

## **"The Ultimate Solution": CCF Programs of Assimilation and the Indians and Metis of Northern Saskatchewan**

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**ABSTRACT.** During its time in power from 1944 to 1964, the CCF government of Saskatchewan earned a well-deserved reputation for introducing various new social policies. While Canadians still frequently refer to T.C. Douglas's efforts to promote medicare, relatively few know that his government aggressively attempted to assimilate the province's Indian and Metis population into mainstream Canadian society. Through various programs, CCF politicians and bureaucrats sought to apply what they called "the ultimate solution" to the province's Aboriginal population. Northern Saskatchewan, located far from the consciousness of southern voters, became the testing ground for the party's most innovative and controversial assimilative programs. The Aboriginal population of the north resisted many of the plans made outside their region, often frustrating and foiling CCF planners. Yet, in some respects programs developed by Douglas's CCF led the way for assimilation efforts elsewhere in Canada.

**SOMMAIRE.** Pendant qu'il était au pouvoir de 1944 à 1964, le gouvernement CCF de la Saskatchewan a mérité la réputation d'introduire un nombre de politiques sociales nouvelles. Tandis que les Canadiens mentionnent encore souvent les efforts de T.C. Douglas pour promouvoir l'assurance maladie, peu savent que son gouvernement a tout fait pour assimiler la population indienne et métisse de la province à la société majoritaire. Par l'intermédiaire de nombreux programmes, les hommes politiques et les bureaucrates du CCF ont cherché à mettre en oeuvre ce qu'ils appelaient "la solution finale" concernant la population autochtone. Le nord de la Saskatchewan, éloigné de la pensée des électeurs du sud, est devenu un banc d'essai pour les programmes d'assimilation les plus innovateurs et les plus controversés du parti. La population autochtone du nord a résisté à beaucoup de ces plans venant de l'extérieur, souvent à la grande frustration de leurs auteurs. Pourtant, sous certains aspects, les programmes développés par le CCF de Douglas ont pavé la route vers l'assimilation dans d'autres parties du Canada.

When Saskatchewan politician J.H. Sturdy in 1948 called for "assimilation in the social and economic life of the province" as "the ultimate solution to the Metis problem," he did not covertly whisper this to a trusted political colleague or friend.<sup>1</sup> Instead, he openly expressed his conviction to J.Z. LaRocque, the general secretary of the Saskatchewan Metis Society.<sup>2</sup> Anything but a right-wing politician, Sturdy stood out as one of the most respected ministers in Tommy Douglas's socially progressive Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) government. Sturdy's views meshed well with attitudes common within his party at the time and did not receive censure from the province's premier. Instead, in the years that followed, Sturdy developed a reputation as an expert on Indian and Metis matters, which led to his eventual appointment as T.C. Douglas's special assistant on dealing with the province's Aboriginal population.<sup>3</sup> Also the province's minister of





Yet, CCF planners encountered great challenges along the road to assimilation. Obstacles resembled those encountered by road builders sent north by the CCF to physically open the region for progress. Like the muskeg and bedrock of the north, bottomless bogs and immovable stone outcrops blocked the path to assimilation. Some of the ensuing difficulties were due to inconsistencies in the CCF's own thinking, policies, and actions. Contradictorily, while stressing the need for the rapid assimilation of Aboriginals, those designing and implementing provincial programs doubted that Indians and Metis could possibly ever think and live as Euro-Canadians did. Further, after an initial burst of energy and spending, the CCF refused to devote the resources required to meet its goals of modernizing northern Saskatchewan and assimilating the population. Additional barriers to assimilation lay within the northern society. Much as the region's dense forests and deep lakes hid the abundance of life that teemed within their bounds, so the outward passivity of Aboriginal society disguised the strong local resistance to the schemes imported from the south. Although they lacked the means to argue their case on the floor of the legislature in Regina, northern Indians and Metis contested the CCF relegation of their society to the anthropological scrap heap. Aboriginal people had not asked for sweeping changes within their world. Many of them appreciated the services and structures built over more than a century in co-operation with the HBC and the churches. To the consternation of the southern-based party, the Indians and Metis of northern Saskatchewan proved their strength by insisting on having a say in choosing their future.

Throughout its time in office, few, if any, discordant voices arose in the CCF ranks regarding the drive to assimilate Aboriginals. T.C. Douglas set the tone for his party when he said "social assimilation is absolutely vital."<sup>6</sup> Leading Aboriginal persons, including those considered as models of assimilation, went along with and supported the province's agenda for the First Nations people.<sup>7</sup> Led by Douglas, "progress for Indians was measured in terms of integration"—which meant assimilation.<sup>8</sup>

Joe Phelps, who held the powerful position of minister of Natural Resources and Industrial Development (DNR) from 1944 to 1948, played an instrumental part in designing programs to assimilate northern Aboriginals. Like Douglas, Phelps wanted to see an end to Indian status. He opposed "aborigine rights," which he interpreted as Natives wanting land and control: in his view, Indians should let "bygones be bygones."<sup>9</sup> Even after Phelps suffered electoral defeat in 1948, the CCF policy did not change. The new DNR minister, J.H. Brockelbank, wrote, "We are convinced that the long-term solution to these social problems is cultural assimilation."<sup>10</sup> Those elected to represent northern constituents joined the chorus. Reputed for his close relationship to his Aboriginal constituents, in 1952 CCF MLA Bill Berezowsky confided to Jim Brady, a Metis, that "it seems that the sooner we can assimilate the native Canadians into the melting pot the better it will be for them and for the country."<sup>11</sup> Little changed by the mid-1950s when the provincial cabinet instructed J. H. Sturdy to lead a study into how to make Indians into "ordinary citizens in Saskatchewan."<sup>12</sup> And the province's determination to bring assimilation did not wane: in 1962, C.L. MacLean, a CCF electoral candidate and senior employee of DNR, described "economic and cultural assimilation" as "the only lasting answer to the so-called Metis problem."<sup>13</sup> Throughout its time in office, the CCF worked to assimilate Saskatchewan's original inhabitants.

