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ABSTRACT

The 1970 paper is an expression of personal views acquired during 12 years of broadcasting in the Canadian North. The population of the North is polarized between 2 social groups: the minority of white incomers, who have the jobs, money, and power; and the native Indians, Eskimos, and Metis, who are economically deprived, culturally alienated, and politically powerless. Although broadcasting is the obvious means of mass communication for these isolated people who do not have a written culture, media in the North is predominantly middle class in its outlook and appeal, aimed at the white minority. If broadcasting is to change and help the native peoples it must serve them as both a source of information and entertainment and as a means of self expression. This paper explains experimental and community broadcasting programs that could meet the needs of native people. It also details programs currently being developed by the Northern Service of the CBC, one of 2 main broadcasters in the North, and by other agencies such as the Native Communications Society of Alberta and the Society for the Coastal Area Network in British Columbia. Additionally, it gives possible community and cultural involvement in broadcasting, and programs that could use native languages. (KM)

"THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF BROADCASTING IN THE NORTH"

by

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Yellowknife, N.W.T., September 10, 11, 1970

To date there have not been any studies by sociologists or anthropologists of the impact of broadcasting on the lives of the people of the Canadian North although the Indians and Eskimos there have been probed and investigated for practically everything else. As broadcasting is comparatively new in the North there is little to study. No doubt the field will be ripe for a harvest of doctoral research when television has taken possession of every tent and living room and its effect on the folkways of the people can be measured.

This paper is not a layman's substitute for a study by social scientists. It is an expression of personal views acquired during twelve years of broadcasting in the North.

Any assessment, however tentative, of the social impact of broadcasting in the North must be related to the social objectives of the government's policy of economic development there. For the development of Northern Canada is controlled by government, federal and provincial, directly through the civil service and indirectly through crown agencies. Government can direct and control the impact of economic development on the lives of the people.

The Prime Minister declared earlier this year to a group of

students at Carleton University that government in Canada today is concerned with the quality of life of Canadians, not merely with the quantity of things they consume. This is a departure from the conventional wisdom that maintains that the function of government is to make the country safe for private enterprise and let quality look after itself.

Ministerial statements on the government's social objectives in the North have been vague and pietistic. They have repeatedly stated that northern resources must be developed in the interests of the native peoples as well as Canadians as a whole. The results of this policy are not apparent to date nor are the means of achieving them.

The drive to develop the North's natural resources comes from "outside"; its financial clout is international as well as national. The needs and rights of the native peoples are as relevant to the objectives of the developers as they were to the objectives of the settlers who took the Indian's lands in the rest of North America during the past three hundred years. Today the protests of the Indians and Eskimos of the North that their rights in the land are being ignored by the government and the developers echo the protests of the Metis of the Red River in 1870 and Indians and Metis of the North Saskatchewan in 1885.

In the past two decades there has developed a mystique about the wealth of the North that is reminiscent of the mystique about the wealth of the East that prevailed in Europe for centuries. Even amidst the harsh realities of environmental pollution, inflation and social violence it is almost heretical to question the advantage to the nation of certain aspects of Northern development.

But there can be no question of the advantage to the nation of developing the human resources, the Original Peoples. They are Canada's most valuable undeveloped resource in the North. It is the social impact of broadcasting on them that this paper is mostly concerned with.

The population of the North is polarised between two social groups: the minority of white incomers at one end and the majority of native Indians, Eskimos and Metis, the Original Peoples as they call themselves, at the other. The former have the jobs, the money and the power; the latter are economically deprived, culturally alienated and politically powerless. The whites are in the North by choice, the majority to better themselves financially, a minority to better the lot of other; the natives are there because they were born there and they have nowhere else to go.

Poverty in the North is part of the national problem of poverty, of wasted human resources, the economic and social disenfranchisement of almost a quarter of the nation. The Economic Council has pointed out that poverty in Canada 'is often so disguised (it does not, for example, invariably go about in rags) that it can pass largely unnoticed by those in happier circumstances.'

