



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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REVOLUTION IN THE ARCTIC

Talk by R.A.J. Phillips, Chief of the Arctic Division, Department of Northern Affairs, for CBC Special Speaker Programme, September 8, 1957.

There is no word in the Eskimo language for "economics". This is just one reason why it's difficult for any of the 11,000 of Canada's Eskimos to understand the strange new forces now surrounding them. But Eskimos don't think in the abstract. Their world is everywhere concrete and immediate. There is food or there is no food. In adversity and success they tend to take things as they come. And this is just as well, for they are at the center of the Revolution in the Arctic.

The absorption of our Arctic frontier is more compressed in time, more expanded in space than any such national process that Canada has known. In our past, the excitement of change was centered in the border lands. Young Canadians of the future may be surprised to learn that the CBC was not on hand when Jacques Cartier landed on our shores. In the mid-twentieth century it was, and so were writers, film crews, administrators, scientists, business men and a modest tourist traffic. A century ago a trader-explorer might, on returning from his voyages, announce the discovery of rivers as long as the Ottawa, of islands as big as Great Britain, and the purchase of 5,000 bales of fur. To-day the Arctic trader may listen by radio to fur quotations on the Montreal market, and receive authority to change the partitions in his warehouse.

In a sense, this marks the end of the frontier, but in a much more important sense it marks the sharing of the frontier by the few who live in it with the many of us outside.

There are many things we southerners are beginning to learn about the northern third of Canada -- the endless wealth, and what it may mean to us and to a world crying for minerals; the problems of transportation; the

difficulties of knitting together one of the most sparsely settled regions on earth; the responsibilities we have to a northern people who now look to us to guide the forces which they cannot comprehend.

To one of these people, let me give the name of Paul Tookaluk. Two years ago Paul lived in the western Arctic, in igloos in winter, in a canvas tent in summer. He caught seal and caribou, and trapped the white fox. From these skins and their family allowance, his total cash income might average about \$600 a year, with which he would buy ammunition, flour, tea, some other store foods, some materials to supplement his family's skin clothing. His existence was marginal.

This had been the pattern for a long time, but not for always. Once there had been no trader, and so all food and clothing and housing had to come from the land. Perhaps game was more plentiful in those days before the rifle, but it was harder to come by, and if the hunter failed there was no family allowance, no relief, and no outside knowledge of his plight. There was starvation.

In recent years, there had been no starvation, there had been little luxuries his ancestors never knew, but Paul Tookaluk sensed that things were not good in the land. The white fox no longer brought the price it once did, and he could not grasp the laws of supply and demand in the clothing industry of Montreal or New York. The caribou were disappearing and he didn't know why. Government relief was welcome to a hungry family, but he could not be expected to weigh the social consequences of dependence on handouts.

Then, two years ago, Paul went to work at a site on the Distant Early Warning Line. The revolution in his life had started. He was strange to the idea of a job -- first of all to the idea of time, to starting and stopping work by a clock, to staying in one place. He lived in permanent buildings, ate store food, and dressed entirely in white man's clothes. There was a fascination in the new machinery. He learned quickly, he was accepted. And he found he had money, two or three thousand dollars a year, plus his food and fuel.

This was more than money, it was an added status, an independence the Eskimo had not known since the first white men began to run his life generations before. The new mid-twentieth century Eskimo was lucky, but his children would be luckier still. They had schools where they could learn to read, write, and discover new worlds in books denied to every older Eskimo. Paul's sons might grow up to be hunters, and this would please him, but they might also walk in his footsteps, going much farther than he could go. For the first time Eskimos would have a choice in their future, a simple and compelling freedom almost wholly unknown until now in Canada's Arctic.

This spring, Paul Tookaluk faced yet another cataclysm in his private world. He was offered the chance to go "outside" with other Eskimos to study vehicle mechanics and basic English. But he learned far more than these. He lived in the white men's homes and was accepted in his community. He learned something of the rest of Canada and began to realize that his homeland too stretched from sea unto sea.

This was a time of immense personal excitement. Airplanes had long been common place to him, but as he was driven from Edmonton Airport to the school at Leduc he exclaimed in wonder "It is wonderful, you know this is the first time I see a car". And as they drove on in this voyage of discovery, he banged the window and shouted "Look, look, trees, you know I have not seen a tree".

And Paul stared in delight at the row of telegraph poles along the prairie road.

The adjustments are amusing, exciting: they are also tough. These people need constant guidance, but even more they need encouragement to take their lives into their own hands. The formation of their own Eskimo Councils has been one of the landmarks of their development.

Although the whole Arctic is in the grip of change, only about one-tenth of the Eskimo population has so far made the complete transition to wage employment. More will do so as more jobs are created. The mines will soon eclipse defence projects as employers of Eskimos. For the Eskimos not taking jobs there are other outlets -- cottage industries, handicrafts, seal skin tanning, the collection of eiderdown, boat building, and, of course, there are remarkable stone carvings which now bring them an income of nearly \$100,000 a year.

For many years, the majority of Eskimos will still live off the land, though not as their fathers did. With fewer hunters, better equipped, the search for depleted game will be eased. Wildlife surveys by air are an immediate help; conservation measures and population shifts are long term solutions already begun.

Industrial birth on the grand scale, changes in individual lives -- there are just two aspects of the Canadian Arctic in revolution. Bits of the story are scattered in every part of Canada. In an office where town planners give a sense of order, economy and satisfaction to the new communities of the north. In a Bay St. board room where decisions are being made to bring fruitful life to the empty barrens. In an Ottawa office where social workers, teachers and administrators spend long evening hours debating the consequences of a new approach to Eskimo training. In a Canadian Embassy abroad where material is sought to find lessons from other lands in which primitive and modern societies have met. In a kitchen

late at night where a Civil Servant's wife watches patiently as her husband plays a hunch in mixing Arctic moss and paste to form a new approach to housing Eskimos in comfort and economy. In a southern hospital where the cloudy lines of X-ray films are painting the picture of gradual success in the fight on northern disease. In a large city hotel where men and women gather to discuss the national revolution centered in their north. In an Arctic hut where Eskimos gather to discuss their problems and thus set in action reserves of human resources almost untouched while the nation looked east and west and south -- anywhere but north.

At the center of the revolution are the Paul Tookaluks grasping for something new and strange and better. We know that what they seek is a higher material standard of life, wider opportunities for their children, a new human dignity -- in short, the benefits and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship.

It may take a generation or two for our Eskimo citizens not only to achieve their goals, but to understand them. When they do, the revolution will be complete and all of us will be the richer.

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