

radio and telephone system for places where radio rarely reaches and conventional telephones are unavailable. Native newspapers provide news to their readers about opportunities and difficulties of life in the mainstream of Canadian society, and offer a distinctively native view of how native people can participate in Canadian society while retaining their cultural integrity.

French-speaking minorities

Another situation in which my Department is deeply involved is the fate of *francophone* minority groups outside Quebec. Following the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism of a few years ago, it became obvious that, if French-Canadians could not feel at ease in linguistic and cultural terms anywhere but in Quebec, then a separate Quebec would become increasingly attractive. Assimilation is not the answer in a country like ours. Thus my Department encourages the *francophone* minority groups outside Quebec to survive and to flourish, by a variety of social and cultural mechanisms. And the Government as a whole attempts to ensure that federal services in both official languages are available across Canada wherever there is a reasonable proportion of the official language minority. Recently we supported a task force of *francophone* minority-group representatives that, among other things, has led to a national federation of *francophone* associations. This group will be in a position to articulate their problems on a national basis and to support the many local situations across Canada where *Francophones* are trying to preserve a distinctive "life-style", for the ultimate benefit of us all.

What conclusions can we draw from this experience of government assisting a series of minority groups to communicate among themselves and with the larger Canadian society? In the short run, we must admit that this process can be disruptive. It permits the expression of dissent and it can lead to confrontation between the minority groups and the majority society.

Inadequate communication creates backlash

In some parts of the country, there is a negative attitude towards the expressed grievances of native people. In some

areas, the white society feels threatened by the land claims of the natives. The conception of aboriginal rights is seen by certain people as an extremist point of view. It is also not clear that in all cases the native leaders generated by our funding have been capable of maintaining their ties with the native grass-roots.

If we examine the attempts to guarantee equal language rights across Canada, we can see the opposition this has generated....

It is both pointless and erroneous to dismiss such reactions as simply viewpoints of bigots. To be sure, there are racists in Canada. There are also Canadians who appear to have an investment in preserving inequality. These things are facts of life and cannot be ignored. But what is far more troubling is the very large numbers of Canadians who simply do not understand the legitimate grievances of minorities or who simply have a perception of life that ignores constructive social change.

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Native claims need explaining

Regrettably, it is not always the content of [native] demands that disturbs people. People tend to focus on the blockades, the demonstrations, even the personal styles, of Indian leaders. And in the process, they ignore the real issues – the historical injustices, the land claims, the housing, employment and educational needs. That is why I am encouraged when I hear about the week for NWT (the Northwest Territories) land-claims being sponsored by the Canadian Association in Support of the Native Peoples. This event...will make a concentrated effort across Canada, in co-operation with the native leaders, to explain the reasons behind and the implications of native land concerns. This is the kind of continuing education that can have a real impact on society.

Most of you in this audience are professionals in the field of learning. Perhaps you can help me to find answers to such questions as: How can you encourage people to listen and understand new concepts? How can attitudes be changed to accommodate the rights and concerns of a minority?

Because these are the sorts of difficulty government must consider when we consciously enter the social de-

velopment arena.

Yet I think it is worthwhile that the Government be in this business. The alternatives are to ignore the minorities or to leave to chance the expression of minority points of view. In a society that aims for pluralism, which is based on respect for diversity, such options are unthinkable.

Role of educators

I believe the Federal Government has accepted the consequences of opting for such an interventionist option. But we do not think we can do it alone, or even that we are the most important actors in the play. In fact, I am inclined to believe that an even greater influence can be exercised by you, the adult educators and teachers of Canada. The impact of the guided "peer-group" learning situation can be profound. And I am not just thinking about the kind of innovative "out-reach" approach of Frontier College or of CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas).

In the long run, I am confident that society will be stronger only if we do help people in the minorities to communicate among themselves and then to communicate with the rest of society. But let us remember the risks. Once people's expectations have been aroused, they will not be satisfied with second-class treatment. So we must have a commitment that, once started on the road to aiding minority groups, we cannot suddenly turn back.

We must also realize that providing financial support to groups forever is not the answer, though it is part of the solution. Sometimes our hard-nosed friends at the Treasury Board in Ottawa will say to us: Where is this all going to end? Is it a bottomless pit? When can you stop giving money to women's groups, ethnic groups, native groups and so on? Our answer is, when there is greater acceptance of diversity and pluralism in Canada. Strangely, this does not satisfy the sceptics! How much diversity, how much pluralism – these are still unanswered questions for the majority of Canadians.

Money not enough

But the serious point is, surely, that handing over funds is not enough. There must be greater access to both