



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

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## *Canada's Native People*

CANADA IS THE HOMELAND of the Indians and Eskimos. They had no communication with the great centres of developing civilization abroad. They looked no farther than the land in which they lived for fulfilment of all their needs. Everything they possessed came as the result of their own labour and the ingenuity of their own devices.

These are real people, not fruits of the imagination of strip artists, movie writers and book authors. They are not men and women in chorus-girl costumes whose destiny it is to entertain us, but people seeking what people everywhere seek — home, health and happiness.

The task of adjusting their Stone Age civilization to confrontation by the twentieth century has moved so slowly as to be called a "national disgrace" by a national association devoted to native welfare.

After a set-back due to the introduction of diseases from Europe, the Indian population of about 205,000 is now increasing at roughly twice the rate of the general population. There are about 12,000 Eskimos in the Northwest Territories and Northern Quebec. At the present rate of increase the Eskimo population will double within twenty years.

The majority of these native people stand neither in one world nor the other. They are enmeshed in the old culture while trying to take advantage of the new way of life introduced from abroad. They are freedom-loving people, resenting dependency. Their economic problems are as serious as those facing the newly emerging nations in Africa.

The facts about the need of our native people have been brought out by the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada. This is a citizens' organization which came into being in 1958 as a Commission of the Canadian Association for Adult Education. It was incorporated in 1960 with the declared purpose of ensuring that Indians and Eskimos, and the descendants of a union between the Indian people and Europeans, be given opportunity for progress and fulfilment equal to that afforded other Canadians. It believes that the native people should be able to move into the

mainstream of Canadian economic, social and political life with dignity and without loss of identity.

### *Aboriginal way of life*

We must not depreciate the knowledge and techniques made use of by Canada's first people. Stone tools were at the foundation of their native economic life, and, said Diamond Jenness in his book *The Indians of Canada* (National Museum of Canada, Queen's Printer, Ottawa, 1960): "Some of their arrowheads, knife-blades, and animal figures rival the best work of the pre-historic Egyptians."

The Iroquoian natives used a system of currency of wampum, manufactured by New England coastal tribes from shells. Trees were hardly dented by stone axes, so clearing of land for agriculture was done by fire. The sod was turned over with digging sticks fitted with blades of shell, and the crop was gathered by hand and transported in baskets. Clock time, by which today's urban life is regulated and largely dominated, was unknown to these native people, whose only clock was the sun, their only calendar the seasons.

Such was the material state of Canadian people when the first settlers from across the ocean arrived. But they had graces amid their hardships. Every tribe was founded on groups of families closely united by ties of kinship; their religion included the belief in protecting spirits who assisted them in life's crises; neither rank nor wealth gave title to arrogance; their chiefs dressed in the same way as commoners, except at ceremonies, and ate the same food as the ordinary people.

### *The Canadian Indians*

If life in an Indian community seems to be dull and uninspiring it is not because the Indians are dull or uninspired. It is because the newcomers have taken away the Indian's satisfying way of life without replacing it.

The Indians were not pagans. The Ven. Archdeacon S.H. Middleton, who died in 1964 after half a century

of service to the Indians in Southern Alberta, wrote in his book *Indian Chiefs Ancient and Modern* (Herald, Lethbridge, 1953): "In the long ago the Indian centred everything upon his religion and religious observances. His religion entered into every phase of his life: planting, harvesting, feasting, recreation, hunting, warfare; in short, all his interests were intimately bound up with religion."

William Wuttunee, the National Indian Council's first chief, said: "We believed in what is known as Gitchi-Manitou, the Great Spirit. God was in the sun, in the moon, in mother earth, in the rain that made the grass grow. Manitou was a loving and merciful god to us. I learned about our Heaven, known as the 'happy hunting ground' where everyone goes whether you are good or bad. There is no such thing as Hell and this concept was alien to the Indian mind."

These persons, practising living in a hard environment, essentially rural, accustomed to informal living in close-knit families and helping-hand communities, find it difficult to cross the bridge to the cold, impersonal, time-measured, and essentially selfish industrial way of life. The economic base of their natural living habits has disintegrated. Reserves no longer provide sufficient game, and the people are restricted so that they cannot move to more productive areas as they did centuries ago.

The crisis did not arise in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. It did not become evident until late in the nineteenth century. It has become intolerable in the twentieth century.

When Jacques Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence in 1535 he found Indians cultivating the land on the present site of Montreal. The settlers came in small numbers to a vast country, depending upon the goodwill of the natives for security. Life was simple, and the differences between the pioneers and the Indians were only superficial. The Indians taught the settlers woodcraft and acted as guides and canoe-men, while the settlers introduced new tools of agriculture and hunting.

### *Whose responsibility?*

It is generally accepted in the ethics of our society that the strong are obligated to help the weak. We, the descendants of immigrants from far-off lands, are the stronger in this scientific and industrialized age, and we are largely to blame for the problems of the native people. It is we who have intruded upon an aboriginal way of life and made it impossible; it is we who have broken up the hunting grounds into artificial provinces and counties and homesteads, all fenced in, and have relegated the original owners to reserves.

