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By Mary Lee Stearns

Talk among some Indian spokesmen of organizing protest marches to dramatize their claims on society rouses mixed feelings in observers of Indian affairs. There are some who applaud this stirring of militancy as a sign of political maturity. Others reflect that legitimate grievances translated into the militant idiom tend to become unreasonable demands which arouse resentment in the rest of society.

Indian militancy

What is the significance of the rumblings of dissatisfaction now audible among Indians? Is it that protest movements are fashionable and offer a new method of attaining social and political goals? Or is it that politically disadvantaged minorities have no effective channel for communicating with the majority? The onus of maintaining open communication and of including the disadvantages in decision making is upon those in power. We have warnings that this action is overdue.

It is impressive to the student of social process to see Indian communities, for long dependent wards of a paternalistic government, quickly become adept political pressure groups. Yet political action by Indian groups is not new. The struggle against discrimination in education and employment was initiated some years ago by the Native Brotherhood. Political methods were effectively employed to gain social ends. This struggle is not yet concluded as studies of discrepancies between Indians and whites in education, income, housing, and other spheres

clearly document. The responsibility has been recognized and accepted, though not yet discharged by the society. In this day of emotional liberalism, or better, liberal emotionalism, denial of equal opportunity to weak minorities becomes morally indefensible and politically inexpedient. Government is obligated to extend to Indians equal access to welfare, public services and other benefits on the basis of their citizenship in province and nation. Will the ultimate and hopefully inevitable achievement of their goals satisfy Indian aspirations? Or are we seeing the emergence of new political goals? What modes of political action are available to Indians? In what circumstances is Indian political action likely to be effective and with what consequences? This paper is devoted to an examination of the last of these questions.

*the question*

Parenthetically I wish to say that I have striven for objectivity in this analysis, though not because I imagine that the scientist can be valuefree. Rather, I feel that his personal values are irrelevant if not detrimental to his primary responsibility which is observation and explanation. The value commitment which is today demanded of social scientists, chiefly by some of their own number, seems to me to require the delineation of issues in blacks and whites. What follows is very grey. I think that in this respect it reflects the actual situation.

To give due consideration to the human factor I should add that the field work on which this paper draws was a very warm and satisfying personal experience. Perhaps it is my friendships with persons of all groups in the community, rather than any notions of scientific neutrality



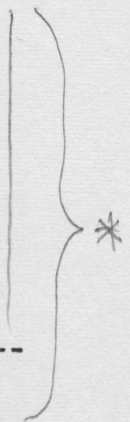
which makes me unwilling to favor one side at the expense of the other. This attitude leads directly to my conclusion that Indian betterment must be achieved as part of the general social betterment of the total community. I think that an open minded appraisal of all the facts leads independently to the same conclusion.

The anthropologist views the political activities of groups in terms of the total structure of the society. He assumes that societies are systems made up of interdependent parts, each of which contributes to the functioning of the whole. He is thus required by his assumptions to study wholes on whatever level of analysis he selects as relevant. The study of the position of Indians in the total Canadian society is essential to the formulation of national policy, as a guide to legislative action, and as a measure of the task to be undertaken. In implementing policy on the local levels, consideration must be given not only to the social and economic conditions of individuals, but to the political structure of the community.

There is extreme variation on the level between urban centers and rural settlements. On any of the criteria which might be employed, rural and urban social organization will contrast. The size of the settlement varies from the dozens or hundreds in the rural village to the thousands and hundreds of thousands in the city. Economic activities differ in type and diversity from primarily logging, fishing or agricultural villages to complex manufacturing, processing, shipping and governmental centers with consequences for the division of labor.