In the North it is undisguised. It differs from poverty in the rest of Canada not only in degree, its incidence is higher, but in kind, its victims are of a different race and culture from the rest of the community.

The Original Peoples of Canada as a group are the poorest of the poor. The Hawthorn Report describes them as 'citizens minus' when, as 'charter Canadians' they ought to be 'citizens plus.' A few statistics, to quote the Economic Council, tell a brutal

story. The average life expectancy of a Canadian Indian woman is 25 years; the infant mortality rate among Eskimos is ten times the national average.

But despite the shadow of poverty and death in which they live the Indians, Eskimos and Metis who were thought at one time, perhaps wishfully by some, to be a dying race, are increasing in numbers faster than any other racial group in Canada. The Indian population will double in about fourteen years. Because of their high birthrate and the declining birthrate of the country as a whole their proportion in the total population will also increase.

Will the increase mean an improvement in the quality of Canadian life through the contribution of vigorous, productive, culturally enterprising Original Peoples or a deterioration because of their increasing poverty and alienation, leading to frustration and eventually violence?

With their increasing numbers the Original Peoples can no longer live on the land that at one time provided for their unsophisticated wants. They are moving into the larger centres especially the big cities. The younger ones who have been to school and enjoyed a taste of urban life and glimpsed more of it through the distorting mirror of t.v. commercials, the restless in search of change, the ambitious in search of work, the disillusioned and the hostile, are all following the road of jobless, landless rural people throughout history the world over, the road to town.

Without skills, without jobs, without purpose in a hostile environment, their poverty is transferred from the countryside to the city; the rural slum becomes an urban ghetto. Rejected socially by the dominant white society who look upon them in terms of the

stereotype of the shiftless drunken Indian, their situation is more desperate than that of the white poor in similar circumstances. They seek the company of their own kind in the cheapest housing available. In the large cities they usually seek the older central residential districts abandoned by the middle class for more distant suburbs; in the smaller, remoter towns they squat on the outskirts in their shacks. In the big cities they become the hard core inner city slum which, unless it is defused, will eventually explode with the pent-up frustration of restless and frustrated youth.

What the black man is among the poor of the United States the Indian is among the poor of Canada. What the black man has done to the cities of the United States the Indian can eventually do to the cities of Canada.

Poverty is the major problem in the North today, the problem of undeveloped human resources. The impact of broadcasting on the problem will depend on whether it is an agent of social change or a bulwark of the status quo; a means of improving the quality of life for the many or of increasing the quantity of things consumed by the few; a medium to stimulate new ideas and interests or to prefabricate social and political attitudes.

Two crown agencies, the CBC and the CRTC, control broadcasting in the North. There is little private broadcasting as it is known in the rest of Canada so broadcasting in effect means the CBC. The Northern Service covers most of the North and its people.

The program policies of the CBC stem from the Broadcasting Act which is its charter and mandate. The Act enjoins it, among other things, to promote national unity. The obvious divisive

forces to be overcome, the most politically abrasive ones, are the differences between regions of the country and between the English and French cultures. But underlying these is poverty, a divisive force that can destroy Canada as effectively as any regional or cultural separatism.

Nowhere in Canada is the gulf between the affluent and the poor, the inheritors and the dispossessed, more marked than in the North. The extent to which broadcasting there fulfills its mandate to promote national unity will be measured by the help it gives the Original Peoples in their struggle to overcome poverty and ignorance and achieve a position of economic and political equality with the whites. Only then can national unity become meaningful.

In the North as in the rest of Canada, broadcasting is predominantl middle class in its outlook and appeal. The majority of the programs on the Northern Service are for the white minority. The reasons for this are obvious. The white minority is articulate and powerful. It makes its wants known. The Northern Service, as part of the national broadcasting system, draws on the national networks for many of its programs. The staff at the Northern stations is largely white.