"The North American Indians," said Arnold J. Toynbee in *A Study of History* (Oxford University Press 1946), "were almost continuously 'on the run' from the moment of the arrival of the first English

settlers down to the crushing of the last Indian attempt at armed resistance in the Sioux War of 1890, two hundred and eighty years later."

When the battles ended, we introduced a new social order which broke down the systems of law, government, customs and religion on which the Indian society had rested.

Long before that, in the reign of Charles II, instructions were given to the governors of the colonies that Indians who desired to place themselves under British protection should be well received. In 1755 an office was established devoted solely to the administration of Indian affairs. From that time on, a continuing administrative organization has been maintained for the protection and advancement of the Indian interests. Until 1860 the Imperial Government was responsible, but in that year the Province of Canada assumed the charge. By special provision in the British North America Act of 1867 the new Government of Canada took jurisdiction.

There has been, then, a continuous record since 1670 of governmental obligation, acknowledged in our own times by the Indian Act. Under it the primary function of the government is to administer the affairs of the Indians in a manner that will enable them to become increasingly self-supporting and independent members of the community.

This duty of protection and care is not discharged fully by paternalistic measures. The Duke of Edinburgh's Study Conference in 1962 reported: "There is a danger, already evident in certain areas, that the social isolation of the reservations and the supervision by Indian agents may inhibit the resourcefulness, initiative, and individuality of the Indian people, and that, however well intended, it could perpetuate the very situation which it is intended to alleviate."

### *Some suggestions*

A brief of the Ontario Division of the Indian-Eskimo Association said in 1964: "Most of the one hundred thousand Indians of this province are living in dire poverty. A high percentage are unemployed and are educationally and socially unequipped to obtain and hold a job. Little real effort has been made to help the Indians develop new industries to replace the declining industry of hunting and trapping. It has been easier to give relief than to develop industries." Only six per cent of the federal government's expenditure on Indian work is development-oriented.

The Indians are acting to help themselves. Ten bands sent delegates to the Western Indian Leadership Institute at Petrolia, Ontario, in 1965 to examine and practise skills and acquire the knowledge needed for handling band affairs. Frank A. Calder, who was the first Indian to sit in any Canadian Parliament, advocates either the elimination of the reserve system or the giving to Indians of opportunity to administer their own local affairs.

The Indian-Eskimo Association has made some suggestions. It asks for establishment of an Economic Development Agency, charged with administering a fund of \$25 million, and the establishment of an Economic Advisory Council composed largely of Indian representatives. It wrote to the Prime Minister in April 1965 recommending that the Indian Affairs Branch be constituted a full department. It suggests that technical, professional and management personnel be supplied in the early phases of approved new business enterprises, and that training programmes be provided to prepare Indians to take over these duties when qualified; that companies be encouraged to locate, with the agreement of Indian band councils, new industrial plants in or near reserve communities to provide employment opportunities to Indians; that the Economic Development Fund provide assistance to on-job training programmes in these plants, and that plans be expanded for the employment of Indians who do not live on reserves.

In January 1966 the Government of Ontario announced its plan for raising the living standards of Indians within its jurisdiction. By agreement with the Federal Government, which is constitutionally accountable for Indian affairs, it seeks to take over responsibility for education, housing, employment, law enforcement, health, recreation, and economic development. Other provinces are expected to follow this lead.

### *Eskimos: the forgotten people*

The Eskimos are a hardy, resourceful people, cheerful even in the extreme adversity that has dogged their lives. They called themselves "Inuit" — the only strong and true men. No other race, having so little to work with, has accomplished so much.

People who lived in the Arctic before the invasion of highly-gadged outsiders had to do everything for themselves. They needed detailed knowledge of their environment, its animals, plants, and other natural products, its dangers and its potentialities.

But they were not savages. William S. Carlson, President of the State University of New York, spent a winter of his youth with an Eskimo family of five. He found their honesty, sincerity, and coolness in the face of danger noteworthy. They had "a refinement of body, manners and mind. They loved one another in a helpful, tender, but not sentimental way. I learned that it is the civilized man who could emulate the so-called savage to advantage." And Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Canadian-born explorer, said: "On the basis of my years with the Stone Age Eskimos I feel that the chief factor in their happiness was that they were living according to the Golden Rule."

The country of the Eskimos is "underdeveloped" today, with problems somewhat like those of underdeveloped countries abroad, but it has a significant difference: it is an integral part of an affluent and comfortably-living nation. There are no insurmount-

able barriers of land, climate, or culture to excuse our not helping the Eskimo to adjust to the new world we are making.

Farley Mowat calls upon Canadians in his book *The Desperate People* (Little, Brown & Co., Toronto, 1959) to "resolutely set ourselves to expunge a damning reflection upon our own pretensions to humanity, and . . . commit ourselves unequivocally to make amends".

Canada was quick to throw the paraphernalia of law over the Arctic; her voice has often been raised to champion the cause of underprivileged people in other lands; she has subsidized exploration for Arctic minerals; but the reality of her own northland native people has remained obscure until recent years.

It was in 1954 that the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources told the press: "Canada is now turning in earnest to the development of its northland."