Even when speaking directly to Indians and Metis, CCF politicians made no attempt to hide their opinions about the need for assimilation. Several reasons stand out for this openness. One derived from the socialist goal of creating a classless society. As did more radical socialists, Saskatchewan's social democrats thought distinct Aboriginal cultures represented an obstacle to reaching this goal. Although, in retrospect, it seems erroneous to subsume culture in the category of class, CCF ministers did not hesitate to tell Indians and Metis that they must assimilate. However, not all CCF utterances on the matter are attributable to the party's socialist views: another powerful force behind the push for assimilation came from the unquestioning belief held by the majority of Canadians in the superiority of Euro-Canadian culture.

During the CCF era, for administrative and other purposes the province divided Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population into two basic groups: status Indians and Metis. The latter group included many non-status Indians, indistinguishable in most ways from status Indians except in that they lacked status as Indians under the Indian Act. In many respects, responsibility for the care of status Indians fell to the federal government, while the Metis and non-status Indians came under the jurisdiction of the province.

Some CCF assimilative policies applied to both northern and southern Saskatchewan. For assimilation to occur, the CCF considered it essential that it take over the care of status Indians from Ottawa. To this end, for two decades Douglas and his ministers forcefully lobbied the federal government. High on the list of problems created by the ongoing presence of two parallel administrative systems, the differential treatment of one portion of the province's population threatened the CCF plan for assimilation. At first, in the 1940s, it seemed that Ottawa would willingly relinquish its responsibilities for status Indians. Since the federal department of Indian Affairs offered only minimal services in much of Saskatchewan, especially in the northern region, the province frequently provided health, welfare, and education services to status Indians. Saskatchewan viewed this gap in Ottawa's services as an opportunity that would allow the province to assume full responsibility for services to all Aboriginals. But in spite of a partial transfer of duties in 1947, the long-term trend moved in the opposite direction: Indian Affairs expanded its services and staff, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, CCF politicians and bureaucrats continued to assume that Ottawa agreed with the provincial goal of a transfer of responsibilities. In 1956, the province appointed a committee charged with investigating the potential change.<sup>14</sup> In the years that followed, the CCF optimistically continued the drive to include status Indians as ordinary citizens of the province. While indecisiveness in federal ranks caused a delay in extending provincial jurisdiction onto reserves, the CCF cabinet in 1957 decided to provide full social aid services to off-reserve status Indians. Leading bureaucrats agreed with the trend. J.S. White, the long-serving deputy minister of Social Welfare, viewed extending provincial social aid on and off reserves as the "keystone" to solving "welfare problems."<sup>15</sup>

Saskatchewan's efforts to expand its responsibility for status Indians throughout the province gathered strength with the passage of time. The legislature unanimously passed a resolution in 1961 asking Ottawa to give complete Indian Affairs administration to any province that wanted this, providing that a majority of the status Indians approved. Had Saskatchewan achieved this goal, special status for



Indian people would have greatly diminished, aiding the CCF with its goal of assimilation. Several years later, the departments of Social Welfare and Education pushed for a nearly complete takeover of services in their respective areas. For its part, the Community Development Branch of DNR called for movement from reserves to urban areas. Woodrow Lloyd, who replaced Douglas as premier, led Saskatchewan's delegation to a Dominion-Provincial Conference on Indian Affairs called by Prime Minister Lester Pearson. There, Saskatchewan stressed the negative consequences of continuing the reserve system: in the party's view, Indian economic advancement would result from assimilation and acculturation.<sup>16</sup>

Tantalizing hints, that transfer of responsibility for status Indians to the provinces would happen, continued to come from Ottawa. Much like Saskatchewan, the federal government continued to cling to its goal of assimilating all Aborigines. Both levels of government hoped that northern and other Indians would voluntarily give up their treaties and move into Euro-Canadian society. But, seemingly at odds with this plan, Indian Affairs further expanded its presence and services on reserves, particularly in the north. Simultaneously, Saskatchewan's Indians increasingly emphasized the special rights and permanent relationship with the Canadian government granted to them by treaties. Although at variance with Aboriginal aspirations, the CCF continued to oppose Aboriginal distinctness and self-government: still in 1964, party officials wanted to see reserves disappear, and viewed treaties and treaty rights as relatively minor rights. Only "vestigial ethnic traditions" should remain.<sup>17</sup>

Some aspects of Douglas and his party's drive for assimilation have received considerable previous attention. Saskatchewan extended voting rights to status Indians in 1960, in spite of opposition from that group. Several years of consultations had failed to convince the province's Indians that receiving the franchise would not endanger their unique rights as status Indians. The same year, acting on Saskatchewan's request, Ottawa granted the province's Indians the right to consume liquor.<sup>18</sup> Extending what the CCF considered as basic human rights served to increase assimilation by breaking down barriers. Involvement with the creation and control of Aboriginal organizations also aided the CCF with its agenda of assimilation. During the CCF years, these organizations had a reputation as "captive," non-independent structures, which relied on the province for organizational help and funding. Often, they did not very effectively speak for their people or fight against the CCF drive for assimilation.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the foregoing policies and actions, Saskatchewan's CCF government devised a variety of other less-known strategies that aimed to bring Indians and Metis into the mainstream of life in the province. Government devoted many of its efforts in this regard to northern Saskatchewan, where the largest and most distinct Aboriginal society within the province survived. The province's northern reaches remained largely outside the consciousness of the much larger southern population. Consistent with this isolation of the north from the more populated south, little study of CCF actions in the northern half of the province took place, both then and in the decades since.<sup>20</sup> The CCF's northern record consequently long enjoyed a form of immunity from examination and criticism.

