

STRANGERS IN OUR OWN LAND

A DISCUSSION PAPER  
PREPARED FOR

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**ORIGINAL**

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

I.

Historically, Native people have been recognized as a unique group whose culture and individual rights have often been denied. Perhaps out of guilt, the British North American Act incorporated the special needs of Native people and assigned the responsibility for the overseeing of our treaties, lands, and indeed our lives to the Federal Government and specifically a military department of that Government. Essentially, Native people were under military rule.

Administration of Native people was a relatively easy role to maintain. We had no voting rights and were physically restricted to identifiable geographic areas. The insular nature of our survival was reinforced by restricting our contact with non-natives to officials of the Department of Indian Affairs, usually the Indian agent. The convenience of this formal structure did not recognize or encourage development of any kind but responded, often ineffectively, only to basic survival needs. The enfranchisement clause of the Indian Act obviously existed to encourage Native people to abdicate our aboriginal and treaty rights. This clause, if fully employed by Native people, could have potentially annihilated our legal identity, the only identity which the Federal government recognized as valid. Obviously the government of the day would not have discouraged this process.

By limiting our mobility strictly to reserve lands, removing any citizenship rights, and confining our formal contact with the non-Native community to the Department of Indian Affairs, the concerns of the Federal Government were as a result minimal both in regards to its responsibility to Native people and indeed to the survival of this racial group.

Although there were a number of contributing factors to the eventual exposure of Native people to non-Native society, perhaps the greatest was the inclusion of Native people in the Armed Forces during the great wars. Being forced to recognize this contribution and as a result our continued existence, the Federal Government in 1952 finally granted full citizenship rights to Native people which enabled us to transcend the physical and cultural restrictions of reserve lands. In many cases for the first time in history, Natives were exposed to the wrangle of urban communities which had grown up around us and the unexpected impact of their non-native inhabitants.

MIGRATION INTO CITIES

II.

Migrating from a very insular and maintained existence, we were totally unprepared for the dilemma which awaited us. Massive cultural shock, confrontation, disorientation, and if fortunate enough, patronization were encountered on all fronts. To compound these symptoms, the Department of Indian Affairs abdicated their legislative responsibilities once Native People left the reserves. Left to wander aimlessly as a disjointed group, granted citizenship rights in name only and often treated as less than second class citizens, we were left to solve our own dilemma. It wasn't until some 20 years later that the Federal Government formally recognized this problem and even then Native people were asked to incorporate themselves into the social and cultural fabric of an often hostile non Native community. Although migration patterns are often directly traced to larger urban areas such as Toronto, London and Thunder Bay, these Centres are often only the culmination of a transition from reserves. Small northern communities such as Moosonee, Nakina, Sioux Lookout and Red Lake are the first stops in the migration trend. The existence of mining and pulp and paper industries and proposed massive resource development schemes make these communities convenient stop over points for a variety of reasons. It is in these small communities that Native people often for the first time confront the non-native way of life. Here is our first exposure to racism, employment and housing discrimination, foreign life styles and alcoholism.

Here is where often the anger, sense of worthlessness, despair and apathy felt by so many Native people begin and become reinforced. By the time we arrive in the large urban Centres, a set of negative expectations has already been created and confirmed, and in many cases these are almost irreversible. Negative attitudes experienced by a Native person being in Kenora, as an example, are transferred and frequently magnified as they move on to Winnipeg, Thunder Bay or Toronto.

Our Native people have migrated from reserve communities where we enjoyed land rights, status and special recognition. We exercised influence in our local government through our elected chief and council in a community where we lived with friends and relatives. We then arrive in a non-native community where we are exposed to a very different environment with its own set of rules, seemingly stripped of all rights and recognition, and not permitted either to contribute to or benefit from the economic or social systems in that community. With our expectations totally crushed, we indeed become strangers in our own land.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

III.

The general public and most sectors of government continued to believe that the term Native referred to only those living on reserves and indeed that most Native people still lived on reserves. The first group of people to recognize the nature and degree of problems resulting from migration into urban areas were the Native themselves. Because of this insight, in 1957 an "Indians in the City" conference was held in Winnipeg to discuss the reasons and problems of Migrating Natives and to begin charting a course of action toward alleviating some of the negative results of this transition. Here were planted the seeds of an organization whose purpose would be to identify the problem nationally and bring to bear on this problem resources which existed or were yet to be created.

During this period in Ontario, Friendship Centres, of a sort had been established in Kenora, Thunder Bay and Toronto. Their statement of purpose was simple: basic survival for Natives living in those areas. Providing or attempting to identify resources in response to needs for food, shelter and clothing and always on a crisis intervention basis was the lot of these fledgeling Centres. Attempts at cultural identification and reinforcement were considered luxuries and in most cases irrelevant anyway. There existed neither the time nor the resources to indulge in the academics of planning for development.

