

BRIEF TO:

PARLIAMENTARY TASK FORCE
ON
EMPLOYMENT IN THE 80's

Presented by: MAKIVIK CORPORATION

November, 1980

As spokesman for Inuit of Northern Quebec, Makivik Corporation welcomes the opportunity to express its views on the matter before the Parliamentary Task Force on Employment in the 80's.

Makivik is the Inuit word for "advancement". We have a particular interest in any measure that further enables Inuit to enjoy the benefits of Canadian citizenship.

In recognizing that economic development all across Canada is adversely affected by shortages of skilled people, we would like to elaborate specifically on how these shortages effect development in Northern Quebec. We will conclude with suggestions for solutions to this and related manpower problems unique to our area.

The economic and social influence of the South has turned an increasing number of Northern Quebecers irreversibly away from full dependance on the land and the "land based economy". Consequently, our people become more and more dependent on the wage earning or "market economy". Although, for some, the source of livelihood may be found at either extreme, most of the population is to be found at varying stages in a "transitional" or a "mixed economy". That is to say, most families derive their income from wages or social services, and what they can extract from the land.

As population grows, and these natural land sources for food are depleted, we, by necessity, will become increasingly dependent on salaries or wages to supply our needs. There is a shortage of jobs even now for the unskilled because of the limited economic development in our area. The future looks bleak for many Inuit presently unemployed let alone future prospects for the new crop of young men and women coming on stream annually.

You may ask, "Why do these unemployed or new candidates for the work force not move South to find jobs?". There are two reasons that inhibit this mobility. The first, little understood by most Canadians, is that of "Culture Shock". Inuit are a clearly identifiable culture group with our own language, traditions, values and ways of doing things. We are oriented to an environment in which our culture has developed and is appropriate. To be transplanted to a work place in Southern Canada is perhaps more severe for an Inuk emotionally and psychologically than to be placed in complete isolation. Usually, the job and workplace he can endure admirably. It is the strange surroundings, the absence of what is familiar, the social habits, the organization of time and the absence of friends with interests and understanding common to his own that makes his situation unbearable. The attrition rate for those who have tried is almost 100 percent.

The second reason which inhibits mobility to the South is that of job qualification. Due to a variety of circumstances, most Inuit of Northern Quebec have had neither the vocational training nor the work experience necessary to prepare for any job but that of manual labour. Even in the North at institutions, in industry, commerce, education, health, and social services, nearly all positions requiring persons having a special training or skills are filled by non-Inuit.

Employment and Immigration Canada has helped a great deal at times with short on-site courses or with financial assistance for on-the-job training. Unfortunately, such training is sporadic, and designed for short term employment needs. The skills developed are often job specific and establish few portable skills for other kinds of employment that may become available.

Just as progress in economic development is dependent on the availability of skilled employees, so are workers dependent on industry and commerce for the opportunity for them to become highly skilled. Highly skilled tradesmen and those in highly skilled occupations do not acquire their expertise from training alone. Their special abilities come about only as the result of training and experience. Many individuals in the highly skilled workforce have undoubtedly arrived in this position through their own initiative.

Regardless of individual initiative, it is virtually impossible at present for an Inuk to aspire to a highly skilled position in Northern Quebec. There are reasons for this dilemma demanding immediate attention.

Vocational and occupational facilities are not available in Northern Quebec. The standards, quality, and availability of academic education varies from settlement to settlement. Drop-outs from a starting class begins after about six years of schooling and increases steeply to about 10 percent attending the tenth and final year. If a grade ten academic standing is a minimum requirement to enter an apprenticeship training program, one can readily see that the choice among candidates is very limited. Candidates applying for training at technical colleges in Ottawa or Winnipeg are restricted because pre-entrance testing shows their real academic qualifications shockingly below universal standards. The I.Q. tests, however, show Inuit candidates normal to the Canadian population. Again, applicants to Employment and Immigration short courses are at a disadvantage for similar reasons. Technical training in the Province of Quebec is limited for Inuit, not because facilities are not excellent nor because there is a shortage of courses, but because the language of instruction is French. For most Inuit, the second language is English.

