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REPORT.

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INDIAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC INITIATIVES  
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AN ALBERTA REPORT

February, 1979

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INDIAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC INITIATIVES AND  
DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSES: AN ALBERTA REPORT

Introduction

This paper is an initial attempt to set down in writing a few of the significant socio-economic initiatives of Indian representatives in Alberta in the past several years. Secondly, we will try to examine the response of the Regional Director's General office to these Indian initiatives. Further, the paper will deal with background issues of Indian-Government relations.

This paper will have three parts, namely:

- (a) Indian-Government Relations - the need for new processes;
- (b) Examples of Alberta Indian Socio-Economic Initiatives;
  - IAA Preliminary Statement on Indian Government,
  - Northeastern Tribal Chiefs Association Initiatives re 22 District Office positions,
  - IAA/Chiefs Initiatives re Esso Resources Project at Cold Lake,
- (c) Comprehensive Community Planning and Examples of Creative Indian Initiatives as the cornerstone for Socio-Economic Development.

It is hoped that this discussion/background paper will serve a useful purpose for the IAA and Indian Bands in the ongoing discussions for the development of an Indian socio-economic strategy in Alberta. Further, the paper is not intended as a comprehensive situation report but rather a report dealing with a few notable examples of Indian initiatives that are familiar to us.

Indian-Government Relations - the need for new processes

This paper has as part of its title "Indian Socio Economic Initiatives". "Initiative" has the following dictionary definition:

"the power or right to take the first step or the next step in some action ..."

The second part of the title refers to "departmental responses".

"Response" is defined as:

"words or acts evoked by the words or act of another or others."

In our view, the basis for putting the primacy on Indian initiative is clear both from current Indian position statements and from the historical record. The N.I.B. Statement of 1977 "The Socio-Economic Development of Indian People" emphasizes "local initiative" in its first recommendation. Similarly, Joe Dion, IAA President, recently spoke to a group of Program and District Managers at the Edmonton Indian Affairs office, and he stressed that Indian socio-economic development rests with Indian people as the primary actors, i.e. the initiative rests with the people.

If we go back in history 100 years to the treaty making processes of the 1870's, we find that Indian leaders at that time took the initiative on socio-economic development. When the federal government began the treaty negotiations in 1871 in Manitoba, the government was prepared to offer only reserve lands and small treaty annuity payments, but the Indian leaders were not satisfied with this, and they pressed for and negotiated the inclusion in the treaty of a number of socio-economic treaty terms. These terms included:

- schools
- farm animals
- agriculture implements and supplies.

In subsequent treaties, Indian leaders negotiated additional terms. They included:

- hunting & fishing supplies
- a medicine chest
- a famine and pestilence clause
- money for seed grain.

Many of the Bands in this area (Treaty 6) requested instruction in "farming and carpentry", and Commissioner Morris endorsed these recommendations.

In the 1870's, Indian leaders were concerned that the buffalo had been slowly leaving the prairies since the 1820's, and they were aware that they had to make a transition to a new life. Still, they wished to maintain their right to traditional hunting & fishing & trapping vocations. Thus, they negotiated the aforementioned additional socio-economic terms of the treaties. In the generation following the

treaties, we find that Indians requested further supplementary economic necessities when they found that certain treaty provisions had proved to be inadequate. In the 1890's for example, more modern farm machinery, and larger, higher quality cattle herds were requested by Indian leaders of this area. Thus, there has been a dynamic ongoing quality of Indian initiative and interest in this area, despite a government that often had closed ears.

This historical research has been done only comparatively recently through the research of the Indian organizations and the Indian Claims Commission. As John Taylor has remarked in his essay "Canada's North-West Policy in the 1870's: Traditional Premises & Necessary Innovations", the fact that the treaties have "... the appearance of a forward looking plan for the economic and social well-being of the Indian people" must be credited to the "... deliberation, wisdom and benevolence" of Indian leaders not government negotiators. (Taylor, National Museum of Man Symposium on Approaches to Native History in Canada, October, 1975).

Thus it is little wonder that Indian leaders and Indian elders look back to the treaties as a basis for their relationship with the government, and the basic principles upon which to build their future in Canadian society. The fact that the spirit and terms of the treaties have not been fully implemented remains a continuing source of grievance for Indian people today.

On the government side, research has shown that certain government Commissioners (such as Alexander Morris) and certain Indian agents in the West did pick up Indian recommendations, support the recommendations and pass them on to their Ottawa superiors. All too often, however,

financial restraint in Ottawa led to frustration and hampering of Indian initiative through a lack of adequate governmental supportive measures. The overwhelming theme of government policy since those early times has been "Indian self-support", yet the measures needed to make that possible were never adequately put forward, and often government policies and practices were contradictory and counter productive.

(Source - Roland Wright, "The Implementation of Treaty 6: 1876 - 1911: An Economic Base: Outline for Discussion." Treaty & Aboriginal Rights Research, IAA, 1976).

