

INDIAN POLICY IN CREE TONGUE

More than 4,000 Canadian Indians, inhabiting the Southern James Bay region of Ontario and Quebec, whose mother tongue is Cree, speak little English or French. For the benefit of these people, five Indians from Moose Factory have translated into Cree syllabic characters the text of the Federal Government's recent statement outlining a "new deal" for Indians (see *Canadian Weekly Bulletins*, Vol. 24, No. 30, dated July 23, 1969, P. 1, and No. 44, dated October 29, 1969, P. 1.)

While it is true that the Department of Indian Affairs paid for the translation, printing and circulation of 2,000 copies of this document, the translators, under the direction of Andrew Rickard, Chief of the Moose Factory Band, started the project on their own initiative.

The undertaking of such a translation is in keeping with the principles expressed in the policy statement which makes the point that Indian culture lives through Indian speech and thought, that Indian languages are unique and valuable assets and that Indian culture can be preserved, perpetuated and developed only by the Indian people themselves.

In a letter of thanks to Chief Rickard, Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chrétien said: "Your endeavors

will mean that many Indian people who would otherwise know the extent of the proposals only at second-hand will be able to read and study them in their own time and can bring their judgment to bear on the proposals with a full understanding of them."

Invention of the syllabics method of writing - the only written Indian language in Canada - is generally attributed to James Evans, a Methodist missionary who learned the Cree language while serving at Norway House in Northern Manitoba more than 120 years ago.

Through his interest in a new method of fast writing, known today as shorthand, he evolved a system of symbols designed to be easily reproduced on birch bark with burnt ends of sticks.

Generally speaking, syllabics are a list or catalogue of phonetic characters representing syllables from which words are built. In the most simple terms, they are the signs that make the sounds that make the words.

James Evans named his system of Indian writing "Cree Syllabics". Only one other method of written communication in an Indian language is in use in North America - that of the Cherokees in the United States.

The following is part of the translation into Cree Syllabics of the Government's proposed new Indian policy statement:

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