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THE CANADIAN TAPESTRY

The following excerpts are from a recent address by Mr. Arthur Laing, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, to the sixteenth Delegate Assembly of the World Confederation of the Teaching Profession in Vancouver:

...I have two educational systems for which I am responsible. One is in the Northern Territories where both native Eskimos and the children of the administrators and settlers attend. There are just over 7,000 children in school in the Northwest Territories, of whom 3,000 are Eskimos, 3,000 Indians and about 1,200 others.

EDUCATION OF INDIANS

As Superintendent-General for Indian Affairs, I have responsibility for the education of 64,000 Indian children, including the 3,000 I just mentioned. Almost 33,000 of these young Indian boys and girls are attending provincial schools at total federal expense. We believe they need the same learning experiences as other Canadian boys and girls. We believe they will benefit from sharing a mutual schooling. We believe this is part of equality of opportunity.

In adopting this policy we are aware of the unhappy fact that these children require something more than their non-Indian counterparts. We are pressing onward with a pre-school training programme, which now accommodates just over half the five-year-olds and will, by 1969, provide some pre-school learning for all Indian children.

This will take care of a part of the cultural deprivation and will assist in overcoming a language-barrier. Many Indian children learn an Indian language in their homes and come from homes where their parents suffer from a limited education. They must be tended in winter. So the trappers set out with the early snow-fall and travel the length of the trap-line and back. They traditionally take their family with them. We cannot operate a school for one family that moves 300 miles during the school-year. The children cannot learn effectively from correspondence lessons, because many of the parents are not able to assist them in their school-work. There is often no base at which the trapper is willing to leave his family.

PROBLEM OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

We have had for many years residential schools, to which the children came in the autumn, returning to their family in early summer. These schools used to be both boarding and learning institutions. In recent years, we have begun to convert them into hostels, with the children attending nearby provincial schools. Soon they will all be run this way.

But the child, of necessity, is separated from his parents at a tender age. He loses the close ties of family. He becomes an adult without the deep and lasting bonds which only the intimacies of family life can forge.

There is no resolution of this problem. We are often told of the damage these residential schools