Shortly after its initial election victory in 1944, the CCF began to encourage, coerce, and even force those who still followed semi-nomadic lives in the northern bush to move to settlements. Certainly, the CCF does not deserve all of the credit

or blame for the process of concentrating the population: both before and during the CCF era, fur traders, the churches, and the federal government all played a part in moving the once-nomadic Aboriginal population to settlements. But no other authority worked towards concentration of the population and assimilation with the fervour of Saskatchewan's new government. When the CCF assumed office, many northern Aboriginals still lived outside communities, moving with the seasons to harvest the region's bounty. Some who complied with the push to settlements moved to pre-existing villages, which in many cases were founded by outsiders who had come to the region. Fur trading posts, missions, and boarding schools had already attracted some Indians and Metis to live in permanent communities prior to 1944. Major pre-existing settlements included Ile à la Crosse, Cumberland House, and La Ronge; and numerous smaller settlements clung to the shores of the inland waterways. Yet, since large areas of the northern region remained without urban centres, the newly elected CCF founded villages on sites freshly cleared from the boreal forest. Using various means, the province then did what it could to compel Aboriginals to settle in the centres. The opportune introduction of the federal family allowance program in 1944 and its requirement of school attendance greatly aided the CCF in its complementary programs of population concentration and assimilation. Basic to the promotion of settlement life was the expectation that urban life would aid with the assimilation of Aboriginals, diminishing and eventually eliminating their distinct ways. Once taken from the bush, the former wanderers could learn the new ways needed for life in the Euro-Canadian world.

Instead of allowing the proliferation of an unlimited number of small villages, the province used its authority to further concentrate the northern population in fewer and larger settlements. By refusing to provide services in smaller villages, government encouraged relocation to the larger communities, leaving those who insisted on remaining in more isolated settlements with only the most basic of services. Efficient provision of education, health, and social services, and the requirements of regulating and monitoring the northern population—all of which the CCF considered as essential—required concentration in relatively few locations.

Faced with ongoing pressure from the CCF government and the attraction of expanding services, thousands of Aboriginals relocated to dozens of communities across the north. On the west side, people moved to La Loche, Patuanak, Buffalo Narrows, Ile à la Crosse, and Beauval. Some smaller settlements survived, while others that had briefly grown in the region almost disappeared. Dene, for instance, had built log houses at Knee Lake, Primeau Lake, Dipper Lake, Cree Lake, and Patuanak; but, influenced by government policies, the first four communities declined, while Patuanak increased in size.<sup>21</sup> Farther to the east along the Churchill River system, the HBC and Roman Catholics at Snake Lake had long provided services to visiting Aboriginals who had chosen not to settle permanently in one place. Soon after assuming office, the CCF expanded the role of Snake Lake as a community for the area's Metis population. The province quickly established a government retail store, and followed up by opening a school in 1948. DNR surveyed a townsite and encouraged the Metis to settle on lots there. Most resisted, preferring to keep their distance; but eventually many complied with the CCF plan for them to move to the site, renamed Pinehouse Lake in 1954.

A similar situation developed on the east side of the province. There,



Cumberland House, the oldest settlement in Saskatchewan, had lost its one-time preeminent role in river transport and the fur trade. With the pre-existing land survey system long broken down, by 1944 Cree and Metis families squatted more or less where they pleased on the often-flooded island in the Saskatchewan River delta. Instructed to do so by its political masters, DNR introduced a four-point development plan at Cumberland House in 1946. The muskrat, sawmill, farm, and education projects were to teach the residents to live like white people. Like elsewhere in its north, the CCF strove to relocate Cumberland House area residents into fewer but larger communities: whereas about 500 persons lived in ten widely scattered seasonal communities in 1947, only four Cumberland House area settlements remained by 1960. The judicious placement of schools, a hospital, and other government services helped direct concentration of the population there. Cumberland House, with 453 persons, had risen in prominence. Residents of its three satellite communities, Pemmican Portage, Pinebluff, and Sturgeon Landing, increasingly viewed Cumberland House as a centre of importance.<sup>23</sup>

Roughly mid-way between Cumberland House and the west side communities, La Ronge became the most important settlement in the north. Once chosen by the CCF as its primary northern administrative centre, hundreds of Aboriginals congregated in shacks in the area. Non-Aboriginals from the south also moved there. Fearing life in close proximity to non-Aboriginals and the loss of their gardens and dogs, Metis attempted to create a separate Metis residential area a short distance from La Ronge in 1948. But the province opposed this plan: A.I. Bereskin, the provincial surveyor, refused to comply with the wishes of those who signed a petition, forwarded by Reverend S. Cuthand, a Cree Anglican missionary and secretary of the Saskatchewan Metis Society at La Ronge. Instead, Bereskin offered the Metis leases on lots one-half of normal size, apparently only 33 feet wide, in the La Ronge townsite. He hoped that placing the Metis in the townsite would increase work opportunities, facilitate supervision of the liquor traffic, prevent the creation of a shantytown, and maximize the efficient provision of services. The provincial Metis Society's secretary, J.Z. LaRocque of Lebreton, supported the Metis fight against the move to La Ronge. He wrote: "Surely there is enough room in the Northern part of the Prov. [province] to allow for permanent homes for our people." But the province took a hard line: J.H. Sturdy, the minister of Social Welfare, thought the separate Metis area incompatible with assimilation as the "ultimate solution" for the "Metis problem." Bereskin, J.J. Wheaton, DNR's northern administrator, and J.W. Churchman, DNR's assistant deputy minister, all echoed Sturdy's point of view.<sup>24</sup>

Freedom to live where and as they wished continued a few years longer for residents of the far-northern reaches of the province, but by the early 1950s, the CCF embarked on an ambitious endeavour to centralize and assimilate the population of remote Reindeer Lake. On the vast lake's east shore, the CCF established a completely new community, naming it Kinoosao (popularly known as Co-op Point). One reason for choosing that site was the province's desire to increase commercial exploitation of the lake's bountiful fish stocks. Since Saskatchewan had built no roads or railways from the south into the region, the CCF wished to take advantage of the new railhead at Lynn Lake, Manitoba, about 50 miles distant, as a shipping point for the fish. At considerable expense, Saskatchewan built a road to the Manitoba town. Following the survey by DNR of the Kinoosao townsite in 1952, the province built a fish processing plant there. Other attractions soon included the

DNR headquarters, a school, a store, and a post office. Hoping that the scattered population from around the lake would move there, government also made leased residential lots available.

But the lack of interest of Indians and Metis in relocating to Kinoosao proved disappointing to CCF planners. Although the province had prepared for a large influx of people, several years later Kinoosao's population included only 2 DNR officers, a school teacher, a storekeeper, 6 trapper-fishermen, and 13 students.<sup>25</sup> Most residents of the big lake stayed far away from the CCF's new settlement. Government did not seem overly concerned that Scandinavian-Canadian fishermen, who lived on islands on the lake, did not want to move to Kinoosao. But the province took a different approach towards the Indians and Metis who lived in the distant Southend area. Pelican Narrows band Cree Indians, who lived on an island reserve, firmly fought against settling in faraway Kinoosao; for their part, Metis residents of a small village at the south end of the lake also resisted moving to Kinoosao.