### *Today's plans*

What is being done to bring our 12,000 Eskimos into the twentieth century?

The Government of Canada, reports *Canada Year Book*, is helping the Eskimo people through the adjustment period by providing education, family welfare services and technical training: the same services as those available to people in the rest of Canada.

Many of the older generation of Eskimos will never be able to fit into the structure of wage employment, but the younger people take readily to the mechanical arts. For government departments they work at a variety of occupations, and as employees in defence establishments and private companies. A growing number are being trained and are working as teachers' aides. Women work as interpreters, waitresses, nursing assistants, clerks and airline stewardesses. But three-quarters of the Eskimo population live in the harsh land outside the main centres of economic and government activity.

Planning is needed not only to develop the rich material resources of the north, but also to provide the maximum development of the native people, wherever they may be.

The *Manchester Guardian* paid tribute to the federal government's loan fund designed to help Eskimos to establish co-operatives dealing in fishing, boat building, lumbering, and arts and crafts. In October 1965 the Minister of the Department of Northern Affairs announced a programme to build 1,600 houses, extending throughout the Arctic in the next few years, to be rented by Eskimos according to their ability to pay, or purchased with the assistance of capital grants. A start has been made in creating small local industries in some sections of the north, befitting the talents of the people and the materials at

hand, thus associating the Eskimos with their own advancement.

Education is crucial. The Eskimos are moving from a stone age culture to the machine age in a generation. Schools are being established for them in key centres from Fort Smith, on the Alberta border, to Grise Fiord, 800 miles from the North Pole on Ellesmere Island, and travelling libraries carry books into some of the out-of-the-way places where they live. Residences at Fort Simpson and Yellowknife accommodate Eskimo children who are continuing their studies in higher grades. Courses in carpentry, building construction, electronics, automobile and diesel mechanics, and other occupations, are offered at some central points.

While other native people in the Americas have been swept out of their ritualistic tribal arts into production for the tourist trade, the geographical remoteness of the Eskimo has protected him, and today his art in native stone and ivory is of world-wide renown.

Market research across southern Canada and in the United States has revealed a substantial outlet for Eskimo crafts, and though the carving industry can never of itself solve the economic problems of the Arctic, it has provided an interim answer for a lot of people. Moreover, it has brought home to other Canadians the existence and the capabilities of their Arctic fellow-citizens.

Among other products of the Eskimos are seal-skin prints, slippers fashioned from tanned muskrat and Arctic hare (one pair won second prize at an international shoe show in New York), and graphics which have been given display in the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Canada and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

### *The co-operatives*

Stefansson brought back this lesson from the Arctic: "Perhaps we could live as happily in a metropolis as in a fishing village if only we could substitute the ideals of co-operation for those of competition." In their co-operatives the Eskimos carry forward their traditional custom of pooled labour and shared harvests.

More than 500 Eskimos — nearly one out of every five Eskimo families — are members of co-operatives. During 1963 nineteen co-operatives were active, with a total business turnover of close to a million dollars. Of this amount, more than \$250,000 was derived from the sale of sculpture, prints and handicrafts. The balance came from char and salmon fisheries, the operation of retail stores and tourist camps, logging, boat building and marketing furs.

The best known in the Northwest Territories is the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, at Cape Dorset. From a modest start in 1959 and considerable help in the early stages from the Northern Affairs Department the men and women of this gifted community, within

two years, were producing graphic art, sculpture and fine crafts to a value exceeding \$200,000. In the east, co-operatives started with credits from the Eskimo Loan Fund are now owned by the local people. In 1963 the first conference of Arctic co-operatives brought together Eskimos from as far west as Aklavik and as far north as Grise Fiord.

### *Into tomorrow*

It is not unreasonable, in view of their background, that Indians and Eskimos should be convinced that in changing over to new ways they are giving up something valuable.

But when offered reasonable opportunity, kindly advice, understanding tolerance, and practical help, all our native people have shown their willingness and desire and ability to make the change.

The issue for tomorrow is this: we newcomers took the land of the native people. Whether it was a good thing or not; whether it was inevitable in the march of history or not: these are irrelevant. We took their land, disrupted their way of life, ruined their way of livelihood, and undermined their culture. We are challenged to discharge our obligation to them.

What is needed is not primarily entreaty, urging, or exhortation, but understanding help. Over and over again in the course of the world's history, says Jenness in his book, great social and economic advances have been made when two peoples who had marched on separate roads came together. The anniversary of confederation offers an opportunity to enlarge and intensify and hasten our effort to raise the level of life of Canada's native people to that of the general Canadian standard.

The guiding principle in dealing with both Eskimos and Indians is expressed perceptively by Irene Baird in her poem "Keep Your Own Things", addressed to the Eskimos. It was published in *North*, a magazine of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, in the March-April issue 1964. These are the opening lines:

Inuit  
You who call yourselves The People  
Keep your own things!  
Use our things if you will  
Use them as you must  
But only just  
As they serve ends  
Between friends  
We face you and you us  
Over a deep gulf of time  
Over arctic spaces moon-lonely  
We are like strangers meeting after  
A hard journey  
With everything to learn  
From one another  
If only how to live and die  
A little better