At the Winnipeg Conference, reinforced by the concerns, frustrations and insights of our peers, the broader issues related to the problems of migrating Native people began to manifest themselves. It became obvious that the intensity of the problem displayed so blatantly in Kenora because of public and media attention, existed equally throughout the Province of Ontario and in fact throughout the whole country. Resources traditionally available to

Natives through the Department of Indian Affairs were removed once we left the reserves. Agencies in the towns and cities were either completely insensitive to the unique needs of Native people or were reluctant to provide us with services since out of ignorance they considered us to be the responsibility of the Department of Indian Affairs. The economic and social benefits of living in an industrialized urban community were unreachable for Native people who lacked the training and education to take advantage of them. The non Native community aggressively encouraged the assimilation of Native people and our culture into their own values and society. How could a group on the verge of spiritual and cultural void contribute to or even feel any sense of worth in a frightening and foreign milieu?

An initial response was an attempt to incorporate the needs of Native people into Multiculturalism programs designed to provide resources to ethnic groups emigrating to Canada. Quite obviously this failed since the needs differed both in kind and degree and as a result a program was presented in which there was no participation by Native people. Once again an inappropriate response to this increasingly critical need maintained the cycle of defiance, despair, apathy and isolationism.

Fortunately in 1970, the Canadian Council on Social Development published a paper entitled "People on the Move". For the first time ever, it was recognized that there was a regular and predictable migration of Native people from reserves and isolated rural communities into the towns and cities. The paper identified this trend and its associated impact in such a manner as it could not be ignored.

Buttressed by this information and having experienced the tragedies and struggle personally, a small group of Native people began discussions and negotiations with the Federal Government which eventually led in 1972 to the establishment of the Migrating Native Peoples Programme.



The program recognized the existence and problems of migration and that Friendship Centres played a major part in addressing these problems, by providing basic funds for the core operation of the Centres. Of special significance was the fact that these funds recognized that Native people were citizens of Canada and were provided for the purpose of citizenship development. They were in no way intended to represent an extension of the Federal Government's responsibility to Native people under the BNA Act.

Although the Friendship Centres initially received the announcement of this program with relief, we were saddled, as mentioned previously, with the full responsibility of resolving the complex issues and problems of migrating Native people and incorporating this group into the social and cultural fabric of communities to which we were migrating. We were expected to perform this function on minimal operations funds and with even less and in some cases non-existent resources from the provinces and municipalities.

THE ROLE OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

IV

Nevertheless, the work of Friendship Centres began in earnest. With inexperienced and often poorly trained Native staff, we began to identify and respond to the needs of migrating Native people in the general areas of:

1. Counselling and Referral
2. Social and Recreational Programs
3. Cultural Awareness Programs
4. Community Development and Community Awareness

Given the obviously limited resources at their disposal, the Centres were surprisingly effective in coping with and even in some cases constructively alleviating the problems.

The success of the movement hinged on the fact that even though the focal point changed from a private home to a social agency, this agency was still operated on an informal basis providing a home-like atmosphere.

As a result of the effectiveness of the Centres in reaching so many people and coping with so many problems, pressures to increase their services came from a multitude of sources. Some of these were the private agencies who could not themselves reach the people or cope with their problems and worked closely with the Centres, others were the government departments who were attempting to devise ways and means of coping with an increased migration to urban Centres but were themselves too bureaucratized to offer a relevant service, and finally the people themselves who came to the cities and faced a multitude of problems in so doing.

While faced with these pressures of coping with the expectancies of the society and its government and continuing to provide a meaningful service to its clients, the Centres were also pressured to restructure their Boards to include more Natives and to place the decision-making process in the hands of the Natives.

This pressured evolution process was to take place in the relatively short period of 15 years. This is an amazing achievement when compared to other agencies in the cities such as neighborhood houses or even the YMCA whose development was allowed to take place over many decades. Indeed in a short period of a few years, the Centres have become very visible and critical factors in the migration process of Native people.

MAGNITUDE OF MIGRATION

V.

No definitive statistics exist which describe either the total number of Native people living in Canada or trends and amount of migration to cities. A conservative estimate used by the Secretary of State in determining potential clientele for Friendship Centres is that 30% of all registered Indians are migrant. This of course does not include non-status Indians or Metis, most of whom live off reserves. A report entitled "Labour Market Problems of Native People in Ontario" published in December 1977 by Harish C. Jain of the Faculty of Business at McMaster University provides some interesting statistics. It states on page one that,

"When non-Status Indians are included, Native people represent almost 5 per cent of Canada's population. Although no reliable estimates are available, Native people in Ontario could well approximate the national percentage".

On the basis of this estimate some 425,000 Native people reside in the Province of Ontario. The report further states that of the 60,860 registered Indians living in Ontario 41 per cent live off-reserves. Using these statistics, there exists in Ontario a situation where 36,000 Native people live on reserves and an astounding 389,000 live off reserves.