CCF efforts to relocate the Indians and Metis to Kinoosao raised strong opposition from the local people and the Roman Catholic Church. Indians cited the new community's distance from their trap lines, concerns about a shortage of fish there to feed their dogs, and a desire to remain distant from white people. Cree labourers had helped build the Kinoosao filleting plant, but while there had drunk liquor and lost money playing poker with white people. Even after Roman Catholic Bishop Lajeunesse raised concerns with Premier Douglas about the pressure to move to Kinoosao, the CCF did not retreat from its plans for centralization: it had no intentions of abandoning the settlement and wanted to see area children attend school there. DNR's northern administrator C.S. Brown thought the Church and the HBC wanted to keep "the natives in isolation and comparative ignorance ... contrary to our policies and beliefs." He also uttered the familiar refrain: "We consider education and assimilation the only ultimate solution to the native problem." DNR's minister J.H. Brockelbank viewed the Catholics' desire to protect the Indians as a barrier to Aboriginal development, writing that "the only way the native will learn not to gamble is to experience losing his wealth permanently." Although the CCF lacked the legislative force to compel status Indians to move to Kinoosao, it enjoyed more control over the Metis. Ongoing coercion and incentives towards nucleation and assimilation resulted in the new settlement's slow growth.<sup>26</sup>

The CCF also did not forget about the status Indians and Metis who inhabited other remote areas of the north. In some cases it took a decade or more for governmental attention to focus on unregulated pockets of human activity. Ten years after the initial election of the CCF, C. Salt, a DNR officer, encouraged the province to establish a village, school, and airport on the shore of Wollaston Lake. Until then, the mixed population of about thirty Indian and Metis families and a dozen single non-Aboriginals had lived free from enforcement of many of the provincial regulations. While noting friction between the independent local people and DNR officers, Salt wrote, "We bring a little bit of the law to these people who have been doing pretty much as they please."<sup>27</sup> Before long the province intensified its efforts to bring order to the area, while also attempting to maximize fish production from the large lake. DNR's R. Gooding selected a site for the planned community. A government-owned fish processing plant, a provincially funded cooperative retail store, a school, and a new mission pulled the region's formerly nomadic population together in the



settlement. In 1958, extension of the province's trapping area program to the far north placed further limits on the mobility of that area's population. Even those in the most remote areas of the north could not escape the pressures for concentration into settlements and assimilation.<sup>28</sup>

Eventually, nearly all original residents of even the most remote recesses of northern Saskatchewan succumbed to the CCF-directed pressure to move to villages. According to the government, they needed to give up their former ways, which mainstream society viewed as primitive and uncivilized, and live permanently in communities that resembled those in which other Canadians lived. Although social and economic difficulties increased with the shift from life in the bush to a sedentary village existence, which caused government planners to react with frustration and pessimism, a large step towards assimilation took place. Only the impatience of government planners, who expected complete assimilation within a few years, made the CCF program appear unsuccessful.

In a sense government won, since for most Aborigines, living traditional lives in the bush became impractical, if not impossible. Once in the settlements, Indians and Metis increasingly adopted numerous Euro-Canadian ways. Like many other governments, the CCF recognized the power of formal education to bring change. Compulsory school attendance and the construction of dozens of new schools resulted in young Indians and Metis learning the English language as well as some basic skills needed for life in the new world that confronted them. In another initiative it considered essential for the assimilation of Aborigines, the province introduced measures to replace the centuries-old reliance on the fur trade credit system with the use of cash.<sup>29</sup> Both in its confident, optimistic early days and the later years when self-doubt replaced the early brashness, the CCF imposed numerous measures that it believed and hoped would lead Aborigines from their lives in the "wild" into the modern world.

Yet, at the same time, the CCF government did much to sabotage its own plans. The province participated in and often led the way in building structural obstacles to assimilation. Although the population concentrated in settlements, most northern settlements became enclaves of surviving Aboriginal culture. Both government and industry contributed to this situation. While calling for assimilation, Euro-Canadian people frequently did not want to associate with, live near, or work with Indian and Metis people. Consequently, in areas with mixed populations, segregated communities developed: with non-Aboriginals occupying the upper socio-economic stratum, Aborigines found themselves confined to an inferior level. At La Ronge, the eastern and central part of the village housed the non-Aboriginal population while most Metis and Indians lived on the western outskirts. At the site of the Churchill River Power Company generating facility, some residents of Island Falls went to great lengths to limit contact with the Metis and Indians of nearby Sandy Bay.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, inhabitants of Uranium City lived in their racial enclave, protected from the presence of Aborigines by municipal bylaws. While it continued to call for assimilation, the CCF did not explain how Aborigines would learn to live like Euro-Canadians if the two groups lived at a distance from each other. If anything, the barriers between the two groups solidified as time passed. Still in the early 1960s, at the time when civil rights issues in the United States increasingly dominated Saskatchewan newscasts, equally dramatic instances of discrimination continued unreported and unchecked within the province.<sup>31</sup>

Another contradictory set of circumstances plagued CCF efforts to end the Aboriginals' traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle. While government planners wanted to move northern Indians and Metis into gainful employment, bureaucrats and politicians lacked faith that these northerners could compete in the free marketplace. As a result, the CCF reserved particular economic opportunities, those it considered suitable, for the region's original inhabitants. Acting in what it believed the best interests of Aboriginals, the province decided that trapping, commercial fishing, and small-scale agriculture should form the basis of the future Aboriginal economy. Indians and Metis had previously participated in these activities, but often in a subordinate position to more aggressive non-Aboriginals. To ensure the success of its plan, the CCF carefully structured and regulated northern trapping, fishing, and farming, in large part reserving these occupations for Aboriginals. In place of the former capitalist inspired free-for-all, CCF planners created new regulations and structures. Socialist principles determined many details. Ambitiously, the CCF believed that it could demonstrate to Aboriginals, who reputedly possessed a penchant for co-operation, the advantages of socialist forms of organization.

