

# Canada Weekly

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Volume 4, No. 12

March 24, 1976



Ottawa, Canada.

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## The influence of communications on social change in Canada

*Addressing the 1976 Reading Conference at York University, Toronto, on February 20, Secretary of State Hugh Faulkner observed that the concern with communications had been "perhaps the most persistent issue we have had throughout Canada's history". Following a general introduction that dealt with a number of factors influencing social change, the Minister stated that his principal topic would be "communications and their relationship to social change in Canada", and proceeded to devote the balance of his speech to it:*

Looking back to the time of Confederation, it is clear that we tacitly recognized the fact of pluralism. A "confederation" suggests by its very nature the union of distinctly different elements, brought together by some shared values and a common belief that individual and group differences not only need not divide us but will ultimately work towards our mutual enrichment.

Throughout the last 109 years, we did not elect to attempt to boil down our differences into some homogeneous "mix". We agreed, instead, to share our differences and tolerate our idiosyncrasies in the pursuit of mutual prosperity.

In more recent years, my Department has been pursuing an active policy to promote social and cultural pluralism. One important aspect of this has been assistance to minority groups in Canada. Today this mandate is not as popular as it once was. Many commentators have pointed to a kind of right-wing backlash in Canadian society. Some feel that the disadvantaged are "ripping off" the tax-payer. I want to take this opportunity to discuss some hard truths about minority-majority relations and the communications problems involved. In so doing I shall draw on my Department's experience in assisting various minorities. Let me briefly give some examples of our activity in this area.

Take the example of Canada's native people. There are about 250,000 status or registered Indians, about 750,000 non-status or Métis people, and about 18,000 Inuit — taken together, a sizable minority of about one million Canadians. No doubt, many of you are familiar with the social, economic and cultural difficulties faced by the native

people. The focus of much of my Department's work with the native people is designed to enable them to communicate with each other and then to express their concerns to the society at large. Two programs in particular do this: the program of core-funding to native associations and the native communications program.

### Financing native communications

Core-funding involves the provision of basic operating costs (staff salaries, rent, publications, meetings) to three representative national native groups — the National Indian Brotherhood, the Native Council of Canada and Inuit Tapirisat of Canada — plus 31 representative provincial and territorial associations. Over the five-year life of the program, since 1971, over \$30 million has been allocated for the kind of leadership development and political representation desired by the native people. They have argued their case compellingly and with persistence. Sometimes the Government has disagreed with them, but in the main we have responded with policies and programs to improve the lives of native people.

The native-communications program has supported the growth of native newspapers and native-communications resource societies. Now groups such as the Alberta Native Communication Society bring information to thousands of native people, encourage contact among different reserves and help to inform the white society about the needs and concerns of native people across Alberta. In British Columbia, RAVEN, with its principal tool of a single-sideband high-frequency radio network, acts for remote communities along the coast as a kind of combined

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