The report also provides some insight into the degree of Native migration to the Cities. On page 16, the chart indicates that some 1,519 Indians lived in Ontario cities in 1951, 4,239 in 1961, and 10,120 in 1971. These figures represent a 239 percent increase between 1961 and 1971 of Indians living

Ontario cities. Between 1951 and 1971, the population increased an astonishing 667 percent.

Combined with the facts that a disproportionate number of Native people live off reserves and that migration to the cities is rapidly increasing, the report also states on page three that,

" - - - - - the Indian population is increasing about twice the rate of the Canadian population"

and on page six that,

"Projections indicate that Indians population is likely to increase by 43 percent from 1973 to 1985. 36 percent of the increase is expected to occur in the age group under fifteen and another 52 percent in the age group 15-64; the latter being the age group most likely to be in the labour force."

Clearly, the role of Friendship Centres presently and perhaps even more so in the future is a vital one in responding to and planning for the needs of Native people in urban communities.

PLAN OF ACTION

VI.

The amount of and concerns associated with the migration of Native people is increasing and the trend will obviously not reverse itself. The ultimate solution of course is for Native people living in urban communities to contribute to and become an integral part of those communities without loss of pride, identity or social or cultural values. Indeed this is the only manner in which we effectively can become part of the community. In order for this development to occur, many additional resources must be identified and brought to bear on this problem. The Secretary of State, in recognition of the role of Friendship Centres, has introduced a new Five Year Migrating Native Peoples Programme which will provide increased levels of funding for operations costs and the facilitation of intergroup discussion regarding urban Natives.

We feel however, that the Province of Ontario has a major role to play in the development for the effective integration of the urban Natives into our communities. Although support from the Province in the past have been appreciated and well utilized, it has been stop gap, short term and poorly coordinated. In order for the Friendship Centres to be effective, resources provided by the Province must be increased, coordinated and reliable. This is the only basis upon which meaningful and long range development can occur.

Some of the major problems preventing the effective community integration of Native People include:

1. Discrimination
  2. Alcoholism
  3. Education
  4. Unemployment
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5. Housing
6. Health Care
7. Cultural Reinforcement

Quite obviously, in order to effectively deal with these issues, Ministries such as Health, Education, Culture and Recreation, Community and Social Services etc. must begin to strategically address and develop these issues. Recognizing the fact that this process is complex and time consuming, the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres proposes that a joint Task Force be established for the purposes of:

1. Defining the issues
2. Gathering relevant information
3. Mobilizing existing resources
4. Developing resources where none presently exist
5. Changing policy and legislation in order to provide ongoing and permanent resources

We propose that this Task Force be composed of:

1. Representatives from the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
2. Deputy Ministerial input from initially the Ministries of Culture and Recreation, Community and Social Services and Health
3. Input from time to time as required by other urban Native groups such as the Ontario Native Womens' Association and the Ontario Metis and Non-Status Indian Association
4. A representative from the Indian Community Secretariat whose responsibility it would be to coordinate the activities of the Task Force

We also propose that the activities of the Task Force occur within the following time frame:

1. May 1, 1978 - formal establishment of the Task Force
2. May 1 to May 31, 1978 - Meet and identify the issues
3. June 1 to July 31, 1978 - Gathering relevant information
4. August 1 to October 31, 1978 - Review of existing resources
  - Identify resources which are required where none exist
5. November 1 to December 31, 1978
  - Presenting recommendations
  - Formulating plans for the implementation of resources
6. By February 29, 1979 - Ministerial commitments
7. April 1, 1979 - Implementation of resources and plans

We are aware of your Ministry's and Government past initiatives in the area of Native concerns. However, we are hopeful that with the establishment of this task Force, a more coordinated and cooperative effort will be launched in positively responding to the needs, aspirations and contributions of the urban Native.



## SUMMARY

### STRANGERS IN OUR OWN LAND

Historically, attempts to deal with Native people and our culture have spanned the range of assimilation to eradication. Despite this process, we survived and maintained our culture and in 1952, were finally granted full citizenship rights.

As a result of this and other factors such as the lack of employment, education and health care, Native people began to move from the reserves and isolated communities into the towns and cities. From this migration resulted the unexpected problems of culture shock, defiance, despair and isolationism.

The first group to recognize the problems resulting from migration were the Native people themselves and in 1957 organized the "Indians in the City" conference to look at this problem and discuss solutions. This conference gave support to the few Friendship Centres existing then and pointed the way for the development of others.

Finally in 1972, the Federal government recognized the work of the need for Friendship Centres by establishing the Secretary of State's Migrating Native Peoples Program which provided core funding for the operation of Friendship Centres. As a result, the number and the work of the Friendship Centres grew and provided critical assistance in the areas of counselling and referral, social and recreational programs, cultural awareness programs and community development.