

# THE LOGIC OF THE JAMES BAY SURVEY

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THE values of an age change and in doing so give place to a new spirit of thought and feeling. On the basis of these shifts in world-views, historians distinguish between periods of history. For example, they perceive the Renaissance emerging from the Mediaeval picture. Changes in the temper of an era occur imperceptibly so that the people involved in a transition are often aware only of a feeling that things are becoming "awry". They feel the need to reorient themselves. With time and in retrospect the shifts become sharper and better defined. Paradoxically it is the historian of the future who becomes capable of interpreting the stresses and strains of an age. Today we can begin to see the altered patterns of viewing the world and nature that distinguish our twentieth century from the nineteenth century, with its unbridled faith in rational man. In this paper we will be concerned with how contemporary patterns of thinking about man are related to problems of human administration. Particularly how they are related to the government of people who follow a way of life different from that of the administrators.

Cross cultural administration in the nineteenth century aspired to assimilation. The native was conceived of as a responsibility of "advanced" western civilization, which in turn became dedicated to uprooting backward ways of life in favor of the substitution of civilized habits. The climate of the age included a quasi-scientific belief in the inevitability of socio-cultural evolution. This doctrine, enumerated by men like Tylor and Morgan, saw the state of western civilization as the certain goal of all peoples. Why then not hasten the progress of the heathen to his inevitable destiny? Faith in the psychic unity of mankind, unmitigated by an awareness of the tenacity of learned habits of behavior, further justified and encouraged the attempt to implant that crowning achievement of human kind—western civilization. If all men are equal, nineteenth century social theorists reasoned, why could they not all learn to behave like Europeans? This viewpoint also characterized the administration of Indian affairs in Canada and the United States. Many of the native tribes with whom our expanding frontiers came into contact were hunters. The doctrines of

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social evolution regarded a hunting-gathering existence as a "lowest" state of human living, one destined to yield to a more noble state of husbandry. Great efforts were therefore made to transform the hunters of our Great Plains into farmers, most with indifferent success as contemporary studies reveal.

In place of the nineteenth century armchair theories about human nature and behavior our midcentury world has seen the rapid rise of the social sciences. Under the leadership of people like Bronislaw Malinowski, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead social anthropology has come to replace the belief in cultural evolution with empirical laws concerning the processes through which social life maintains itself and changes. Simultaneous development in psychology, psychiatry, and other life sciences have given modern thought a new conception of man's place in nature. Man emerges not as the lord of the universe but rather as a single variable in a most complicated field of forces. While academic circles are grappling with these new conceptions colonial administration is also being affected by the new dynamic patterns of thinking. Today cross cultural administration has largely abandoned the ambition to effect radical cultural transformations. Great Britain was early the scene of a fruitful wedding between anthropology and administration. Considerably later the United States began to utilize social science in Indian administration. In 1947 Canada undertook the James Bay survey, involving a major attempt to integrate the points of view of diverse sciences and to apply those disciplines to administrative problems.

## II

On Tuesday 6 March 1947 the late Frederick F. Tisdall and G. Gordon Brown, a medical doctor and anthropologist respectively, appeared before the Special Joint Committee of Senate and House of Commons in Ottawa. The Committee, it will be recalled, had been appointed to examine the Indian problem with a view of reforming the administration of Canada's Indians. In his presentation Dr. Tisdall reviewed the poor, malnourished condition of the Canadian bush Indians. The dwellers of Canada's northern forests, trappers of fur, fishers, and hunters of game, had been the subject of his previous studies in northern Manitoba. Malnutrition had assumed widespread proportions in northern Canada was his opinion. It posed a problem demanding action and change. Two solutions could be conceived. On the one hand the Indian could be given food

