

Introduction to Documents Two and Three

Ronald F. Laliberte

A commonly held perception is that Indians have contributed little to the commercial and industrial development of Canada following the decline of the fur trade. However, in some instances state intervention in the economy has facilitated the flow of Indian workers from reserves to areas of job opportunity. The following documents, which are extracted from the 1966 Meeting of the National Agricultural Manpower Committee, are indicative of such intervention.

In 1966, the National Agricultural Manpower Committee was responsible for all matters related to agricultural manpower in Canada as a whole. However, most of the problems related to agricultural manpower were dealt with by the Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committee (FPAMC). Its main mandate was to recruit and relocate workers needed in the various agricultural sectors throughout Canada. The FPAMC consisted of a joint committee of both federal and provincial representatives. The federal part of the FPAMC consisted of the Chairman of all the Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committees, officers of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration (now the Department of Manpower and Immigration) and representatives from other interested federal departments and farm organizations. The provincial part of the FPAMC consisted of provincial agricultural committees composed of a senior officer of the provincial departments of agriculture, representatives of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and other members that the ministers of agriculture for the provinces might appoint. In 1966, the Indian Affairs Branch (IAB) of the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources assisted the FPAMC in the procurement of Indian workers for agricultural employment.

Document 2 illustrates the role that the state played in the recruitment, relocation and retention of Indian workers for agricultural sectors in Canada. In particular, the recommendations made by IAB official D. Jackson were aimed at recruiting and retaining migrant Indian workers from reserves in northern Alberta and northern Saskatchewan for the sugar beet industry of southern Alberta. Document 3, compiled by Department of Labour official Gil Schonning lists the federal and provincial labour laws that explicitly

excluded agricultural workers from the benefits normally enjoyed by labour. What it reveals is that agricultural workers—in this case, Indians—had basically no labour law protection and were therefore vulnerable to exploitation. The reader should note that, although the IAB's objectives and recommendations in document 2 portrayed a concern for working conditions, this did not materialize in the case of the Indian labour force that migrated annually to the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. In fact, throughout the period, beginning in the mid-1950s to the early 1980s, when the state was heavily involved in the recruitment of Indians for the sugar beet industry, the working conditions of Indians were deplorable.¹

In essence, these documents from the National Agricultural Manpower Committee are an example of state intervention in the economy in order to create the conditions for capital accumulation. This is in keeping with the Marxist interpretation of capitalist exploitation of labour.

Note

- 1 An example of the poor conditions in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry was the housing provided to workers. In a 1971 study on the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, Steel and Zacharias stated: "[O]ur first-hand observations convinced us that many migrant labourers are, in fact, living out their summers in housing that most people would recognize as unacceptably substandard. In some cases, they're in chicken coops or converted granaries. In one instance, the farmer moved the chickens out just before the workers arrived and, later, the chickens tried to return home for the night." Elizabeth Steele and Calvin Zacharias, *The Sugar Beet Fields of Southern Alberta, May-September, 1971* (Ottawa: Planning Services Information Canada, 1971), p. 20.

Document Two:

Mr. D. Jackson
Indian Affairs Branch,
Department of Northern Affairs
and National Resources

The role of Indian Affairs during the past summer was that of a recruiting agency for a group of people, many of whom were introduced to this line of work for the first time.

The problems of the Indian workers in the field appeared to be no different from those experienced by people of other racial origins. Efforts to secure Indians suffered because of the lack of persons at the reserve who were familiar with the many facets of agricultural employment and who could provide information about working and living conditions.

A difficulty frequently experienced revolved around work orders received which allowed insufficient time to recruit and prepare the worker for movement and to make the necessary family arrangements.

Considering that the physical and financial efforts expended to deliver a worker who stays on the job for one day is the same as that for one who remains all season, our report is a résumé of observations, conclusions and recommendations indicating steps which might be taken to help the Indian worker to remain on the job.

Objectives of Indian Affairs Branch in Agricultural Employment Program

1. To introduce suitably qualified Indians to wage employment.
2. To ensure that a positive social environment is provided.
3. In relation to the above, Indian Affairs Branch is prepared to co-operate in securing Indian workers where appropriate work settings, including acceptable accommodation, are available.

Available Supply of Indian Labour

This depends on the following:

1. The extent to which the employer develops good relationships with his workers.
2. The net earnings through agricultural employment as against those from local work opportunities.