The administrators, police, teachers, traders, prospectors, scientists, workers and professionals whose knowledge and skill are necessary for the development of the North and the well-being of its people, quite properly demand as a condition of their living and working there the basic amenities of life, 'outside' housing, education, health services, communications, transportation and broadcasting. The cost to the nation is high but the government has decided that

the development of the North is worth it.

The cost of providing a broadcasting service in the North is about five times the national average of $7.30 per person annually. Eighty per cent of the cost of operating the CBC is provided by the federal treasury. The balance comes from advertising. As the Northern Service does not carry commercial advertising, its entire cost may be said to be borne by the taxpayer as is the case with most of the other public services in the North. The major part of the annual cost of providing a broadcasting service goes to programs for a minority of the population. As the television service is expanded both the per capita cost and the proportion of the total cost devoted to the non-native population will increase.

These proportions compare with the amounts spent by the federal government on public services for the whole nation and those spent by the Department of Indian Affairs & Northern Development on Indians. According to the Hawthorne Report the average amount spent on all Canadians by all levels of government in 1964 was $740.00 per person whereas the amount spent on Indians and Eskimos was $300.00.

One could wish that the Original Peoples of the North were as articulate in expressing their demands and as effective in having them realized as their white fellow citizens. The fact that they are neither demanding nor critical of the broadcasting service does not mean that they neither desire nor deserve it. To a great extent they are not aware of what it can do for them. What they need and what they want is not by any means the same as the white middle class needs and wants.

Broadcasting is the obvious means of mass communication for

people without a written culture, unaccustomed to communicating by the written word and without the means of doing so even if they were, living in isolated communities across the breadth of the continent and remote from the rest of the country. It can be to them not only a source of information but a platform from which to speak, to be seen and be heard.

The reasons for lack of adequate programs for the native peoples on the Northern Service is just as obvious as the reason for the abundance of programs for the white transients. The Northern Service has no source of programs for Indians, Eskimos and Metis to draw upon from the national networks, and no experienced body of broadcasters to create them either 'outside' or in the North. There are no precedents in Canada for broadcasting to Indians, Eskimos and Metis. The North has to train its native broadcasters to create their own programs with little assistance from outside bodies.

Assuming that the broadcast needs and wishes of the native peoples could be adequately met, is it possible for one broadcasting channel to provide a service to two groups in the one community? Can an adequate service be given to each by combining them on the one delivery system? Is an equitable distribution of broadcast time and program funds between them possible?

Until now the white minority has been tolerant of the few programs for native peoples on Northern Service radio, some of them in Indian and Eskimo languages. But experience has shown that mixed broadcasting audiences are not very tolerant of each other's tastes, preferences and language.

If broadcasting is to help native peoples it must serve them in

a two-fold way: as a source of information and entertainment and as a means of self expression.

Ideally the Indians, Eskimos and Metis should have their own broad casting system with small independent community stations to serve local needs and exchanging programs among themselves by means of tape recordings. This could, in time, develop into connected networks.

This concept of community broadcasting may sound novel, if not revolutionary, but it is not original. It is quite feasible in both radio and television. Experiments in 'store front' broadcasting are taking place in the United States.

Broadcasting is not a difficult art and its hardware is becoming cheaper and more easily managed by people without a great deal of technical skill. Community radio, and eventually television, stations could be started in the North. They could be paid for by a small levy on the wealth being taken out of the land there which, in the view of the Original Peoples, still belongs to them. At least they have an equity in it and this could be one way of redeeming it.

A scheme for low power F. M. community radio stations was devised to serve small isolated communities in the North, particularly the High Arctic, not served by the medium band stations of the Northern Service. The stations would be operated voluntarily by the people of the community to broadcast programs of information and entertainment in the local language. The station would keep in touch with the 'outside' by means of the CBC's Northern shortwave service, particularly its news and messages in Eskimo. The stations would circulate their own programs on tape among themselves.

The CBC's role in this scheme would be to train operators, advise on technical equipment, supply programs if requested and help the stations circulate their own taped programs. The government would buy the equipment and pay for its installation; the community would pay for its upkeep. Besides its effect on community development, the project would have a spinoff in familiarizing native peoples with the use of electronic equipment, a skill which could be useful to the young seeking work 'outside.'

