's make sure that Indians can get their rights, education, health and so on, from the governments like every other Canadian". But we have learnt in the process that perhaps we were a bit too theoretical, we were a bit too abstract, we were not, as Mr. Cardinal suggests, perhaps pragmatic enough or understanding enough, and that's fine. We are here to discuss this.

You have said yourselves it would take time; it will take time. You said it is a difficult problem; it's obviously a difficult problem. We can't in one year undo the injustices or misunderstandings of a hundred or two hundred years of history, and certainly we can't do it alone. And that's why we have these meetings and that's why we'll have many more.

But in order to reach some kind of agreement, in order to reach some kind of a dialogue and exchange we have to trust each other a little bit, perhaps not completely. We can be suspicious of each other because you know there have been some people in the past who have pulled fast ones on each other. When I was in the Orient I was told by a Chinaman that they were much smarter than we were because when we wanted peace, we white men, we gave our hand, and the other man took our hand, but the left hand might be near a gun. So the Chinamen make sure that when they offer peace they hold both their hands and this way they can't reach for a gun. They do it this way - I mean the Asian Indian people. But even that's not perfect because no solution is perfect and I noticed that the Chinese people wear very long sleeves - so

But we have to trust each other, at least that we're honest in our dialogue. And I must say -- we want to be frank -- I must say that in some of your response to our policy paper there are some things which I don't like and I may as well tell you quite frankly. When we take a position of, for instance we say there should be a positive recognition of the unique contribution of Indian culture to Canadian life. Well, this is said in all sincerity. It is not meant, you know, in a hypocritical way. But you say these are nice sounding words but they're intended to mislead everybody.

And we have another thing we say which I think is the policy of this government in so far as we can apply it. We say those who are furthest behind should be helped most. Well, surely this is a good principle, that those who have to be helped most should be helped first. But you say that's a trap in order to catch you into the rest of the policy. We say lawful obligations should be recognized. You say if the government meant what it said we would be happy.

You know, we can't really reach any progress if you don't think we're honest people, because if you don't think we're honest people why do you want to talk to us? If you want to talk to us it's because you think maybe we can understand. And if we talk to you it's because also we think you can understand and that we can reach some kind of agreement.

So let this be the basis of our talk. Let us say that the other person is ignorant; you can say the government doesn't understand, that's it's dumb, that it is stupid or ignorant. Perhaps all these things are true, at least in part. But don't say we're dishonest and that we're trying to mislead you because we're not. We're trying to find the solution to a very difficult problem that has been created for one or two hundred years. And we're not trying to find it just for the ministers here at the table, we're trying to do it for the Canadian people. And you have said, I think very proudly, that you are Canadians and you are part of

Canada and you are proud to be so. Well this is our position too and we have been elected, for better or for worse, but in order to try to find a solution to this very difficult problem.

And I repeat, we have made a proposal which may be naive, and which may be short-sighted or misguided. But you are now beginning to answer; you are now -- and I think again it's your Vice-Chairman, or perhaps it's Chairman Dieter who said it -- the result has been at least for perhaps the first time Indian people have come together to discuss this issue, have really begun to come to grips with this problem. You realize as we do that all Canadian peoples are at a crossroads and that we have to find the solution now. And that is what we are trying to do.

Mr. Cardinal made a very nice reference to my meeting with the Maoris. Well it was a nice meeting and it was interesting to see how they in New Zealand had found not a perfect solution, but at least one which permits the Maori people to keep their culture, to keep their distinctiveness and all the values in which they believe, not be assimilated and become New Zealanders like everyone else, but to be part of the total society, to be integrated into that society. And not only they've kept it but they've converted New Zealanders. At the meeting I had with them, and I also had on previous visits to New Zealand, we see white people, we see blond people -- and the Maoris are not generally blond -- in the dances or in the tribal group being really converted to certain aspects of the Maori culture just like today we see many white people, especially young people, wearing many things that they borrow from the Indian costume. It's good if you can convert people to your way of feeling, not demand that one must have Indian blood to believe in Indian values but believe that your values are good and they're strong and they're beautiful and they can be respected and sometimes shared by people who don't have Indian blood.

This is the Maori solution but, two countries later, I went into Malaysia and here I found another solution. I found that the aboriginal people, the equivalent of the Indian people here, the Malays, they under their constitution are given special rights, special protection. They were there before the Chinese; the Chinese came later, made more money, had perhaps better education, a little bit the situation in Canada, and therefore had special advantages. So Malaysia brings up another type of solution. We're prepared to look at that too. We don't think it's the right solution; we've rejected it, this government has at any rate. In the case of the French in Canada I, as a French Canadian and Mr. Chretien, and others, we say the way to be strong in Canada is not to be apart but to be equal to the English.

So there are many solutions. And the problem you are asking us - you will also have a responsibility not only for yourselves and your children but you have a responsibility for the way this government and future governments treats the Eskimo in Canada. Because he also is an aboriginal Canadian, he was there as early as you if not before. And we are now faced with the problem of what will we do with the Eskimo? Will we have a hundred years of experience with him and end up as we do with the Indians with the wrong solutions? What should we do? Keep the Eskimo apart, or should we teach him the white man's values, or what? We don't know the answers but perhaps in our discussion with you we can try to feel some answers.

Now the minister has said, and I can only repeat, we can't respond to this brief. It was The statement was made now and we have to look at it. You want us to be pragmatic and rational and your brief is pragmatic and rational, and it's calm and it's poised and we appreciate that. We will try to have that kind of response and the dialogue will go on. And we had our policy paper which you reject; now we have your red paper which we may reject or which we may accept and modify, or we will discuss

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it with you. But let us remember that when you ask that there be some kind of an arbitration body whose judgment will be binding on both sides on the question of aboriginal rights and other things, this is a suggestion we will also consider. And also the suggestion you just made, Mr. Cardinal, about the people with whom in this government you want to dialogue, we will consider and give you answer as soon as possible.

But let us remember that our dialogue, and the ultimate arbitration body, is not going to be some court or some commissioner, or some committee of the Senate and the House of Commons. It is going to be the Canadian people. And these are the people you've got to convince, and that we've got to convince. And this may take a lot of time because you can't convince people just by publishing papers, white or red, nor by making laws. And the injustices which have been given to the Indians are not only a result of laws or misunderstanding, very often they are the result of distorted views in many of the Canadian people. It's this which altogether you and we have to correct and it's this process which I agree with you will take some time.

I've already taken some time, more than I should this afternoon. But let me just say that we will be meeting again and we will be furthering the dialogue, and let me just say, we're in no hurry if you're not. You know, a hundred years has been a long time and if you don't want an answer in another year, we'll take two, three, five or ten, or twenty -- the time you people decide to come to grips with this problem. And we won't force any solution on you, because we are not looking for any particular solution