The CCF kept strict control: trappers found themselves trapping co-operatively in newly delineated group trapping areas and selling their furs to the newly created Saskatchewan Fur Marketing Service, the provincial Crown corporation that under the authority of a new law handled virtually all northern beaver and muskrat pelts. Led by Joe Phelps, the minister of natural resources, planners also redesigned the commercial fishing industry. While Aboriginal fishermen appreciated the CCF expulsion of many outsiders from this industry, they found their own fishing activities closely controlled. Many could no longer sell their fish to private buyers and found themselves compelled to deal with a series of new Crown corporations, including Saskatchewan Fish Products, the Fish Board, and Saskatchewan Fish Marketing Service. Those who wanted to farm also found the CCF firmly in control. Phelps and his colleagues recognized that the rich land of the Saskatchewan River delta in the Cumberland House area represented possibly the greatest untapped farming opportunity in the province. The province quickly took control over land and farming on both Spruce and Pine Islands, while participating in studies of the agricultural potential of the larger delta area. Over the next two decades, the CCF tightly guarded its ownership of arable land, while it alternately attempted to demonstrate and teach farming to Aboriginals.<sup>32</sup> Failures, attributable in part to inadequate program designs and the CCF remissness in completing projects, followed in all areas of the newly designed northern Aboriginal economy. Accounts of the governmental fiascos at Cumberland House and elsewhere could fill volumes.

Throughout its time in office, the CCF continued its efforts to simultaneously segregate and assimilate northern Aboriginals. Instead of confining them to the new and separate Aboriginal economy, CCF planners could have opened up a wider range of options for the region's Indian and Metis people. After all, another economy operated in the north; it primarily provided government services, mined northern ore, logged timber resources, and accommodated tourists. Partly because government considered Aboriginals unsuited for these activities, thousands of civil servants, miners, forestry workers, and tourism operators came to the north from outside the region. These activities held the greatest potential for generating



adequate incomes; yet the CCF and industry did little to encourage, and at times even actively discouraged, Indian and Metis participation. A strong belief in the unsuitability of Aborigines for industrial labour pervaded Euro-Canadian society. In the meantime, those activities chosen by the CCF for Aborigines offered nothing but a life of dismal and worsening poverty. As the years passed, the proportion of the population able to support itself shrank dramatically and increasing numbers relied on welfare payments for their survival.<sup>33</sup>

A further contradiction stood in the way of assimilation. While they still spoke of the need for assimilation, many in government came to believe that Indians and Metis lacked the capacity to live as civilized people. More charitable observers gave Aborigines the benefit of the doubt, suggesting that they could, over the course of many generations, leave their primitive ways behind them. DNR's northern superintendent, who had described the Cumberland House area as "just one jump out of the Stone Age," added: "if over a period of a hundred years we succeed in bringing about a reasonable change I feel the effort is well worth it."<sup>34</sup> Even those in government and industry who had faith in the ability of Aborigines to adopt the new ways did not expect them to do so within the immediate future. Pessimism came to dominate government circles, and once-optimistic observers considered the CCF effort to assimilate Aborigines as a failure. Seemingly perplexed, Tommy Douglas himself questioned the course he had helped chart; as his biographer observed, "The darkest problem facing Douglas, and the one he was least able to solve, was the degradation of the Indian people of Saskatchewan."<sup>35</sup> In the view of Douglas's government, "degradation"—or in other words "the Indian problem"—appeared inextricably linked to the refusal by Aborigines to give up their distinct ways and embrace Euro-Canadian society.

Although sometimes disheartened because Aboriginal people did not respond as hoped, the CCF continued its efforts to assimilate Aborigines. Instead of giving up when faced with increasing dysfunction in the new northern society and economy, government turned to "experts" for guidance. As the 1950s progressed, DNR's planning staff included an increasing number of geographers and anthropologists. The work of one anthropologist in particular brought a new optimism to government circles. Vic Valentine seemed unique in his ability to understand Saskatchewan's Indians and Metis; glowing reports about his pilot project in community development in the Ile à la Crosse area offered hope that the province finally had found the key to bringing directed change to Aboriginal communities. Valentine demonstrated that if anthropologists could plant development programs in such a manner that local people believed that the projects originated with them, rapid change would come. But the anthropologist's departure for the federal civil service by 1957 dealt the program a severe blow; following the loss of his dynamic leadership, optimism in government circles that Aborigines would quickly embrace Euro-Canadian culture all but disappeared. Although the community development program continued, a planned major expansion underwent a severe downsizing; a multi-stage, inter-departmental plan directed at numerous northern communities did not proceed.<sup>36</sup>

While discouraged by the departure of Valentine, the CCF turned to other professionals for advice on how to meet its goals for the northern society. The province sought expert guidance outside the province, including from the Stanford Research Institute.<sup>37</sup> Most significantly, in 1957 the CCF co-sponsored, along with

the University of Saskatchewan, the creation of the Center for Community Studies. While not created specifically to study northern Saskatchewan and its Aboriginal population, over the next half-dozen years, this task became the Center's primary role. During these years, the Center attracted dozens of academics from various disciplines to its staff; they came to Saskatchewan from other provinces, the United States of America, and even Britain to study the north and its original inhabitants. In various reports, the specialists then offered diagnoses and advice to the CCF government; these included suggestions on how to proceed in dealing with the intransigent northern population, which continued to resist adopting the habits of Euro-Canadians.