A similar scheme is being pursued by the Mid-Canada Community Service and Broadcasting Foundation, a subsidiary of the Mid-Canada Development Foundation. It is building its first station this year at Tuktoyaktuk with the co-operation of radio station CHUM, Toronto.

The Native Communications Society of Alberta, with the financial support of the federal and Alberta governments, produces programs in Cree for six private stations in the province and hopes eventually to develop its own network of local stations. This network would include other Indian nations as well as Cree including the Blackfoot of Morley who broadcast in their own language on a local private station and have plans for a station of their own.

While television stations are more expensive to build and operate, the development of videotape recording makes possible non-broadcast visual program networks. These lack the immediacy of television broadcasts but have some of the advantages of cable transmission.

The Society for a Coastal Area Network in British Columbia, SCAN, has a project to circulate videotaped programs made by themselves and acquired from outside sources among isolated Indian communities on the Pacific Coast. There would also be a radio

network linking the communities. This Radio and Visual Educational Network, known by the romantic acronym of RAVEN, would be operated by the Indians themselves.

Perhaps the Original Peoples of Canada will be the pioneers in disestablishing broadcasting, freeing it from the domination of public agencies on the one hand and by business on the other, making it the two-way communication system it must become if it is to be an agency of social change, of participatory democracy, available to ordinary citizens for the exchange of ideas, the governed to talk to their governors, public servants to account to the public they serve, consumers to confront producers. Until now broadcasting has been largely a one-way channel of communication where the governors talk to the governed, the experts dispense their particular expertise and sellers brainwash buyers.

The national broadcasting system would provide the community stations with national and international news, information and entertainment.

In the meantime, pending the advent of community controlled broadcasting, how can the publicly owned national broadcasting system help bring about social change in the North?

It must involve the native peoples in its programming; give them the information they need in the language they understand and the form they appreciate; give them the entertainment they enjoy including their own; provide them with a platform for the expression of their views, discussion of their problems and the airing of their grievances.

The Northern Service has sought to involve native peoples in its programming by taking them on staff, employing them as free

lance broadcasters, consulting them as individuals and as organized groups.

Where necessary and where possible it broadcasts in local native languages - Northern Cree, Chipweyan, Slave, Dogrib, Kutchin and the principal Eskimo dialects. This is the only way to communicate with those Indians and Eskimos, especially the older ones, who still speak only their mother tongue and it is a mark of respect for their culture and traditions. Without a written culture the spoken language is the repository of their racial memory, their myths and their legends. The individual draws strength and self respect from the culture of his people. The deliberate disrespect for native languages shown by the educational system has helped to destroy the self respect of the native peoples. The Northern Service has helped to preserve the story of their past by broadcasting, and recording for the archives, their myths and folk tales and the reminiscences of their elders of a way of life that has gone from the North as the scythe has gone from the farm.

The information which the Original Peoples need to cope with the urbanized wage earning cash economy that is so painfully different from the life on the land, information on health, housing, the law, education, consumer goods and services, jobs, government, must be given to them in a language they understand. The English must be of Bunyanesque simplicity, simple, descriptive, declaratory. The test of its simplicity is its ability to be translated easily into native languages. It must be free of gobbledygook, expertise and academic abstractions.

Drama is an ancient and hallowed tool for imparting information and stimulating thought. The Northern Service has produced plays

by native peoples on themes of their own choosing and acted spontaneously by them without scripts. Almost one hundred radio plays have been produced and recorded at Povungnituk in Eskimo by Eskimo actors. Peter Murdoch, a well known figure in the North, initiated them and today the Eskimos can produce the plays themselves. A similar series was produced this summer in Yellowknife by Phoebe Nahanni, a university student from Fort Simpson.