Contrasts in population density and technological complexity are reflected in social organization. Urban centers exhibit horizontal strat-

ification into socioeconomic classes. Individuals of differing ethnic or racial origin are assimilated by the society (whether or not they assimilate to it) on a level appropriate to their education, skills, income and transferable status. Rural settlements, on the other hand, when composed of significant numbers of differing ethnic or racial background, may exhibit vertical segmentation. Each racial or cultural group maintains some separate institutions, usually domestic, religious and recreational. Others, including economic, judicial and often educational institutions, are shared by the segments though they may participate on different levels and to a different degree. These contrasting modes of social organization--the horizontal and the vertical--have great significances for political action.



A few hundred or even a few thousand Indians embedded in the urban class structure have had little opportunity to express themselves or to exert pressure as Indians although as Canadians their status may not necessarily be disadvantaged. Even in the rural context where reserve communities of a few hundred Indians are often juxtaposed to "white" settlements, political competition takes very different forms from one community to the next. Reasons for this will be explored below.

On the reserve, Indian status has cultural meaning. The reserve as a territory supports quasi-traditional social relationships, economic subsistence patterns, and a sense of unity and uniqueness vis a vis the larger society. The reserve community may be viewed as a social system with members recruited by birth and marriage, carrying out some activities in common, and regulated by distinctive norms and values.



The bands are closed corporations holding land and resources as an estate. They and their members have special legal status and are administered by a separate department of the federal government under a system of indirect rule.

Duff in his study, *The Indian History of British Columbia*, Part One, (1965, p. 50) states that there are about 250 Indian settlements in British Columbia. A glance at the map of population distribution of Indians in 1963 (p. 51) indicates that the majority of these reserves are located away from the heavily populated lower mainland. Further, only 7,500 of the province's 40,800 registered Indians were listed as living off their reserves. (p. 52) Many of these live in the white settlements adjacent to the reserves. There is, therefore, ample justification for examining the social structure of the rural communities in greater detail.

Very few Indian reserves provide full economic services for their populations. Generally Indians sell their produce or their labor in markets controlled by whites. One factor in determining the nature of the interrelations between whites and Indians is their relative prosperity. A second factor is the composition of the white settlement. Two major types of settlement will be considered although there are other possibilities.

The first type may be termed the "outpost." It is made up of the local branch of one or more institutions of the larger society. Operations are controlled from the central office and the local representative has little autonomy. He is usually assigned to any one post for a limited period. Military, commercial, governmental and often

construction company personnel, when accompanied by wives and children, tend to form closed groups, excluding both native and white elements of the local population. Teaching personnel are commonly assimilated to the "elite" group. Status is determined by membership in a hierarchy which extends beyond the local scene. Rewards come from outside. Values and morality are strictly urban middle class. This group may number one or a few dozen as against a native population of one or a few hundreds. Relations of the white group with local inhabitants are very restricted and may even be the subject of policy determined at the top of the respective hierarchies and sanctioned by dismissal and transfer. The political structure may be viewed as caste-like. There is reason to believe that here only militant action will earn <sup>an</sup> *Outpost* Indians a share in decision making.

The second major type of white settlement is the "frontier town." These "white" settlements, some of whose residents are Indians, are open social systems with fluid heterogeneous membership. New members are recruited by birth and immigration, chiefly the latter. Males predominate. Various motives impel whites to settle in remote places, not the least of which is a taste for pioneering. A strong value is placed on self-reliance, independence, "standing on your own ~~two~~ feet," on being able to do many different kinds of tasks. Interest in excellence of workmanship is less frequently mentioned. These values fit a situation in which almost everyone does the same kind of work. Specialists, whether in electricity, plumbing, carpentry, medicine, barbering or other service industries, are infrequently available. Where found,



they are overworked, and at the same time find it hard to make a living. Generally speaking, the economic system is geared to unskilled labor and low capital expenditure. Social organization is loose with no sharp class or racial barriers. Frequently these settlements are located adjacent to Indian reserves and may exploit the same economic resource, as in fishing. Timber resources draw logging camps where Indians may find employment. The reserve, in turn, is likely to be seen as a source of women.