through public relief channels. Charity, however, amounted to a failure to attack the roots of the problem situation. Hence relief in reality constituted no solution. A second course of action lay in finding "ways of improving the facilities of the people to do things for themselves to make the people self-supporting." The second approach demanded knowledge about "what makes the Indian tick, what motivates him." Dr. Tisdall envisioned a battery of specialists tackling the Indian problem in one or two specific groups. Such groups might be considered analogous to the pilot situations created in the laboratories of other scientists. Among the specialists would be social anthropologists, men whose business it was to find out all there was to know about the organization of group life. Professor G. Gordon Brown of Toronto University then made his presentation and in greater detail outlined the proposed research scheme that he and Tisdall had developed. Changes in food production and consumption demanded prior knowledge of social conditions. To gain this knowledge he proposed "to put two communities under observation for a calendar year and watch what happens not only at any part of the year but through the whole annual cycle." In other words, the first task was to obtain the facts of the way of life. This work would be carried out by social anthropologists, Brown explained. Two had already accepted the assignment and were waiting for funds to become available. A partial subsidy had been promised by the Canadian Life Insurance Officers Association on the condition that the Dominion Government also make a provision of funds. The insurance officers, were interested in health, "in improving the health of the whole community—and they realize that the health of the Indian is inter-related to the health of the whole community." On the basis of the case stated by Tisdall and Brown funds for research were granted from the resources of the Indian Affairs Branch (then under the direction of Mr. R. A. Hoey) and the Indian Medical Services, of which Dr. Percy Moore is still Superintendent. Simultaneous medical and anthropological research was planned in the two pilot communities which were still to be chosen. To coordinate these studies the National Committee of Community Health Studies came to be organized in Toronto, with Dr. Percy Vivian of McGill University as chairman.

In June 1947, when field work could begin, two related procedures had been decided upon by the Committee. First the two anthropologists (of whom the writer was one and Mr. A. J.

Kerr the other), in company with G. Gordon Brown, would survey communities in the James Bay area. This was the district that had been chosen as the scene of the survey. The following consideration of a number of factors, including the pronounced dependence on relief of many Indians here and the fact that its adjacency to Toronto made it the subject of a number of newspaper reports dealing with the serious poverty of the natives. Canadian public opinion understood the James Bay problem as well as American opinion grew familiar with the plight of the Navaho Indians. When the anthropological party had decided on the two communities to be seriously studied the anthropologists would move into them for a year's residence. Meanwhile a second party would outfit. This group was to consist of an x-ray technician, medical photographer, dentist and several physicians interested in problems of public health and nutrition. In the middle of the summer the professional men would make medical studies of the two communities. In July the anthropologists established themselves in the field, Mr. Kerr going to Attawapiskat, Ontario, and Mr. Kerr to Rupert House, Quebec. In August the medical survey visited these posts and carried out a large series of examinations. The specialists at that time also suggested particular problems that arose in their work, to which the social scientists might make further contributions.

### III

In the preceding section we have sketched the manner in which the James Bay Survey was organized. The detailed reports of the work parties must be consulted in other sources. Here we propose to outline three principles which may be said to have logically guided the organization and conduct of the

<sup>1</sup>The anthropological reports have not yet been published, manuscript copies being available at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto and at Government offices in Ottawa. The interested reader may also consult the medical report published in *The Canadian Medical Journal*, vol. 59, pages 505-518, 1948. Dr. Tisdall with his colleague, Dr. E. C. Robertson, wrote an informal account of the survey in the Hudson's Bay Company periodical *The Beaver*. This may be found in the issue for December 1944, pages 42-46. A somewhat more technical article oriented toward administrative problems appeared under the name of the present author in the journal *Human Organization*, vol. 8, No. 4, pages 3-28, 1949.

project. In these principles we have contemporary patterns of thinking shaping the methods of the sciences and promoting to influence the arts of human administration.

The first principle affirms the fundamental unity of human

Contemporary thought has ceased speaking of an economic man, rational man, biological man, and so on. Various concepts like psychosomatic, organismic, holistic, and a conception of life that is influencing modern day work in the

human sciences demands recognition of the simultaneous interplay of biological, nutritional, emotional, social, and cultural forces. Man's eating habits are not separately determined by his geographical habitat, accustomed patterns of food-getting, and conceptions of what is nutritionally valuable or pleasing to taste. All these factors are interrelated. Hence health is a "function" of geography, human constitution, and traditional habits of subsistence procurement, as well as of the size of the social group within which economic cooperation can be expected to occur. Isolation of single factors is indispensable for analysis but realistic planning cannot obtain unless the factors are put together again. The organizers of the James Bay Survey recognized the principle of the fundamental unity of human life. This is evidenced in the fact that a medical scientist, Tisdall, initially sought the assistance of a social scientist, Brown. Plans at that time included not only cooperation between other biological scientists, like physicians and nutritionists, but also with conservation experts, educational specialists, and agricultural scientists. Unfortunately these aims have not yet been realized. The biologists (using that word in its broadest sense) cooperating in the project specified the signs of malnutrition manifest in the James Bay Indians. The students of society responded by pointing out how learned behavior patterns were at least partly responsible for the neglect of potentially useful food resources. Missionaries and Hudson's Bay Company traders testified to the depletion of the fur bearing animals of the country on which the Indians to a large extent depended for meat and income with which to buy "store food". However, the provincial governments, Indian Affairs Branch, and trading company had already begun to restock the areas with beaver, a paramount source of food and money. The scientists predicted that added natural resources would not automatically correct the picture of malnutrition. Rupert's House, which enjoyed a higher standard of living than Attawapiskat, manifested several signs of poor health which were

