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**MAINTAINING THE ILLUSION OF DEMOCRACY:
POLICY-MAKING AND ABORIGINAL EDUCATION IN CANADA, 1946-1948¹**

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Following the 1949 recommendations of the Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons (SJC), the Canadian government shifted away from a policy of segregated to integrated schooling for Aboriginal children. This paper examines the minutes and proceedings of the SJC. Fewer than 10% of the briefs presented to the SJC called for integration indicating that government's policy shift was less reflective of the needs of the citizens who addressed the SJC than of government "insiders" who had first promoted integration in the early 1940s. Nevertheless, the SJC's open proceedings helped government to maintain the illusion of democratic processes.

Under the terms of Canada's *British North America Act* (1867), First Nations² children in Canada were educated in segregated federally-funded church-administrated schools until the mid twentieth century.³ Where they existed, residential schools — generally off-reserve — were established for eight to 14 year olds whereas day schools were situated on reserve for six to 12 year olds (Titley, 1986).

By the early 1940s, however, the Canadian government began to reconsider their segregation policy and sought a new vision for Indian education and Indian affairs in general. Aboriginal people had long been dissatisfied with their treatment and argued that despite the

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² First Nations, Native, Indian, and Aboriginal are used interchangeably throughout this paper to reflect the terminology that has been used in the era being researched as well as common usage today.

³ Small numbers of individuals were squeezed into local public schools where no federal provisions existed. See Raptis (2008) "Implementing Integrated Schooling for Aboriginal Children in British Columbia, 1933-1981".

disproportionate representation of men who contributed to World War II, they were still not considered citizens (Sittingstone, 1944/1945; Barman, 1991). In 1946, the government struck a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons (SJC) to receive concerns about Indian welfare (Johnson, 1984; Miller, 1996). After the publication of the Committee's report in 1949, the Canadian government shifted away from its policy of segregated schooling for Aboriginal children in favour of integration. In 1951, the government revised the *Indian Act* to enable on-reserve Aboriginal learners to be integrated into provincially-administered public or independent schools if they wished (*Indian Act*, S. 113 b).

Despite its significance to both educational history and policy studies, few researchers have studied this policy shift to date. Of the researchers who refer to the integration policy, most do so in passing and attribute the government's adoption of an integration policy to the recommendations of the SJC (cf. Barman, 1995; Brookes, 1990). Nevertheless, attributing a causal link between the SJC recommendations and the integration policy is problematic because it rests on the assumption that the briefs and testimony presented to the Committee – directly or indirectly – shaped the policy. The research of both James Miller and John Milloy casts this assumption into question. According to Miller, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) began to favour integrated schooling as early as 1944 — two years prior to the establishment of the SJC — as a way “to reduce the cost of providing schooling” for Native children (Miller, 1996, p. 382). Milloy has argued that integration was already in the Department's plans by 1943 and that “the dynamics that moved the Department” toward integration, “included ... as always, mundane financial considerations” (Milloy, 1999, p. 192). Kirkness and Selkirk Bowman maintain that integration was introduced “with little or no consultation with First Nations parents and children or the non-native community” at all (Kirkness & Selkirk Bowman, 1992, p. 120).

This paper examines the minutes and proceedings of the SJC in order to determine the extent to which Canada's policy of integrated schooling reflected the briefs and witness testimonies presented to the Committee. The following questions guided this research: Who submitted briefs and presented testimony pertaining to Aboriginal education to the SJC? What percentage was presented by Aboriginal people and what percentage non-Aboriginals? What did the majority of presentations and briefs ask for? Did the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal presentations differ substantively in their content? To what extent did the government's policy of integrated schooling address the concerns and recommendations presented to the SJC? How can we best explain the federal government's decision to adopt a policy of integrated schooling?

Background

Beginning in the early twentieth century, concerns were being voiced over the federal government's inadequate educational provisions for Aboriginal children. As early as 1922, Dr. P.H. Bryce, the DIA's former Chief Medical Officer, condemned the government for failing to safeguard Aboriginal children enrolled in residential schools from tuberculosis. A "trail of disease and death has gone on almost unchecked by any serious efforts on the part of the Department of Indian Affairs" (Bryce, 1922, p. 14). At the time, it was alleged that approximately half the children who attended residential schools did not live long enough to make use of the education they received (Milloy, 1999). And while government bureaucrats lamented the children's poor attendance, chronic under-funding resulted in many children not attending school at all. In British Columbia, for example, in 1945-46, of the 6,227 students aged 7 to 17, only 3,478 (56%) attended school (Canada, Department of Mines and Resources, 1946, pp. 34, 41, 42).