*What about  
Kitimat, Okanagan  
'outpost' or  
'frontier town'?*

It may be hypothesized that where Indians have an even chance in economic competition, relations between whites and Indians will generally be open. The nature of political relations between two such adjoining communities are more difficult to predict. To investigate this problem, I spent 15 months in ethnographic field work in a northern coastal fishing area. I speak of it as an area because the relevant social field was defined in terms of the widest extent of continuous interaction. It includes all those individuals and groups sharing a single set of institutions, which here are economic in nature. (The most embracing set of relations is, of course, defined by the national polity but this does not involve continuous face to face interaction.)

This economically unified area includes an Indian reserve village, a "frontier town," and a military "outpost." Total population of the area is about 1300 of whom approximately half are Indians living on the reserve. The economic core, or "business district", which serves all three segments is composed of 2 stores, 2 cafes, 2 garages, a dry goods store, a bowling-alley--pool hall--snack bar complex owned by a

Chinese, an electrician's shop, a credit union, a hotel and an oil company agency. The fish cannery is the major buyer of fish and source of employment for the area.

Other shared services include a 3 bed Red Cross Outpost Hospital, used only for emergencies, an RCMP station, post office, and an integrated school with grades 1 through 10. An Indian Agency office was located in the settlement but has recently been closed after 5 years of operation. An Anglican Church, community hall and Canadian Legion are also located here. These serve the needs of the white population.

The reserve village three miles away has its own Anglican Church, Indian Health Service dispensary, Indian Affairs Branch School with grades 1-3, community hall and a shop with a small stock of groceries.

The military outpost has a canteen and facilities for single men at its base three miles outside the white settlement in the opposite direction from the reserve. Quarters for married men and families are located in a compound in town.

All groups share the inconvenience of isolation, problems with water supply and poor service by the freighter. There are no sharp differences in occupations as between groups, excluding, of course, the military. The remainder are affected by seasonal fluctuations in work patterns and income. While many Indians depend on welfare to get through the winters, many of the whites must rely on fishermen's compensation or unemployment insurance.

There is a great discrepancy between Indians and whites in



capital investment in boats. I was able to secure information on 48 boats, a number I believe to be fairly complete. 35 of those are less than 20 feet long with an average value as set by their owners of \$500. Of 29 boats owned by residents of the white settlement, 25 are larger than 30 feet. Values as estimated by owners range from \$4,500 to \$50,000. This fact is often interpreted at a distance as proof that Indians are being forced out of fishing by competition with whites. This interpretation is inaccurate. The discrepancy is due to differences in orientations and values.

Within both Indian and white villages, living conditions range from comfortable to squalid. In both places there are upwards of 100 occupied houses in addition to some abandoned old buildings. In the Indian village, however, there were at least 19 houses less than 2 years old and 5 more under construction last August. In the white village 4 units, including a duplex and a teacherage, were under construction last year. There are many shabby homes which cannot be replaced due to lack of adequate financing. Here is one instance where preferential treatment accorded to Indians introduces inequities into the local situation which are quite the reverse of conditions found in many places. (Differences in funds provided for winter works by federal and provincial agencies is another example.) Generally however, older homes in the white village are painted and otherwise repaired.

The other major institution shared by all segments in the area is the school. Half the student body are Indian band members whose tuition is paid by the Indian Affairs Branch. Another third are

of Indian background. Differences in performance between local white and Indian children are not so extreme as those found elsewhere.

The children of military personnel who have had a portion of their schooling elsewhere form a dramatic exception. This situation *in what way?* reflects a lack of incentive and stimulation, probably in large part a consequence of isolation. Children of all segments interact in school activities.

It is sometimes assumed that participation in the same set of institutions by differing cultural groups signifies acculturation or the growth of homogeneity. Shared activities are supposed to result in shared values, greater understanding and other virtues. But these different segments participate in different ways, to a different extent and for different reasons. What determines this differential participation--discrimination or choice? The answers require more complete analysis for their delineation. However, the difference in the capital investment in boats reflects, among other things, a different commitment to ~~this~~ basic economic activity.

