

No. 56/3 THE FUTURE OF THE CANADIAN INDIANS

Speech by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Mr. J.W. Pickersgill, to the Canadian Club, Ottawa, March 28, 1956.

When the first Europeans came to North America, there were about 200,000 Indians in Canada

Until early in the twentieth century, the Indian population declined steadily, and it was generally assumed they were a vanishing race. But the trend was reversed and, as a result of improved medical services and improved welfare services, the Indian population has increased rapidly in the last two generations.

The Indian census of 1949 showed a population of just over 135,000.

In 1954 there were over 150,000 in Canada: an increase of more than eleven per cent in five years.

Today the Indian population of Canada without any immigration is increasing faster than the rest of the population with the very considerable addition resulting from immigration.

This increase in numbers is just one of the many reasons why a new policy for the Indians simply had to be devised after the Second World War.

It would not be unfair to describe Canadian Indian policy before 1939 as a mixture of benevolent segregation and habitual oblivion.

The broad terms of our new policy were set out by the present Prime Minister in November 1949.

Mr. St-Laurent said it was our aim: "to have the Indian affairs branch administered in such a way as to bring the original inhabitants of Canadian territory to citizenship as quickly as that can reasonably be accomplished."

In explaining why Indian Affairs were combined in the same department of government with Citizenship and Immigration, Mr. St-Laurent said:

"It was felt that it would have some psychological effect to say that these three activities dealing with human beings, and which are designed to bring those human beings to the status of full citizenship as rapidly as possible, were under the one head.

"Having citizenship, Immigration and Indian affairs in the one department would indicate that the purpose of the activities of that department was to make Canadian citizens of those who were born here of the original inhabitants of the territory, or those who migrated to this country."