absent in Attawapiskat. A preference for flour and sugar developed in the community with the higher income and is also increased in the poorer area. This posed a demand for education on the mass community level to accompany environment changes which the governments were encouraging. Such education, or rather reeducation, promises to be very difficult. Social science understands poorly how to alter desire. Furthermore there is the fact to consider that the educators who espouse a body of democratic values, must proceed in conformity with those values if they are to remain honest with themselves. Manipulation of people is not accepted as part of Canadian administrative procedure.

We have already entered into discussion of the second principle underlying the survey program, a principle that maintains that to understand human behavior it is necessary to reckon with the total situation to which that behavior is responsive. Contrary to the rational position of the nineteenth century, the total situation includes not only external realities but the subjective perception of those realities as well. How a person sees the world is of fundamental importance for understanding how he acts toward it. The Attawapiskat people, for example, were not starving in 1947 and 1948. It is, however, both true and important to state that they believed themselves both on the brink of starvation and neglected by the Federal government. Psychologically they were profoundly troubled, anxious, and insecure, conditions no doubt related to the fact that they had seen their country's resources dwindle in a period of over-trapping as well as to the fact that the government was apparently sharing their anxiety by pursuing a generous relief policy. In other words, the subjective state of the people is related to the "real" conditions of the external world. There is another sense in which total situation entered into the methodology of the James Bay Survey. Older anthropology sometimes studied native peoples on their reserves without a word of reference to the wider society surrounding those people. In James Bay we followed the dictum of I. Schapera, the South African anthropologist, who wrote that "the missionary, administrator, trader and labour recruiter must be regarded as factors in the tribal life in the same way as are the chief and the magician." Dr. Tisdall, for example, consulted with the Hudson's Bay Company and missions to learn the exact amount of food flowing to the Indian groups through those channels. The social scientists studied the manner in which the white

Canadians participated in social relations with the Indians. We discovered that, practically speaking, whites and Indians did not consist of two communities in places like Attawapiskat but that both were welded into a single functioning social body. Evidence indicated which whites were in a pivotal position to exercise leadership for social change, but we also realized that it was easy for the potential leaders to push too hard or become impatient with their followers. This would arouse resentment. The leaders themselves could benefit by training in intercultural relations. Furthermore the total situation included not merely Indians, missionaries, and traders but also the policy-making superiors of the white men who served in far off Winnipeg and Ottawa. The network of interpersonal relations involving the Indians was even greater than that. Changing fur prices or fashions in New York, London, and Paris could affect the life of the natives, dependent as they were on a single industry. Large kills of geese in Alabama, one of the winter resting places for the fowl on which the Indians depended for food, might imperil the native's food supply. Canada's bush Indians are far less "bushed" or isolated than is commonly supposed. Together with the rest of the population of our shrunken globe they are intensely bound up with their contemporaries. Realization of this complex "social field" is of paramount importance for planned change. Administration may be conceived of more realistically in the light of this information, but at the same time it becomes more difficult. A large number of factors must be controlled, or at least kept in mind. Thinking persons will agree that recognition of modern man's multiple relationships highlights the inadequacy of purely local administration as compared to wider scale administrative cooperation. However, such people are also aware of the many traditional patterns of thinking that stand in the way of more centralized planning and control.

A final principle that impressed the organizers of the James Bay Survey from the start and that dominated particularly the work of the anthropologists recognizes the dynamic role of culture in resisting or facilitating change. It is assumed that the reader understands the meaning of the word *culture* as here employed. The non-technical usage of *culture* as a word referring to the graces of living is not part of the vocabulary of modern social science. Anthropology and sociology mean by culture the whole way of life of a people—their habits of play, eating, organizing, worshipping, feeling, believing. In fact, these are