The white resident fisherman views fishing as a commercial venture, reinvesting a large proportion of his gross in new equipment. Characteristically he has a large boat, a powerful engine, and several nets for specialized fishing conditions. Usually he has large monthly payments to meet, in the winter off-season as well as during the fishing season. If financed by the cannery, 25% of his gross is deducted and applied on the loan. He does not preserve much fish for his own use.

The Indian also participates in commercial fishing but he may



together. In this way survival of the distinctive social patterns we call culture is assured for as long as the people themselves wish.

There is a vaguely defined ranking system within each segment but no sharply defined boundaries separating segments. The traditional native society was based on hereditary status differences between "nobles" and "commoners". Those of high rank validated their titles by competitive potlatching. The principle of inherent inequality was inconsistent with Christian teachings and, so it appears, was voluntarily rejected by the people. While some families still claim to be "higher", the general consensus is, "We don't feel it's right for some people to say they are better than others." I was able to determine that the vaguely defined factions within the village are based on membership in "families," the remnants of maternal descent groups which the anthropologist calls lineages. There appear to be no institutionalized rankings based on economic criteria within the reserve.

In the white village, the family which formerly owned and now manages the cannery behaves as an "elite." These pretensions are ridiculed by others of the old settlers who concede no basis for differentiation. Persons with some professional training, such as teachers, are regarded as providing a service and receive no special status. Where prosperity depends on fishing and this skill is not acquired in school, education is not considered indispensable by everyone.

Life style as expressed by well kept and well furnished homes is one criterion of ranking. A few of the reserve families who maintain

attractive homes and pay lip service to the values of industry and self reliance are accepted on social terms by whites. It is probably not irrelevant that these persons are also of "good family background" and, as leaders, showed moderation in dealing with whites. It is clear that Indian status is no barrier to participation in white society in this locality.

In contrast to the relative fluidity on economic and social levels, each segment is a sharply defined political unit. Each has an elected council, but neither the councils nor the two villages are parallel units. The white settlement is an incorporated village, a provincial unit. The Indian village comprises a band which is under federal jurisdiction. The Indian Affairs Branch is not only an administrative department; it is an increasingly sensitive channel for transmitting Indian grievances to the top of the hierarchy. The white residents, with no local citizen representing them in Victoria have no comparable voice to defend and further their interests. Discrepancies between federal and provincial policies in any sphere are manifested on the local level and become a source of potential strain in relations between the two villages.

The direction of change over the last 50 years has been toward greater interdependence of the Indian village and the white settlement. Gradually and for various reasons, duplicate institutions are being eliminated as social services are consolidated. This process has affected police, fire department, school, and stores. The church and medical



services are still separate, though by no means unequal. This trend toward consolidation for special purposes will continue as costly services are provided which exceed the capability or resources available to either unit. An example is the projected water system which will serve the military outpost as well as both villages. And yet, during this period of increasing interdependence and despite the relative absence of barriers to interaction, political relations between the two villages have been worsening. It is not possible to analyse the many responsible factors here. It should be noted that the consolidations were imposed by external agencies and do not reflect any overriding sense of common interest within the social field. The integration of the school and the extension of RCMP jurisdiction to the reserve are examples of such administrative decisions.

A long smouldering sense of grievances within the reserve has in recent years been translated into action. A militant pressure group emerged, representing majority though not unanimous opinion. Supported and encouraged by the fishermen's union, this group made its grievances known. Up until this time the attitude of the white community had (traditionally) been one of tolerance occasionally flashed by exasperation.