By the 1940s, many government officials realized that they needed a new policy agenda for Native education. In 1946, the Canadian government took the first step in a new direction when it established the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons to examine the *Indian Act, 1927*, and make recommendations on treaty rights, band membership, taxation, enfranchisement, reserve lands, schools, and “any other matter pertaining to the social and economic status of Indians and their advancement” (Canada, 1946, iii; see also “A Just Claim,” 1945; Johnson, 1984). The Committee was tasked with examining the Indian Act. Following the publication of the Committee’s 1949 report, the federal government shifted its educational policy from segregation to integration. This policy shift was legalized in 1951 by revisions to the *Indian Act* enabling the Minister of Indian Affairs to enter into agreements with provincial governments, territorial councils, school boards or religious or charitable organizations for the schooling of Aboriginal children living on reserves (Raptis, 2008).

Some observers have attributed this policy shift to Canadians’ growing recognition of the sanctity of human rights (Johnson, 1984). For example, a member of Alberta’s provincial legislature declared in 1947 that the “Canadian people as a whole are interested in the problem of Indians; they have become aware that the country has been negligent in the matter of looking after the Indians and they are anxious to remedy our shortcomings” (Miller, 1996, p. 378). According to Barman, both the Depression and the Second World War led to a growing need for the state to “take a more active role in ensuring minimum standards of life for all Canadians” which resulted in an “equality revolution” over the subsequent decades (Barman, 1991, p. 298).

Others have argued that the factors that shifted government policy from segregation to integration were not driven solely by an expanding awareness of civil rights. Miller, for instance, has shown that in addition to attitudinal factors, integration was driven by financial concerns. As

early as 1944, Indian Affairs Superintendent of Welfare and Training Robert Hoey warned government officials that the number of Indian residential and day school pupils across Canada was increasing by 300 per year. In order to meet the rising demand in the existing segregated system, government would need to construct five day schools and one residential school per year. In light of these realities, federal authorities sought other strategies by which to fulfill their educational obligations to Native peoples. According to Miller, integration enabled federal authorities to avoid capital start-up expenditures on new schools and simply pay operating costs on a per capita basis to provincial schools and districts:

The defensible ideology of integration would serve as a means to the end of economizing, especially at a time when numbers of young Inuit and Indians were swelling. (Miller, 1996, p. 390)

Milloy agrees with Miller. He has argued that the rationale for government's shift from segregated to integrated schooling was twofold: policymakers' longstanding goal to assimilate Native peoples into Canadian society and "mundane financial considerations" (Milloy, 1999, p. 192; see also Johnson, 1984, and Titley, 1981). As early as 1939, Hoey had obtained a report from the American Department of the Interior indicating that the United States government was acting on the 1928 Merriam report recommendations to desegregate Indian children and integrate them into state-run public schools. Hoey circulated this report to DIA officials and raised the notion of integration at other government meetings including the 1943 Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment charged with planning for post-war social reconstruction. Milloy has further observed that throughout the hearings of the 1946-48 Joint Committee, "it was obvious that the Department [of Indian Affairs] favored integration" (Milloy, 1999, p. 194).

Research approach

Much to the surprise of the SJC members, education was a far more pressing matter than they had anticipated, representing roughly 92% of all submissions (Miller, 1996). For the research reported in this paper, the briefs were examined in the following way. First, only the briefs and presentations which addressed education were selected for analysis. All of these submissions were typed out in full, creating a total of 145 “texts” for analysis. Second, the “texts” were coded as having been presented by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal peoples. Next, a content analysis was undertaken to determine the recommendations made in each of the texts. Twenty recommendations were identified and are listed in the Table. A straight tabulation was then made to determine the number of briefs/testimonies containing each of the recommendations. These were further converted to percentage values. A comparison was made of the percentage of Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal texts mentioning each of the recommendations. Newspaper coverage from the era was also consulted and has been included where appropriate. The results of these analyses helped determine whether the government’s integration policy reflected the briefs and presentations received by the SJC and how to explain the government’s chosen direction.

Table

Recommendations noted in briefs and testimonies

1. Repair or build on-reserve day school
2. Integrate children into public schools
3. Set up another commission to investigate schooling (separate from SJC)
4. Hire better (more qualified, better paid) teachers
5. Keep residential schools (mainly for neglected or orphaned children)
6. Establish a new system but still to be run by federal government
7. Increase vocational or agricultural options in schools
8. Fix problems in existing residential schools
9. Infuse Indian language and culture into schools' curricula
10. Follow provincial curricula with greater academic emphasis
11. Increase overall funding
12. Allow parents to choose the denominational school of their liking
13. Increase access to higher education and improve transportation to get there
14. Offer adult education on reserves
15. Give Indian people greater control over schooling; election to local Boards
16. Give control of education to the provinces
17. Leave system as is; all is satisfactory
18. Attend to specific needs re: particular schools (such as building repairs)
19. Continue to include religious instruction in schools
20. Eliminate religious instruction; end denominational control of schools

Findings: Briefs and Testimonies to the SJC

One hundred and thirty (or 90%) of the briefs pertaining to education came from Aboriginal groups whereas only 15 (or 10%) were from non-Aboriginals. By far, the number one recommendation from Aboriginal groups was to hire better teachers (56 or 43%). To most, “better” meant “properly certified and trained” (Canada, 1946, p. 802) as it was no secret that more often than not the teachers hired for Native schools had little or no preparation for teaching (Barman, 1995). Nevertheless, people were not only concerned about certification. Many briefs recognized the difficulty of attracting certified teachers when remuneration (at \$750-800 per year) was considerably lower than in provincially-run schools (\$1000-1200 annually) (Annual Report of the Public Schools of British Columbia (ARPS), 1945-6, Appendix 1). A brief

submitted from the Sarcee Day School in Alberta argued that teachers of Native children “should also be entitled to the pension benefits accruing to teachers in Alberta under the Provincial scheme” (Canada, 1946, p. 824). The submission of Alberta’s Blood Indians recommended that teachers “be members of the Civil Service and be entitled to all the privileges which are given to its members” (Canada, 1947, p. 2057).