Besides giving information and entertainment, broadcasting must provide the native peoples with the means of self expression. This can take a variety of forms. The Northern Service has tried to adapt the CBC's Farm and Citizens Radio Forums, long discarded on the national networks, to the needs of native peoples of the North. It has co-operated with the Indian-Eskimo Association in this. The Community Action Programs have tried to stimulate an expression of views by Indians and Eskimos in their own communities. This has been neither simple nor easy. The native peoples are unaccustomed to expressing opinions on their situation that might be critical of the establishment and broadcasting is part of the establishment to which they have never belonged. It has taken time to convince them that the CBC exists to serve them as well as the white population. With the growth of native organizations such as the Yukon and the Northwest Territories Native Brotherhoods, and the Committee on Original Peoples Entitlement, COPE, the native peoples now have a more powerful and articulate voice for the expression of their views which will be reflected in their broadcasts.

Broadcasting is part of the process of developing native leaders. Simonie Michael, the only elected member of the Northwest Territories Council who is either Indian or Eskimo, was a broadcaster on radio

station CFFB before he was elected.

Radio service for the native peoples of the North is comparatively cheap to operate and programs are easy to produce. The evidence available suggests that the programs produced by the Northern Service to date have had a considerable effect on the attitudes and ideas of the native peoples. Television is a still more powerful medium. The visual has the same universality that music has in sound. Whether or not one picture is worth a thousand words it can at least be understood by everyone whatever his language.

The impact of this powerful medium on the lives of native peoples in the North is both exciting and fightening. Exciting if it is used as an agency of social change to improve the quality of their lives; frightening if used to replace their traditional values of community living and sharing with the competitive, acquisitive way of life of the consumer economy before they have become adjusted to it and integrated into it.

The existing Frontier Package Television service of the CBC in the North was designed for the white transient population. It broadcasts a condensed schedule of the programs of the national network. It does not broadcast any programs designed for the people of the North either white or native. If the satellite is to be used simply to transmit the national television network live to the North the quantity and range of the programs will be increased but not their nature.

If, however, satellite is to be the boon to the native peoples of the North that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development have stated, programs for them and by them such as are being produced

on radio will have to be produced on television as well. That will be costly but not beyond the financial capacity of the nation and the benefit from them will be proportionate to their cost. The alternative is to treat the Original Peoples in the North as bystanders, rubbernecks of the white man's parade, eavesdroppers and knot hole watchers of a world that will never be theirs.

The impact of some standard television programs could even be harmful to them. The stereotypes of native peoples, especially the Indian, that are still part of the dramatic stock in trade, humiliate and degrade the Original Peoples when they do not outrage and anger them. The emphasis on consumption in our television commercials tantalizes the poor with a range and variety of goods they can never hope to possess unless by theft. The consumer philosophy assiduously promoted by television that happiness consists of the possession of goods is contrary to the philosophy of mutual sharing that has characterized the traditional life of the Original Peoples on the land.

What the visual medium can do for the native peoples is illustrated by the National Film Board's series "Challenge for Change." The Film Board has trained Indian producers and cameramen and allowed them to make their own films, tell it as they see it not as the white majority sees it or thinks the Indians should see it.

If the Original Peoples of Canada, and the poor of which they form a part, are to emerge peacefully from the iron ring of poverty and ignorance in which the majority of them are held and take their place in the greater society, they must be given the help they need from government and its agencies and from the public. They must be allowed to become equal citizens as Indians, Eskimos

and Metis, not reconstituted white men, and be accepted as such by the dominant group. As equal citizens they have as much to give as to receive from Canadian society. In terms of the conventional wisdom an investment now, which though large in sum would be small in terms of the wealth of Canada, will yield invaluable long term dividends. Failure to make the investment can mean long term national impoverishment and destructive violence.

The Indians, Eskimos and Metis must become articulate, their talents and energies given channels of peaceful expression. Broadcasting can help in this by giving them a voice and an image. If it fails to do so it will fail not only the Original Peoples but the nation. The result can only be increased alienation and eventually violence, which Martin Luther King called the language of the inarticulate.

OTTAWA,
July 16, 1970.