The entire population of the area is directly or indirectly affected by the cannery operation. The cannery in turn is dependent upon Indian labor. This has given the Indians a powerful political weapon. When they chose to strike to enforce a political demand against the white community, reaction was bitter. The issue at stake was a matter of principle on both sides and was only marginally connected with labor-management relations. The Indians' action was successful

in accomplishing its immediate object and in demonstrating their strength both to the whites and to themselves. However, a hostility was roused among the white community, reaction was bitter. The issue at stake was a matter of principle on both sides and was only marginally connected with labor-management relations. The Indians' action was successful in accomplishing its immediate object and in demonstrating their strength both to the whites and to themselves. However, a hostility was roused among the whites which has only partially subsided. Most of the Indians realized that the old working relationship between the villages had been destroyed. In a sense, relations had been reversed, for now it was the whites who were suspicious and resentful. Among those Indians who felt they had gone too far, a more moderate attitude emerged.

The whites have access to a different kind of power. Because they control the school board they are able to restrict the curriculum offered. With limited resources at their disposal, they opt for the academic program which they feel their own children deserve rather than a manual arts type of program which would suit the needs of the majority. There are many aspects to the problem of schooling but the intervillage tension acts as a complicating factor. Despite the large sums paid to the school district by the Indian Branch on behalf of Indian students, the latter get comparatively little out of it.

I was responsible for a cooking program in the school in which Indian girls prepared the school lunch. This activity was rewarding to the girls in a way that their academic subjects were not. Nevertheless, the program received no support from the school board, the community, or the



Indian Branch. The school board and the Branch both refused financial support. Quite unjustified reports circulated in the community that the kitchen was left in a filthy state. The considerable labor and enthusiasm that went into the girls' efforts to provide hot, nutritious lunches for several dozen children each day was not enough to offset the financial deficit. A rare opportunity to encourage common action for mutual benefits was thrown aside. The explicit refusal of all groups to support the school in this effort demonstrates limitations placed upon that institution as an agency for improvement.

Each side uses the weapons available to it with the result that participation in the formally integrated institutions is inhibited. The only solution to this corrosive kind of competition is the cultivation of better social relations. Externally generated policies which increase and aggravate the tensions between the two villages will have a very negative effect. Unequal treatment of two groups whose living conditions and economic opportunities are so similar is one source of such aggravation. Another source is the emphasizing of Indian rights rather than Indian social improvement and opportunity. This brings us to the really basic issues.

At the outset it was stated that government is obligated to extend to its Indian citizens the same benefits that are available to other citizens. Are Indian claims based on their status as Canadians? In going over a considerable volume of field notes collected during 15 months of active field work, I did not find one case where this was so. The claims are all based on the Indians' status as descendants of the original inhabitants

of the continent and as victims of the "white man's greed." As seen by the local whites, the Indians are demanding as compensation, continuing payment on a moral debt whose principal never diminishes. In their eyes this payment simply reinforces the Indians' conviction that they are entitled to special privileges. Here occurs a clash in basic values. The notion of hereditary right to special status and privilege is the antithesis of the pioneer values of self-reliance and independence. Rightly or wrongly, the whites see themselves as the embodiment of these qualities. This provokes the demand for the abolition of reserves and the special privilege they represent in order to restore the balance.

My object has been to demonstrate how economic and social factors condition the type of political competition prevailing in a specific and probably atypical situation. In this case there is a low differentiation in occupations. The dominant economic activity of fishing may be engaged in by unskilled workers with little capital. (It is not implied that fishing requires no skill but that this skill is acquired on the job.) The white population is heterogeneous and social organization within the white community is loose. There is no consensus on values or on the criteria of ranking. The possibility of successful political competition between members of two different cultural groups is related to success in economic competition. In a relatively depressed area, the preferential treatment given to Indians by the federal government places them in an advantageous position in terms of housing, access to special educational programs, and so on. In the whites' eyes this is not as unpalatable as the fact that rarely do the Indians seem to take advantage of the opportunities open to them, particularly in education.



There are significant implications here for community development planning. This analysis shows that the reserve is not necessarily the relevant social unit. When improvements are being considered, planners must weigh their effect on relations within the total social field. This is not a question of fairness or of democratic ideals but of sound business practice. Failure to take account of the widest area of interaction on the local level may very well doom the whole project to failure.

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