The Center's researchers and the province agreed on the necessity for assimilation, even though this goal became increasingly referred to as "integration." Possibly some doubts appeared about demanding complete assimilation. In the language of the time, the Center speculated that "Complete integration, i.e., the disappearance of the socially identifiable Indian, may not be accepted as a goal by everyone, but its achievement lies so far away in the future that there is no need for a consensus of opinion on this issue."<sup>38</sup> As earlier, politicians and planners placed faith in community development programs. They hoped these would make the movement from the old ways to the new possible and relatively painless for all concerned. However, both the Center's researchers and their political bosses in Regina believed that Aboriginal people still lacked readiness, and possibly even the fundamental ability, to assimilate fully. *The Indians and Metis of Northern Saskatchewan: A Report on Economic and Social Development* appeared in 1963, incorporating the official thoughts of the Center and its director W. Baker. Its writers, Helen Buckley, J.E.M. Kew, and John B. Hawley, made numerous recommendations, some of which, if implemented, may have helped break down the economic and social walls surrounding Aboriginal communities. Yet, the report's authors and the CCF government, which quickly endorsed it, did not demonstrate much faith in the ability of Aboriginal people to change and assimilate. Buckley and her co-writers recommended keeping Aboriginals in the north, in their isolated communities.<sup>39</sup>

To argue that respect for Aboriginal culture explains the reluctance of the Center and the CCF to endorse more radically disruptive programs ignores the overall thrust of the Center's report. Without question, the provincial government still wanted to bring lasting and radical change to Aboriginal society, but the province doubted the ability of Aboriginals to meet society's expectations. With its endorsement of the Center's report in 1963, the CCF reaffirmed its contradictory policies of wanting to assimilate northern Indians and Metis while keeping them in separate and isolated socio-economic enclaves. The CCF goal remained one of stamping out all but insignificant vestiges of Aboriginal culture; yet these people should live in settlements with people of their own kind, until they could learn to live in a fashion similar to that of the dominant Canadian society. Until that time would come, northern Aboriginal communities should serve as holding areas for Indians and Metis, protecting southern urban society from the burgeoning Aboriginal population and their social and economic problems.

Other contradictions to the CCF goal of assimilation also became more apparent in the last years of the CCF mandate. On one level, the province recognized that Aboriginals, in order to join the larger society, needed to become literate and learn new vocational skills. Yet the province refused to provide any academic



education or vocational training beyond the most rudimentary elementary education in the northern Aboriginal communities. Only those settlements with a majority of non-Aboriginals received high schools, and no government-operated vocational training existed in the region. A handful of northern Aboriginals travelled to southern communities for high school and vocational training. The Canadian Vocational Training Centre, which briefly operated at the University of Saskatchewan, demonstrated an exploratory and innovative approach to training northerners in the south; yet the school met harsh criticism and proved generally unsuccessful. Seeing the need for vocational training, several individual Roman Catholic priests from Beauval and Buffalo Narrows attempted to help fill this void; but the province viewed this as outside church jurisdiction and discouraged the priests from proceeding.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, the CCF refusal to provide its own training service continued.

In similar fashion, contradictory policies plagued the employment situation. In its summary report on the northern situation, the Center for Community Studies offered extensive statistics that documented the grim economic reality facing northern Aboriginals. It confirmed what government already knew—that those Aboriginals participating in the CCF's segregated economy of trapping, fishing, and subsistence farming found themselves caught in a downward spiral of dire poverty. Government and industry had failed to act in order to provide economic alternatives for the region's Aboriginals. And non-Aboriginals continued to hold virtually all of the permanent and better-paying governmental and industrial jobs within the north. Even though the number of these positions roughly equalled the number of unemployed and underemployed Aboriginals, the province made no meaningful effort to train and hire Aboriginals for this work. The Center's suggestions for improving economic opportunities for the region's Indians and Metis included no radical suggestions to alter provincial policies. Instead, the writers of the official report praised the CCF for its efforts in the north, blaming at the same time the old forces—the churches and trading companies, although greatly weakened by CCF initiatives—for much of the region's malaise.

The stand taken by the Center did not go unchallenged. After having spent years studying the northern situation, most of that organization's expert staff did not agree with the official report and recommendations, written by a minority of staff members. The dissenters found little to praise in government policies, which they considered as ineffective and serving little purpose other than to institutionalise a northern welfare society. Their suggestions for a radical new approach called on the province to encourage northern Aboriginals to move south for educational and vocational reasons; in their view, government should not increase the level of comfort of northern welfare recipients within their home communities, but should facilitate training and employment programs where economic opportunities existed. Uncharacteristic of the Euro-Canadian view, the rebels appeared to believe that Aboriginals should receive and could benefit from the same training and employment opportunities available to other members of society. Both parties to what soon became an irreconcilable split, however, agreed on the need for Aboriginals to assimilate with the larger society.

Frustrated and disillusioned with their employer and the province's government, most of the Center's research staff departed. Yet, even after leaving, they wanted to broadcast their message. The Center successfully blocked these efforts

for a time. Later, shortly before meeting with electoral defeat in 1964, the CCF authorized release of the dissenting report. Although greatly delayed, it eventually appeared: edited by Arthur K. Davis, *A Northern Dilemma: Reference Papers* remained obscure and failed to receive the promotion or circulation of the official report.<sup>41</sup>

Some might expect that, along with political defeat, the CCF's assimilationist policies would have met the same fate. Instead, Douglas and Lloyd's legacy lived on. Continuity, more than difference, characterized their Aboriginal policies and those of their successor as premier of Saskatchewan, Ross Thatcher. Although in a somewhat different fashion, adherents of both parties worked for assimilation. Where the CCF had set assimilation as a goal, the provincial Liberals expected assimilation to come about largely as a by-product of economic goals. Like Douglas before him, Thatcher did not question the belief, common at the time in Canadian society, that considered the disappearance of a distinct Aboriginal society as inevitable. That conviction gained yet more strength, reaching its maximum force late in the 1960s with the release of Pierre Trudeau and the Liberals' White Paper. Trudeau's well-meaning but naive efforts might have led to the assimilation of Canada's Aboriginals had not these people vehemently said "no." But it is necessary not to award the federal Liberals all the credit or blame for that ill-fated initiative: in retrospect, they did little more than paraphrase the pro-assimilationist words long spoken elsewhere in Canada and possibly most notably in Saskatchewan. That province's long serving CCF government must rank at or near the top of the list of the most persistent proponents of assimilation. Next to the laurels awarded to Douglas and his colleagues for introducing medicare to Canadians belongs the more dubious distinction of breaking ground in designing, as the CCF minister of Social Welfare suggested, the "ultimate solution" for Canada's Aboriginals.