At present, few Inuit in Northern Quebec can aspire to jobs requiring anything more than little or no particular skill. Steps should be taken now to ensure that those presently unemployed acquire skills that enable employment. Those coming into the work force in future years should come prepared with employable skills. Further, for those displaying motivation and appropriate employee behavior, career oriented training and work experience should be made available. An arrangement should be made between employer and a training institution to enable higher skill development and the employee's mobility upward. Apprenticeship training should be enhanced and standardized through formal theoretical training and supplemented by training in shop practices not available on the job. None of these things can be accomplished at present without sending people out of the North. Training that is available in the South is often not appropriate to the needs of Northern Quebecers. A Vocational/Occupational Training Centre is most urgently needed in the North.

Such an institution should be flexible enough to give appropriate academic up-grading to those early school drop-outs while they are engaged in vocational training. The centre could provide training in groups of related trades such as carpentry, electrical and plumbing in a Building Construction Course for example, thus giving the trainee broader vocational back ground and a wider scope for employment.

This facility in addition to providing standard general vocational training for men and women in a number of occupational areas suited to Northern needs, could also be the site for special shorter term training courses needed for limited numbers of people from time to time. Employers could look to the Centre for assistance to enhance the abilities of employees through additional training. Trades practices and procedures for apprentices throughout the North could be standardized through use of this facility. Perhaps of greatest importance, men and women whether married or single could attend an institution close to home giving them meaningful learning and experience appropriate to their needs and aspirations.

Again you may ask, "What advantage would there be in giving all those people some vocational training when there are so few jobs available?". First of all, persons applying for jobs with vocational training background would have a wider base for job selection as well as some employable skills. It is that broader background needed upon which higher skills could be developed. Secondly, it is a fundamental requirement, if we ever hope to become less dependent on non-Inuit, to fill those positions of employment in the North requiring advanced training and high-skills.

Existing and future employers in Northern Quebec probably could do much more to advance the role of the Inuit.

A modified and flexible affirmative action program should be pressed on all employers. It should be designed to ensure local residents the opportunity and encouragement to aspire to positions of leadership and responsibility. Federal government departments of Indian and Northern Affairs, and Employment and Immigration Canada could advance this idea by supplementing employee/trainee wage costs on a longer term career basis rather than the short course or short term on-the-job method currently available.

There is no reason why many Inuit, so inclined, should not embark as entrepreneurs in small supply or services businesses. A governmental development loan fund especially designed for this purpose with headquarters in the North could be of great assistance in stimulating economic development. To qualify for financial help, perhaps an applicant would be required to meet some rigid requirements including small business management training. Such an undertaking would require close control. Advice and some supervision to new applicants might be available through voluntary advisory services people from Canadian Executive Services Overseas.

In spite of the good work being done presently by the different institutions working in the North, there is duplication of effort, good services in some areas, none in others.

An economic development co-ordinator is needed in Northern Quebec to promote the advancement of the Inuit, not as an autonomous independent body but as self-reliant individuals. Inuit are proud of their heritage but ask only for the same opportunities to get ahead as those available to Canadians elsewhere. Inuit are realists. We see vast changes taking place all about us. We ask only for help to cope with the changes as they evolve and the chance to participate in them. The haphazard development of the area could cause needless inequities. Economic development should be encouraged and promoted but at the same time directed. With planning, and adequate economic and vocational training support, human resources could be developed to match the skills ultimately required to satisfy area needs. As economic and human development go hand in hand, they must be developed together.

As stated in objects 5 (b) of Bill 27, Government of Quebec, it is the mandate of Makivik Corporation "to promote the welfare and the advancement of education of the Inuit".

Makivik would consider making its 'good offices' available to co-ordinate economic development in Northern Quebec provided some funding was made available from private or public sources.