

CONSULTATION WITH THE ESKIMOS

The underlying principles, then, consist of an objective, and a philosophy of gradualism in its attainment. One other principle is most important - namely, that, since the efforts of all concerned with this matter relate to the well-being of the Eskimos, the opinions of the Eskimos on this subject are of paramount importance. This is a matter of fundamental human justice. The Eskimo community will progress far more rapidly and maintain its own culture and dignity more completely if it has entire confidence in the governments and other groups with whom they associate.

Therefore, the Government of Canada has taken the stand that meaningful consultation is a necessary prerequisite to any change in matters so important as the administration of the basic government services. "Meaningful" has two aspects - the mechanism of the consultation must be such that the feelings of the Eskimos are properly conveyed to the governments in a way that has the confidence of the Eskimos; and the governments must be prepared to take into account the feelings they discover through such consultation.

FIRST STEPS

With particular reference to current events, yesterday's statement makes it clear that the only current discussions with Mr. Lesage have involved the transfer of surplus equipment at the Mid-Canada Line site at Great Whale River, and the provision by the Province of Quebec of municipal-type services such as power, water, sewage collection and the like to the residents of the community - Eskimo, Indian and white. These are the kinds of service which are normally provided by municipalities and by provinces, and do not involve the "administration of the Eskimo people". The arrangements discussed with the Province of Quebec have provided for prior consultation with the Eskimos and Indians at Great Whale River. One meeting with the Eskimo Council has been held, and another meeting is planned later this month.

With regard to the plans of the province to build a school at Fort Chimo, there can, of course, be no question as to Quebec's right to build and operate this school or schools anywhere else within the province. The provincial school will provide education for the non-Eskimo children of the community as a matter of course and will offer special kindergarten and nursery classes not now available in the federal school to Eskimo children. The province plans, also, I believe, to teach these classes in Eskimo and will be prepared to provide instruction to Grade 1 Eskimo children - also in Eskimo. This in no way limits the right of Eskimo children to attend the federal school at Fort Chimo, which will continue to operate for as long as it may be required. The Prime Minister, in his statement, emphasized this point when he said: "This provincial service in education will, therefore, supplement ours and, as time passes, the Eskimos in Arctic Quebec communities may well decide that all education should be provided to their children by the system the

province will establish". It should be clearly understood that the curriculum of the provincial Department of Education is and has been the basis of the courses of study employed in federal schools in Northern Quebec.

NO FEDERAL ABANDONMENT

The preamble to the understanding reached with the province of Quebec on February 29, 1964, says: "It is agreed that Canada cannot divest itself of its power to legislate regarding Eskimos". Item 4 of the understanding says: "The Governments of Canada and Quebec undertake to consult jointly the Eskimos of Nouveau Quebec" and goes on to set out the meaning of consultation and the fact that such consultation is a prior condition to the execution of any agreement.

It is, therefore, entirely inaccurate to refer to this development as federal abandonment or denial of federal responsibility or a federal "sell-out". What is involved is an arrangement to provide municipal-type services in one community after consultation with the Eskimos and Indians. It is the hope, also, that arrangements can be made with the province for a stage-by-stage, gradual extension of other services, the scope and timing of any such extension to be determined in accordance with the wishes of the Eskimo communities after consultation with them.

CONDITIONS FOR TRANSFER OF SERVICES

The Government of Canada and Quebec have been discussing these matters actively for over two years now. Mutual understanding has grown up between them, taking always as a theme and reference point the welfare of the Eskimos themselves. As the Eskimos outgrow the need for a particular federal service, or if the province can do that particular job as well as or better than the Federal Government, and if the governments, and, most importantly, the Eskimos, so wish, then transfer of the administration of that particular service to the province is appropriate. In its discharge of responsibility towards Eskimos, the Federal Government cannot move more quickly than indicated by these guidelines. It would at the same time be a disservice to the Eskimo community to continue special federal services setting them aside from the rest of Canadian life after all concerned agree that the need has passed. The best interests of the Eskimos require their full participation in the various provincial communities in which they live; otherwise they will find themselves hived off from the rest of the population, and segregated through special federal services in education, welfare and other fields which reach all other citizens through provincial agencies. Implementation of this policy does not mean any diminution of federal authority and responsibility, and the Federal Government stands ready to provide such services as may be required, and must satisfy itself that the standards of services being provided by other agencies are appropriate and adequate. This gradual and agreed progression toward an objective of full and equal participation in Canadian life is the essence of our policy.

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