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Alberta's Community Development Program

AN ADDRESS BY

Hon. Fred Colborne

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Hon. E. C. Manning:

Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Welcome once more to "Tele-Facts". In the Cabinet, we have a special committee of Ministers which is giving attention to a very important phase of your public affairs, known as "Community Development". The Chairman of that committee is your Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Mr. Fred Colborne. I am delighted to have him with me tonight to tell you something about our Community Development Program. Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Colborne . . .

Hon. Fred Colborne:

Thank you, Premier Manning, and Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, I would like to say how delighted I am to have this opportunity to appear on "Tele-Facts" this evening with Premier Manning, and review for you, the program of Community Development that has been carried out in our Province during the past couple of years.

This program started out as an experimental program, scarcely two years ago, and its purpose was to determine whether or not it was possible to help our people of Indian ancestry (our Indian and our Metis people) improve their own social and economic conditions by the use of certain new methods and new techniques which are known as Community Development techniques. Community Development is not a program designed to solve people's problems for them. It is not a program of government hand-outs. No-one in Community Development has anything to give, in a material way, to anyone in the Province.

Community Development is rather based on the fundamental belief that any group of people, no matter who they are, no matter how bad their circumstances might be, will take positive and definite action on their own part to improve their circumstances, if they are given a genuine opportunity to do so. Community Development, then, is a program of opportunity — a program that is designed to open up social and economic opportunities by removing the artificial barriers which stand in the way of our native people, and other people as well, taking advantage of opportunities which would otherwise be available to them.

Up until now, our program has been concentrated in the northern communities of the Province, and there are very good reasons for this. First of all, we realized that most of the native people in the north are on almost total welfare; that they are living in conditions which would be unacceptable to the vast majority of the people of our Province — substandard living conditions. We also realized that Alberta is on the verge of vast new economic developments in the north — economic developments that would produce new economic opportunities and new employment opportunities for the people of the north.

Our objective, then, was to attempt to ensure that these developments would not pass the local people by; that our native people and other people who have made their lives in the north would be given a genuine opportunity to take advantage of these new developments. Our first project area was Fort McMurray, and Fort McMurray was chosen because of the new tar sands development taking place there, where Great Canadian Oil Sands Limited is investing something like \$190

millions in the establishment of an oil extraction project. This meant that at Fort McMurray there would be a large number of new employment opportunities for the people of the north, and at the same time, there would be large expansions taking place in the town of Fort McMurray itself which would provide additional job opportunities.

Time tonight will not permit me to tell you all that has happened at Fort McMurray; but I think it is true to say that the success of our program, to some extent, can be measured by the fact that over 330 native people were employed in Fort McMurray during the year 1965. It soon became evident that most of the native people were being employed in common labouring jobs because they lack skills in the trades; and if the native people were to be given an opportunity to take advantage of the better and higher paying jobs, then some sort of trades training would have to be provided for them; and so the Fort McMurray Adult Vocational Training Centre was established. Its purpose was to provide training in a number of the trades — welding and carpenter work — teaching people how to operate heavy equipment, and the automotive trades. In addition, the trainees were given an opportunity to up-grade and improve their standing in regular academic school subjects. Fort McMurray Training Centre graduated its first trainees in January — thirteen men who are now fully employed with the Bechtel Corporation and Great Canadian Oil Sands Limited. Here I would like to acknowledge, with our gratitude, the wonderful co-operation our program has received from Bechtel Corporation and Great Canadian Oil Sands Limited, this latter company having gone to the extent of even investing money in our training program and providing equipment and instructors for the courses.

This training centre is unique in all of Canada. It is unique because its programs are designed to the specific needs of industry, while at the same time they are also designed to the special needs of each individual trainee; so that each person in a course progresses at his own rate of speed and is not expected to keep up with any class that he might be in. I think it is true to say, without any question of doubt, that the trainees at this centre are being given an opportunity to make a new life for themselves and to become self-supporting and valuable citizens of our Province, in a way that could not have been accomplished before the training centre was established. The training centre was built for fifty students; there are now eighty enrolled, with a waiting list of 165, and so we are considering plans to expand this facility to handle larger numbers of trainees.

Our Community Development Program is not confined to Fort McMurray. Other programs are now underway at Fort Chipewyan, at Slave Lake, at Hinton and Wabasca. Time will not permit us to cover all of the activities that are taking place, but I would like to tell you about some of them. At all of these centres native housing co-operatives have been established for the purpose of enabling native people to obtain better standards of housing than they have heretofore had. Perhaps the largest single handicap that faces our native people is the lack of adequate housing, and this is aggravated by the lack of adequate credit facilities to enable them to finance new housing by normal credit channels. So the government established, through the Alberta Commercial Corporation, a native housing fund, which would enable the co-operatives to borrow money to finance new housing for their members.

This is all the government does. The native people do everything else. They not only organize the co-operative, but they plan the co-operative housing projects, they choose the house plan that is going to be built, they choose those who are to occupy the houses, and they even collect the monthly payments to retire the mortgage on these homes. All of these things are done by the natives themselves, so they are not only obtaining better housing for themselves, but they are going through a very valuable learning process as well.

At Fort Chipewyan, among other programs, the natives have established a fur-marketing co-operative, and the purpose of this is to enable them to improve the economics of trapping, and particularly the economics of marketing their furs. It enables them, by pooling some of their pelts, and marketing outside at the fur auction in Edmonton, to improve the prices which they receive and thereby improve their standard of living. These people are also attempting to improve their standard of living by another very interesting device. They are pooling their cash resources and buying food in large quantities outside the community. In fact I am told that the last barge that went into Fort Chipewyan brought something like \$4,000 worth of groceries which the people had bought on the outside in order to get the groceries at better prices and thereby further improve their standard of living. This, I think, is a most encouraging sign.

At Slave Lake, among other projects, a co-operative was formed by the natives to take contracts for brushing and clearing operations, and they have carried out a number of very successful contracts with some of the oil companies. Here again, by their own efforts and by working

for their own co-operative, they are not only managing their affairs and learning how to be self-sufficient, but they are also improving their standard of living to a higher degree than simply by working for others.

At Wabasca, the natives have established a saw-mill operation on an experimental basis, with very encouraging results. They are handling this project entirely on their own. They have not asked for any financial help and they are marketing lumber now at good prices.

At Hinton, through the co-operation of the Northwestern Pulp and Power Company, natives are being given an opportunity to become established permanently in the pulp industry as cutters. This requires the re-location of whole families, and it will be some time before the program is developed to its full extent; but we are hoping eventually to re-establish fifty families at Hinton, who otherwise would be on welfare.

These are some of the projects, and there are others which I would like to be able to tell you about — our native craft industry, the picking and marketing of wild blueberries — and the large number of natives that we hope to employ on the Alberta Resources Railway project. But time will not permit this. Let me close by saying that if you measure our accomplishments by what we have attempted, then I think all of us have reason to be very pleased with the results; but if you measure our accomplishments in the light of the total problem that needs to be tackled and solved, then we have only made a very small start indeed. We can say, however, that we have been able to establish, without question of a doubt, that Community Development

techniques do work; and we are convinced that this program should be extended to other communities as rapidly as qualified people can be obtained to staff new project areas.

Hon. E. C. Manning:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am sure you have found most interesting what Mr. Colborne has said to you. This is a program under which we are carrying out our belief that it isn't a government's job to do things for people, but to help people do things for themselves. In this way, we preserve their independence, we give them an opportunity to develop their own initiative and enterprise, and this is the thing, of course, for which we are striving in a free-enterprise society.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, and Good-Night.