## Notes

1. Although Saskatchewan's officials sometimes used the term "integration" to refer to their goals for Aboriginals, clearly what these politicians and bureaucrats wanted was assimilation. For much of the CCF era, those working with Saskatchewan's Indians and Metis used the terms "assimilation" and "integration" interchangeably.
2. Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), S-NR2, DNR- ADM, (A), "August 1944- April 1949," f. 37, Northern Administration (J.J. Wheaton), J.H. Sturdy to J.Z. LaRocque, Sept. 22, 1948.
3. SAB, M16, A. M. Nicholson papers, XV, 14, Indians, 1955-64, T.J. Bentley to J.S. White, February 7, 1957; T.J. Bentley to Nicholson, September 17, 1957.
4. In doing so, the CCF wrote another chapter in the history of government efforts to assimilate the Aboriginal people of western Canada. The previous main drive for assimilation originated with the federal government from the 1870s to the 1920s, when it implemented aggressive programs, particularly directed at the Indians of the southern prairies.
5. SAB, S-NR 1/4, DNR Dep. Min. and ADM, 235, Cumberland House-General, Vol. 2, September 1950 to 1957, A.K. Quandt, "Report on the Cumberland House Area to the Hon. J.L. Phelps," 1946.
6. L.H. Thomas (ed.), *The Making of a Socialist: The Recollections of T.C. Douglas* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1982), 244.
7. Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris stand out as two examples. Both considered the struggle to bring socialism and remove class barriers as more important than racial issues.
8. D. French Shackleton, *Tommy Douglas* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 204.
9. SAB, R-A1113, Audio tape, Interview with J. Phelps, Murray Dobbin, 1976.
10. SAB, R-907.3, Brockelbank Papers, 7b, "Dominion Government Departments: Resources and Development," Brockelbank to R.H. Winters, November 8, 1952.
11. Glenbow Archives, M125, v. VI, f. 55, "CCF 1949-1964," B. Berezowsky to Brady, July 2, 1952.
12. SAB, S-M 16, v. XV, n. 14, "Indians, 1955-64," T.J. Bentley to J.S. White, February 7, 1957.
13. DNR, *Annual Report* (1952), 168.



14. Thomas H. McLeod and Ian McLeod, *Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987), 140. SAB, Brockelbank Papers, R-907.2, II-12; S-NR2 (A), DNR, 19, August 1944–April 1949, Fisheries Branch (A.H. MacDonald). These archival papers contain various references to details of federal and provincial responsibilities in the north. Although headed by J. Sturdy, the committee did not recommend a transfer of responsibilities. But this anomaly did not change the overall direction of assimilative policies.
15. SAB, S-M 16, v. XIII, f. 264, "Public Assistance, Indians and Metis, 1952–64," J.S. White to Col. Laval Fortier, February 18, 1958; J.S. White to Dr. G.F. Davidson, July 26, 1960; White to J.W. Erb, February 19, 1958.
16. SAB, S-M 16.1, v. VIII, f. 1, "Planning Board, 1953–63," (1 of 2), J.S. White, to A.M. Nicholson, May 16, 1963; S-M 16.1, v. XIII, f. 264, "Public Assistance, Indians and Metis, 1952–64," A.M. Nicholson to J.S. White, June 11, 1963; "Treaty Indians and Northern Administration," November 18, 1963; S-M 16, v. XV, f. 14, "Indians, 1955–64," M.H. Greenwood to G.J. Darychuk, August 8, 1963; "Proposals by the Department of Education for the Extension of Provincial Educational Services to Treaty Indian People," 1963; "Proposals by the Department of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation for Extending Provincial Welfare Services to Registered Indians," November, 1963; "Saskatchewan Brief to the Dominion-Provincial Conference Indian Affairs," Draft, November 1963.
17. James M. Pitsula, "The Saskatchewan CCF Government and Treaty Indians, 1944–64," *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (March, 1994): 24.
18. Glenbow Archives, Brady Coll., M125, v. VI, f. 56, "CCF 1954–1961," T.C. Douglas to my Indian Friends, May 30, 1960; Pitsula, "The CCF Government," 38; SAB, S-M 16, v. XX, f. 7, "Indians, 1958–63," Address by T.C. Douglas to Conf. of Sask. Indians, Fort Qu'Appelle, October 30, 1958; Prov. Conf. of Sask. Indian Chiefs and Councillors, Fort Qu'Appelle, October 30 and 31, 1958.
19. Shackleton, *Tommy Douglas*, 200–204; John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980), 287–88; Laurie Barron, *Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), Chapter 2; McLeod, *Tommy Douglas*, 140; Murray Dobbin, *The One-and-a-Half Men: The Story of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris, Metis Patriots of the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1981), 171–73; Proceedings of the Conference of the Metis of Saskatchewan (July, 1946), David E. Smith (ed.), *Building a Province: A History of Saskatchewan in Documents* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1992), 379, Document 116.
20. Bill Waiser, "Writing About Northern Saskatchewan," in K. Coates and W. Morrison (eds.), *The Historiography of the Provincial North* (Lakehead University: Centre for Northern Studies, 1996), 232–47. Waiser documents the lack of study about many aspects of northern Saskatchewan.
21. Robert Jarvenpa, *The Trappers of Patuanak: Toward a Spatial Ecology of Modern Hunters* (Ottawa: Canadian Ethnology Service, National Museums of Canada, 1980). Jarvenpa describes changes which took place in the area over the decades.
22. Miriam McNab, "From the Bush to the Village to the City: Pinehouse Lake Aboriginal Women Adapt to Change," in David DeBrou and Aileen Moffatt (eds.), *"Other Voices": Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995), 131–43; SAB, S-NR 1/4, DNR, 235, "Snake Lake," (2 files), A.I. Bereskin to G. Couldwell, August 17, 1954; C.L. MacLean to J.W. Churchman, April 5, 1950; Couldwell to A.E. Bereskin, August 4, 1954; W.K. Riese to McLean, July 19, 1950; Underwood McLellan Ltd., *Pinehouse Planning Study* (February, 1981), 86.
23. J.E.M. Kew, *Cumberland House in 1960* (Saskatoon: Center for Community Studies, 1962), 16, 22–24; SAB, R-907.2, Brockelbank Papers, I-2, "Cumberland House Settlement," M.F. Norris to J.J. Wheaton, October 22, 1947; Attached report "Office of the Northern Administrator Report of an Economic and Social Survey of the Cumberland House District," October, 1947.
24. SAB, S-NR2, DNR—ADM, (A), "August 1944–April 1949," f. 37, Northern Administration (J.J. Wheaton), J.H. Sturdy to J.Z. LaRocque, September 22, 1948; J.Z. LaRocque to Rev. S. Cuthand, August 28, 1948; LaRocque to Sturdy, no date given; Cuthand to LaRocque, August 6, 1948; A.I. Bereskin to C.A.L. Hogg, November 1, 1948; Bereskin to Hogg, J.J. Wheaton, and A.K. Quandt, July 15, 1948; Wheaton to J.W. Churchman, Dec. 23, 1948; Churchman to Wheaton, Dec. 14, 1948; Malcolm F. Norris to Mr. Hogg, November 25, 1948; "Civilization's Northern Drive Shatters Furthest Isolation: La Ronge Story Seen Revealing North's Future," *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, May 1, 1948.
25. SAB, DNS-1, DNS, (GS-201), v. VIII, f. 7, "History and Culture Report—Kinoosao (Co-op Point)," Laverne Olson, "History and Culture Report—Kinoosao (Co-op Point), no date; S-NR 1/4, DNR, 235, "Reindeer Lake—South End," A.I. Bereskin, "Topographical Report on Subdivision E. Side of Reindeer Lake Locally known as Co-op Point," March 5, 1952; Bereskin to J.H. Brockelbank, March 11, 1952; L.S. Cummins to J.W. Churchman, June 4, 1954; Bereskin to Churchman, June 17, 1954; S-NR 1/4, DNR, 235, "South End—Reindeer Lake," A.T. Davidson to L.S. Cumming, February 9, 1954; Churchman to Cumming, March 11, 1954; Cumming to Davidson, February 2, 1954.