Construction labour	\$1.75 - \$2.32 hr.
Forestry Operations:	
Tree planting	\$1.75 hr. plus rm. & bd.
Fire fighting	\$1.75 hr. plus rm. & bd.
Pulp cutting	up to \$30.00 day
Guiding	\$18.00 day plus tips.

3. The provision by growers of information regarding labour requirements in sufficient time to allow for the following:
 - A. The Indian worker to fit agricultural employment in with other seasonal job opportunities.
 - B. Overcome problems of communication with isolated communities and delays in transportation due to weather conditions.

Recruitment of Indian Labour

It is recommended that consideration be given to the following:

1. Using Indians experienced in agricultural employment to assist in recruiting workers.
2. Showing of the film on harvest operations as an aid to recruitment.
3. Involving representatives of Growers' Associations in recruitment.
4. Extending recruitment to communities beyond present limits in view of good work performance of Northern Indians this past summer.

Keeping Workers on the Job

The most critical factor is the extent to which the employer co-operates with respect to the following:

1. Establishes and maintains personal contact and interest in the worker.
2. Provides properly equipped accommodation of an acceptable standard.
3. Provides facilities for Indians to board themselves according to their individual tastes in food.
4. Affords the workers an opportunity to rest after an arduous 3-4 day trip south.
5. Promotes orientation to new work setting and community.
6. Instructs Indians adequately in preferred harvesting techniques.
7. Defines conditions of employment and rates of pay, preferably in writing.
8. Recognizes dependence of Indians on Native leadership.
9. Exempts employees from harvesting operations when field or weather conditions unsuitable.

Recommended Aids to Keeping Workers on the Job

1. Consultation with leaders elected by Indian workers in matters affecting or involving them.
2. Provision of transportation facilities for shopping, recreation and sightseeing.
3. Waiving of charges for accommodation when workers unemployed due to factors such as weather conditions or others beyond their control.
4. As a further aid, Indian Affairs Branch is prepared to:
 - A. Make field staff available for consultation with Indian workers and employers.
 - B. Maintain liaison between the workers and their home settlements.
 - C. Provide films and other materials to farm labour committees which would enable them to better understand the Indian people.

Document Three: Labour Laws and the Farm Worker

Most labour laws expressly exclude employment in agriculture. Even where there is no specific exclusion and the laws are thus broad enough to include employment in agriculture they may, in fact, not be applied to farm workers.

The lack of protection of farm workers under labour laws is evident in the following summary of the status of the farm worker under federal and provincial labour laws.

(1) **Statutory school-leaving age**

In all of the provinces there is a compulsory school attendance law but in many of the provinces exceptions are permitted for employment in agriculture.

(2) **Minimum age for employment**

No minimum age has been established for employment in agriculture.

(3) **Minimum wage legislation**

Farm labour is everywhere excluded from minimum wage regulations.

(4) **Equal pay**

While most of the provinces have an equal pay law, as a general rule this law does not apply to employment in agriculture.

(5) **Hours of work**

Five provinces have laws which regulate working hours but none of these laws apply to employment in agriculture.

(6) **Weekly rest day**

All provinces except Prince Edward Island provide for a weekly rest day for all or nearly all employed persons except farm workers.

(7) **Annual vacations with pay**

Annual vacations are provided for by law in eight of the provinces. Farm workers are excluded in all provinces.

(8) **Public holidays**

Provincial laws dealing with public holidays generally do not apply to farm workers.

(9) **Fair employment practices**

Farm workers are not excluded in provincial laws which prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, religion, and national origin.

(10) **Notice of termination of employment**

Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Nova Scotia have legislation requiring an employer or employee to give notice of termination of employment. These laws do not apply to farm workers.

(11) **Workmen's Compensation**

Agricultural workers were excluded from compulsory coverage in all provinces until 1965 when the provision of the Ontario law stating that the Act did not apply to the industry of farming was deleted. New regulations will be issued extending the protection of the Act to farm workers. It is proposed to bring these workers under the Act from January 1, 1966.

While farm workers are excluded from compulsory coverage in the other provinces it is possible for the farmer-employer to choose to come under the Act, except in Quebec. In Quebec, the industry of farming is excluded and there is no provision for coverage by application.

(12) **Unemployment Insurance**

Employment in agriculture is one of the main categories of employment excepted from provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

(13) **Labour Relations**

The Labour Relations Acts of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia exclude agriculture. Agriculture is not excluded in the Acts of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Under the Quebec Act farm workers are not excluded but the legislation applies only to farms which have three or more employees.

November 23, 1965