the data out of which the social scientists constructs the culture patterns of a people. Somewhat paradoxically the culture of a group is simultaneously always in flux, always changing, and the same time resistant to change. The conservatism of culture follows from the reluctance of people to spend energy learning new ways of doing things as well as from the fear of losing advantages through change. An Attawapiskat woman will resist the idea of setting two nets with which she could secure more fish to feed her family and dogs if it will mean spending more time on the ice or in a canoe tending those instruments. She will therefore share the rolled oats received in family allowances and relief between her children and the animals. Our own way of life provides many similar examples of cultural persistence. Another reason why culture change may be resisted is that an innovation is incongruent with the ideas, values, skills or patterns of organization familiar to a particular social group. Gardening has been pressed upon the Attawapiskat and Rupert House Indians for several years but has failed to take any root. Canada's northern Indians respond with no enthusiasm to husbandry, but they do respond to the thrill of bringing down live game. It is also likely that a fundamental mistake occurred when gardening was introduced with the expectation that men would undertake planting. Now, traditionally in Attawapiskat culture men engage in the more spectacular and less humdrum occupations—hunting, trapping, travel, large scale marketing. Women do the routine work, including net fishing and cooking. A similar division of labor occurs in most other parts of the world, including Africa, where, for instance, women do the bulk of the gardening after men have broken the earth. Probably plant husbandry would be more successful than it has been in Attawapiskat if the women were placed in charge of the gardens and if the community garden were split into clearly defined, individual plots. (The Indians are thorough going individualists who see no value in cooperating with groups larger than the family.) Encouraging competition for excellence should also interest the women planters.

If cultures resist change they also facilitate innovation through containing in their organization some appreciation of prestige, novelty, and labor-saving to which the innovator may appeal. Anthropologists have not recorded an instance of a group of people who refused to substitute the iron bladed ax for the less efficient stone ax. People have borrowed European clothing in tropical areas where the garments are not needed



for cold protection. The clothes were accepted because of their prestige value and because of the prestige attached to the innovators, the white men. In another sense, people interested in making money or securing food readily take over ways of earning more or providing more food—provided that these innovations do not conflict with established values and habits of organizations. Thus there exists in culture a more or less equal balance of forces directed toward and resisting change. To the anthropologists working in James Bay these laws of culture change meant that they could not plan innovation from outside the way of life of the people but had to make their recommendations for change with the existing culture in mind. Advantage had to be taken of the specific aspects of Attawapiskat culture, for example, through which change would be introduced with the cooperation of the people affected.

Recognition of the role of culture in determining the fate of an innovation and a belief in democratic values involve a serious modification in nineteenth century patterns of assimilation. The assimilationists aspired to the goal of erasing indigenous cultures and substituting western patterns of feeling, believing and acting in their stead. Field studies of anthropologists reveal cases where after nearly one hundred years of attempted assimilation traditional native values still persist. Apparently assimilation is a policy both difficult to realize as well as basically undemocratic. Yet nobody desires to withhold from native societies techniques that would enhance their control over the environment or traits that members of those groups are anxious to adopt. The policy of internal development that has come to replace assimilation as a doctrine of cross cultural administration has been variously expressed. Briefly it means, in the language of the American Indian administrator, D'Arcy McNickle, allowing native peoples "to use their hands and their brains as these had been developed in a thousand generations." In the United States the Indian Reorganization Act passed in 1934 carries out such a policy. Central in the new act is the realization that native forms of life are still useful and "were only waiting", in McNickle's words, "for intelligent use to bring them into the open and put them to use." Behind the act is the realization, born of anthropological research into the dynamics of culture, that the success of culture change depends on how closely innovations retain congruence with the existing way of life while at the same time helping to attain goals that the people regard as desirable.

We were influenced by this point of view in preparing recommendations to the Government. We tried to present those recommendations by first outlining the Indian's needs and values and then designing an action program that would work through those traditional facilities. We did not wish to hinder the introduction of obviously advantageous changes desired by the natives, government, or medical specialists. Our recommendations therefore sought to promote material development from within the culture rather than from without. For example, organized research was suggested in order to develop new and nutritious but realistic methods of food processing. Indians could follow with only two burner stoves at their disposal and with the limited equipment customarily found in tents. We urged the search for improved trapping and fish catching techniques. We envisioned education that was designed for use, in other words that would help equip the Indian to solve more effectively the problems arising from his way of life outside of his habitat. If all this smacks of bringing coals to Newcastle it must be kept in mind that Indian techniques of subsistence production have evolved through the centuries as naturally and selfconsciously as our own agriculture prior to the nineteenth century. When scientific research turned to agriculture great strides resulted. We maintain that scientific methods can be developed and thereby change the Indian's traditional culture to a point where it is not a slavish imitation of the white man but where it represents a unique and satisfying instrument, well adjusted to its milieu and at the same time not radically divorced from tradition. The success of such a program rests closely with imaginative and sympathetic administrators who must themselves be trained. It demands continuous application of social scientific and other knowledge. Above all it calls for men who believe that social science can be successfully applied to human administration.