Thus, in our view, if we are both to learn from history and to learn from what Indian leaders are saying to us today, it is that the initiative - the power or right to take the first step or the next step - must remain with Indian people and their leaders.

The task for those of us working with the Department of Indian Affairs must be to find or to assist Indians in finding supportive measures necessary to make Indian socio-economic initiatives work effectively, i.e. to act as allies to Indian leaders as Joe Dion has recently suggested. In other words, we are called to respond not to initiate. If the Department of Indian Affairs tries to initiate, then we tend to get caught up both in a counter-productive top-down exercise, and in the fallacious assumption that government knows what is best for Indian people! A new process for Indian-government relations would seem to involve the following sequence of events:

- Step One - Indian initiated socio-economic goals & processes;
- Step Two - Indian initiated dialogue with government on how to achieve socio-economic goals;

Step three - An Indian/Government negotiated Agreement on Goals and Processes.

In order to be clearer on these steps, several examples of our experiences here in Alberta in the year may serve to provide correct illustrations.

Examples of Indian Socio-Economic Initiatives and Departmental Responses in Alberta - 1978-79

Firstly, I would like to deal with the example of the "Alberta Indian Preliminary Statement on Indian Government."

In early 1978 the Indian Association of Alberta received funding to carry on a series of Indian government district workshops, and this was done in January and February of last year. After several revised drafts, the Indian task force headed by Wilf McDougall presented a consensus report/statement from the workshops to an All Chiefs meeting in early May, 1978. This statement was approved by the Chiefs and presented to Hugh Faulkner on May 4th. It set the direction for Alberta Indians in the broad areas:

- Financing
- Planning Process
- Transfer of Programs
- Indian Act Revision
- Training and Personnel
- The Future of: Indian Band Councils  
Area and District Councils  
Department of Indian Affairs

This comprehensive statement on Indian government should be taken seriously in the area of socio-economic development, if we define socio-economic development broadly as Alberta Indian leaders have, namely:

"people development in conjunction with economic development."

(Statement of Eugene Steinhauer, Chief-Saddle Lake, Joe Dion - IAA President).

Indeed, Indian tribal governments are crucial in the socio-economic development context for several reasons, including the following:

1. To insure that houses, utilities, roads, schools and other basic social and economic needs are satisfied;
2. To insure that economic development does in fact take place on the Reserve by serving as a catalyst for development, and often a focal point for the generation of ideas re economic enterprises;
3. To insure that economic enterprises on Reserves serves the needs of the entire community, i.e. community goals and not simply the goals of private profit (or interest) must be met if economic development on Reserves is to be compatible with the needs of the Reserve community. (See N.I.B. statement which emphasizes the community not the individual).

One of the key recommendations of the IAA Statement on Indian Government was to get more financial resources to the Bands by cutting down the size of Indian Affairs District Office staff, and converting their salary dollars to "contributions to Bands", i.e. operating and maintenance dollars for Band governments. These dollars could then be put to use in some of the aforementioned ways.

The Regional Director General in Alberta, Dave Nicholson, responded positively to this suggestion as did the Minister of Indian Affairs, Hugh Faulkner. A committee composed of departmental representatives and Indian leaders to follow-up the IAA paper was suggested by Mr. Nicholson to Joe Dion, IAA President. At about the same time (fall, 1978) the Northeastern Tribal Chiefs Association took the initiative and put forward a concrete proposal for the phasing out of 22 staff positions at the St. Paul District Office, and the turning over of dollars and responsibilities to the Bands. The Chiefs began to regard many of the District functions, either as redundant to their own tribal government operations or alternatively, the Chiefs wish to run their own programs in particular areas. Those are:

- Local Government
- Economic Development (excluding loan monitoring)
- Engineering & Maintenance
- Education Counselling.

A committee of Indian and departmental officials was struck, therefore, to follow-up this concrete suggestion for the St. Paul District. There have now been several meetings on this proposal.

Both Indian leaders and departmental representatives have put forward both negotiating principles and concrete suggestions for moving the concept ahead. While agreement in principle has been achieved, there are still a number of important details that each side must work out independently. The process has been a healthy one and judging from the last workshop in St. Paul on February 2, 1979, we are not too far away from draft agreements with the individual Bands of the Northeastern Tribal Chiefs Association.

