

A History of the Alberta Metis Association

by

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Transcribed by David Morin

Education & Denominational Schools

Learned clerics deliver long speeches on the “Metis Question” denouncing Metis and Indian plans because they are based on the material side of life. The old theory that the Metis must be satisfied with an inferior position and if it gets too bad they can resort to spiritual prayers. Bishop Breynat in speaking about Metis Education stressed the clerical view in his statement before the Alberta Metis Commission on April 1st in the following excerpt from the official reports and proceedings

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Mr Douglas: What is your opinion regarding the value to the half breed of giving him an education?

The Bishop: I don't think he should be given too much education. He needs a little to help – I think just until they are 10 or 12 years old probably

Justice Ewing: I agree with you there too much would be a bad thing

When a speaker has no care he usually resorts to the old game of setting up straw men and knocking them down. We were treated to the spectacle of two clerical experts on Native education indulging in this time honored custom at the Royal Commission sittings—the clerics set out to bludgeon the Metis leaders and being astute gentlemen realized it would fall rather flat should they argue the Metis and Indians must continue to support parasitic church schools well just because. So their reverences after giving a fairly accurate account of the Metis situation began to give their own impressions (The wish is father to the thought) concerning the organized Metis views on education. The following illuminative excerpt is taken from the official evidence

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Mr Douglas: Regarding the educational problem We have heard different representations Mr Malcolm Norris and some other chaps They do not seem very favorable to church schools being formed

The Bishop: The Majority are not In this case it is very different

Father Coudert: He is using that to fight us

The Bishop: You cannot go bus his advice anyway That is the type of man who does not know He is a very poor man He would not know anything about it

The clergy can chatter in the press in parliamentary lobbies and Royal Commissions about the manner in which the Indian and Metis educational problem had begun on what everyone has said and what should be done They can subscribe to serve up to us a policy which is essentially akin to a defence of colonial pillage and oppression The entire policy of clerical "humanitarians" in Indian and Metis affairs in general is one of the most ignominious betrayal of the real interests of Indian and Metis education The influence of old line party politics both Tory and Grit have been intricately woven into the very web and woof of Native education in the North for generations The political wareness (sic) of the clerically controlled Naties (sic) for social change has been deflected into the safe conduit of liberal politics and the game of reaction played by engrossing the enfranchised Metis in political promises calculated to divide their strength and is finally predicated on their knowing always "How much we shall receive in how much" we shall get out of this and in "How much" we can control the disfranchised Indian

The transparent reuslt (sic) is evident Sixty years of clerical tutelage has induced an ignorance and passivity which has deprived the Native of the knowledge and understanding whereby he can reach out and bring into being that better lifefor (sic) which the clergy so unctuously intone It will only be realized when the common people of Canada reach out and enforce our right to knowledge and happiness

We emphasize particularly that educational facilties (sic) have been notably inferior in necessary equipment teachers salaries and scholarships The special condition of the Indians and Metis has been characterized by poorer

conditions in almost every respect and particularly with respect to compulsory education. This is attributable to their poorer economic condition. The higher schools are beyond their means and no scholarships are provided for Metis.

We recognize the importance of education in a democracy (sic) and recommend the strengthening of this aspect of a desirable Canadian life in the following ways:

- () Equality of Educational opportunity ensuring to every young person in Canada irrespective of financial resources the right to attend public school high school or university (sic) according to their capacity
- () Governmental grants to raise salaries in Native and other socially and economically depressed areas of Canada; thereby raising educational standards
- () The granting of special scholarships to Indians and Metis
- () Better co-operation between teachers and pupils toward securing courses more adapted to the real problems of the Native and to provide more practical methods of connecting school studies with the economic and social problems of Indian and Metis youth
- () The enforcement of compulsory education among Indians and Metis
- () Courses aiding in the development (sic) and extension of Indian and Metis cultural rights
- () The abolition of all educational fees and the provision of high school text books
- () Training for citizenship through the introduction of democratic student self government
- () Establishment of a student aid program for high school and university students from northern areas. Also co-operative book stores and residences in northern areas
- () The establishment of adult educational facilities (sic) in northern areas whereby illiteracy can be totally eradicated (sic)
- () Educational and vocational rehabilitation of all disabled persons in northern areas with special emphasis on those with dependents
- () All schools to be conducted on a secular non-demonational (sic) basis

What have the clergy done for the Indians and Metis? The system of church-controlled education has it not delivered them into the hands of their enemies?

We know our ideas are shaped by our environment. Consequently, the Native upon whom to a greater degree falls the suffering caused by an outworn social system senses the necessity for change from the old to the new. We also know there is a class who profit from our continued degradation and social backwardness. This class is perfectly unaware of the necessity (sic) for change. Because their ideas are also formed by their environment we cannot blame them if they persist in perpetuating the present conditions among the Indians and Metis because of the special advantages they draw therefrom. This group is really a minority but owing to their special privileges they exert an undue influence on Indian and Metis education. The Metis leaders see clearly (sic) the inevitability of the struggle to right the wrongs under which they suffer but the clergy see only the wrong that would be perpetuated were they forced to surrender the spiritual tyranny and terrorism which has dominated Indian and Metis education for generations.

We have (sic) arrived at a time when clear and accurate thinking is essential to the common salvation of all mankind. Humanity is pretty well agreed that our present social system is obsolete and must be replaced with a new order. The trend of events since the termination of World War II makes this necessity ever more obvious.

The Metis know their ancestors have always proven equal to their problems. Their fathers and grandfathers had the courage o (sic) grapple with almost insurmountable obstacles. They struggled to leave a democratic heritage but left the the (sic) problems of an uncompleted struggle. We know that with the understanding and support of their fellow Canadians they will again equal to the task.