26. SAB, S-NR 1/4, DNR, 235, "Reindeer Lake—South End," J.W. Churchman to Bishop Lajeunesse, December 24, 1952; T.C. Douglas to J.H. Brockelbank, October 24, 1952; C.S. Brown to Churchman, November 12, 1952; Brockelbank to Douglas, October 31, 1953; Petition from South End of Reindeer Lake, Sask to Premier Douglas, July 20, 1952; S-NR 1/4, DNR, 235, "South End—Reindeer Lake," C.L. MacLean to Churchman, November 21, 1950.
27. SAB, S-NR 1/4, DNR, 167 B3, "Northern Region," Minutes of N. District Conservation Officers' Conference Held At P.A., Sask., October 4–8, 1954.
28. J.G.E. Smith, "The Chipewyan Hunting Group in a Village Context," *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (1970): 60–66; J.G.E. Smith, "The Ecological Basis of Chipewyan Socio-Territorial Organization," in A. McFayden Clark (ed.), *Proceedings: Northern Athapaskan Conference, 1971*, v. 2, Can. Ethnol. Service Paper No. 27 (Ottawa: n.p., 1975), 444–46.
29. David M. Quiring, "Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks: CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 2002), Chapters 5 and 10.
30. Philip Ballantyne, et al., *Aski-Puko: The Land Alone* (Lac La Ronge: Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, and Prince Albert: Peter Ballantyne Band, 1976), 134–35; Keith Goulet, "Oral History as an Authentic and Credible Research Base for Curriculum: The Cree of Sandy Bay and Hydroelectric Power Development 1927–67: An Example" (M.Ed. thesis, University of Regina, 1986), 135–38; interview with Alfred Montgrand, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, August 10, 1999; SAB, S-M 16, v. XV, f. 14, "Indians, 1955–64," A.M. Nicholson to Col. H.M. Jones, July 12, 1957.
31. Quiring, "Battling Parish Priests," Chapter 3.
32. *Ibid.*, Chapters 5 to 8.
33. Center for Community Studies, "Economic and Social Survey of Northern Saskatchewan" (March 1961); Helen Buckley, *Trapping and Fishing in the Economy of Northern Saskatchewan*, Rpt. No. 3 (Saskatoon: Economic and Social Survey of Northern Saskatchewan, Center for Community Studies, University of Saskatchewan, March 1962), Chapters 1 and 2; SAB, S-NR 1/4, f. 230, "Northern Region," R.G. (Roy) Young to J.W. Churchman, June 26, 1953; S-NR 1/4, f. 235, "Stony Rapids," J.J. Wheaton to Churchman, July 7, 1949; S-NR 1/4, f. 236A, "Employment Projects," E.N. Shannon to C.L. MacLean, April 13, 1951; C.A.L. Hogg to Churchman, April 27, 1951; MacLean to Churchman, April 21, 1951; Churchman to MacLean, May 1, 1951; V.F. Valentine, *The Metis of Northern Saskatchewan* (Regina: DNR, 1955), 30–31.
34. SAB, S-NR 1/4, f. 235, "Cumberland House-General," v. 2, September 1950–1957, A.K. Quandt to J.L. Phelps, Report on Cumberland House area, 1946.
35. Shackleton, *Tommy Douglas*, 203.
36. Quiring, "Battling Parish Priests," 153–55.
37. Stanford Research Institute, *A Study of Resources and Industrial Opportunities for the Province of Saskatchewan* (Menlo Park, CA: Stanford Research Institute, 1959).
38. Helen Buckley, J.E.M. Kew, John B. Hawley, *The Indians and Metis of Northern Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Centre for Community Studies, 1963), 51.
39. *Ibid.*
40. SAB, S-M16, v. VII, f. 3, "Parks and Lands Branch, 1961–63," Brief by N. Adv. Comm. on Metis of N. Sask., 1955; S-NR 1/5, v. I, f. 39, (230), "Northern Region, 1957–1959," A. Darche to G. MacDonald, June 18, 1959; A.H. MacDonald to J.W. Churchman, May 13, 1959; A.H. MacDonald to Churchman, June 22, 1959; M. Miller to Churchman, June 3, 1959; S-NR 1/5, v. III, f. 8, "Buffalo Narrows, 1963–66," Churchman to J.M. Cuelenaere, June 10, 1964; Churchman, to MacDonald, January 15, 1964; Churchman to MacDonald, August 3, 1964.
41. Arthur K. Davis, *A Northern Dilemma: Reference Papers* (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington State College, April 1967), Volumes 1 and 2.