Another example of Indian initiative in the area of socio-economics came in the summer and fall of 1978 from the same area of Alberta. The Chiefs of the area had been working with Imperial Oil Ltd. in gearing up to take advantage of the potential benefits - jobs and contracts - of the heavy oil development at Cold Lake. At a certain stage of the ongoing discussions with Esso, the Chiefs requested Dave Nicholson to provide technical assistance to their committee and this was done. Similar requests were made by the Cold Lake Band in the summer of 1978. In October, Joe Dion threw the discussions with Esso into an entirely new "ball game" by raising serious questions about the environmental problems and the real Indian benefits from the Esso project. Upon Mr. Dion's request, Mr. Nicholson sought the technical advice of Environment Canada officials to evaluate Esso's environmental impact statement. This information from Environment Canada was relayed directly to the Seven Bands of the area and the IAA. In addition, it was decided that the Department could usefully intervene at the ERCB Hearings at Cold Lake to try to raise crucial environmental matters. This intervention, by acting in a complimentary and supportive fashion to the Indian Bands, was a good example of the trustee role of the Department of Indian Affairs. Thus, the Department did take certain initiatives but these initiatives were of a secondary nature once the basic signals were clear from the Indian community.

After Christmas, we again supported the Seven Bands and the IAA in their interventions on January 16, 1979. The Indian leaders on their own presented an extremely effective case for affirmative action, i.e. special consideration for Indian jobs and contracts at Esso. Also, the environmental matters were also raised in a hard-hitting fashion. The position of Indian leaders seems to have evolved through their own experiences in dealing with Esso, because their affirmative action concerns were now put to Esso in the ERCB as conditions for the project to go ahead. Thus, common goals and informal joint working arrangements have allowed an effective presentation of Indian concerns regarding the \$4.7 billion project proposed for Cold Lake. Indian interests were placed front and centre in a stage that has many competing interests and actors.

In my view, if we examine the essential ingredients of these types of working arrangements, they are:

1. Indian people retain the initiative;
2. D.I.A. must respond to Indian initiatives and often must respond quickly;
3. Both Indian leaders and D.I.A. Managers seem to see the need for informal joint working arrangements, provided each side retains their own sphere of independence of action and judgement.
4. The key actors are Indian leaders and the Department officials must play a secondary, supportive role.

#### Indian Community Planning as a Cornerstone to Socio-Economic Development

Indian community planning will be a vital cornerstone to the successful achievement of a workable socio-economic development strategy. However, also of vital importance is the quality and type of Indian community planning that takes place at the local level.

Four vital elements to this local community process include:

1. The decision to plan - who makes it?

The decision or the commitment to undertake the planning process must come from the local community.

2. Control of the Planning Process

The community must be in control of the planning process.

3. Comprehensive nature

The planning must not be piecemeal.

4. Commitment to implement

There must be a clear commitment on the part of external agencies to respond to the community's planning.

If we examine the majority of Indian community planning activities that has taken place in recent years, we see that very often one or more of the above vital elements has been missing.

Too often the planning has been initiated because of the needs of well intentioned planners and bureaucrats. The reasons for doing the planning have originated from the outside rather than inside the community. Very often the control of the planning activity has not, in reality, rested with the community.

It is essential that the community believe that the planning activity is theirs and not the product of the planner. The attributes of a good planner not only include the ability to map existing conditions, synthesize information, explore alternatives and prepare intelligent recommendations, but also include the ability to listen effectively to what the community is saying and wants. The role is one of support, i.e. to translate very likely what the community already knows about itself into a document which clearly and simply states where the

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community wishes to go. The skill lies in being able to assist the community in this process without having the community losing their feeling of possession of the plan.

Much planning activity in the past has been piecemeal rather than comprehensive. Communities do not tend to view themselves in compartmentalized sections under headings like, economic development, education, social development, community infrastructure, etc. Community needs identification start with the basic needs of the health of the members of the community, which in turn, translate into needs for access to a whole range of opportunities, i.e. choices. A community plan should reflect a wholistic approach to the needs of the community rather than reflecting the organizational patterns of remote bureaucracies.

On the issue of implementation, there are many examples where communities have made the essential commitments described above but because government delivery mechanisms have been tailored to the needs of the larger bureaucracy, implementation was not possible. Seasonal work programs based on natural unemployment patterns are not usually responsive to the priorities that a community is likely to identify in its plan.

A lack of the four vital elements which include:

1. The decision to plan;
2. Community control of the planning process;
3. A comprehensive approach; and
4. Commitment for implementation,

has resulted in hundreds of plans that sit on shelves gathering proverbial dust and constitutes a waste of planning dollars. It has also reflected a waste of people's time, and perhaps most damaging of all, a sense of frustration with the planning process on the part of many Indian communities.

Discussions on the development of a meaningful socio-economic process involve a tremendous challenge. Community planning programs cannot be developed in isolation by government departments. To ensure success, a joint process is essential.

Indian community planning in the future may lead the way in defining the application for more appropriate technology. There are an increasing number of examples where Indian communities have taken the initiative to identify the utilization of local resources to reduce the community's dependency on external economies, and many more of these opportunities may be identified through local community planning processes.

The current emphasis on the development of socio-economic strategies illustrate that government is starting to recognize that programs should be responsive rather than prescriptive, and implicitly that the people who are to "benefit" from government initiatives must be involved from the outset in program design and implementation. Community control of planning will be an essential component of this process.