Non-Aboriginals were less concerned with the quality of teaching than by the lack of on-reserve schooling. Only 20% of their submissions and testimony addressed teaching. The largest percentage (40%) of briefs submitted by this group requested the maintenance or building of on-reserve day schools. Indeed, 13% of the briefs presented by this group (and 18% of Aboriginal submissions) argued against the continued use of residential schools. The Morley School brief from the Stoney Reserve in southwest Alberta noted that the

forcible removal of populations by the Nazi regime in Europe was universally condemned by the civilized world. To perpetuate in Canada against Native Canadians, this policy would be the grossest malpractice and transgression of human rights and privileges... Nazi practices should have no place in Canada. (Canada, 1946, p. 827)

According to the parents of Beaver Lake Reserve in Alberta, sending children “away many miles from their reserve to a school which is at best difficult to reach is so far from the wishes of the parents that the children are receiving no education at all” (Canada, 1946, p. 821).

Fully 39% of the briefs and testimonies of Aboriginal peoples also requested the maintenance and construction of on-reserve day schools. In addition to addressing the serious damage “wrought... among the Indians” by “the breaking up of family life”, a shift away from residential to day schools would enable the children to spend far more time on their academic studies (Canada, 1946, p. 633). One of the most despised aspects of the residential schools was the “half-day system” whereby students spent half their day involved in academic pursuits, with

the remainder spent on chores that assisted with the operation of the school itself — such as cooking, carpentry, and scrubbing floors. This system led to slow progress and poor achievement on the part of children who were one to two grades behind their age peers in public schools (Canada, 1946, p. 820).

Interestingly, 37% of Native submissions to the SJC called for the continued use of residential schooling. This recommendation must not be misrepresented as an endorsement of residential school, however, as the briefs generally called for their continuation as a short-term solution for children of nomadic parents or until such time as an on-reserve day school could be established (Canada, 1947, p. 890). Only 13% of the non-Aboriginal submissions favoured the continuation of residential schooling. Non-natives also considered residential schooling to be detrimental to Native children's development, preparing them better for institutional lives (such as in prisons) than “for life on the outside” (Miller, 1996, p. 387).

The next greatest concern amongst Aboriginal submissions pertained to access to higher education. Forty (31%) of their submissions noted a general lack of opportunities for Native children to attend high school, college, or university. For most children, elementary school was the end of the line partly due to the slow progress made under the “half-day system”. On the other hand, several briefs and testimonies lamented the blatant discrimination displayed by Indian agents and other officials who had complete control over the fate of Native learners. For example, Andrew Paull, representing the North American Indian Brotherhood of Canada, relayed the following story:

I know four boys particularly, members of my own tribe, that were highly recommended by the principal of their school, that were fit and qualified to go to technical school and learn a trade, engineering, to be electricians or something like that. According to the system the Indians had to get the consent of the Indian agent. That Indian agent refused to give his consent and so those four boys could not go to learn something better than their ancestors knew. He persistently

refused. The result is those four boys are doing the same kind of work as their illiterate fathers are doing, longshoreman work, fishing and so on. (Canada, 1947, p. 889)

Paull further charged that the administration of the *Indian Act* was “the most bureaucratic and dictatorial system ever imposed in this world of ours” (“Indian chief bluntly charges,” 1946, p. 17). He closed his testimony by requesting that Canadian officials establish a board in every province to whom Native people could appeal Indian agents’ often unjust decisions. The 1947 Brief of the Veteran’s Association of Wikwemikong, Manitoulin Island, Ontario noted that not a single boy had passed beyond grade 3 in their agency. Although the Association had expressed concerns several times to the Indian Agent, “no action was ever taken...” which was “typical of the indifference of the Indian Department...” (Canada, 1947, p. 1338).

Only three non-Aboriginal briefs were concerned with the lack of higher education opportunities. More pressing for non-Aboriginals was the matter of vocational education. Roughly the same proportion of non-Aboriginal (27%) and Aboriginal (26%) briefs addressed this. In particular, it was recommended that girls spend more time learning homemaking and farming while boys receive instruction in trades training, such as blacksmithing, wood and leather working, animal husbandry, and farm mechanics. The brief submitted by the Union of Saskatchewan Indians made reference to the situation in North Dakota where young men were loaned breeding stock while in high school. After receiving training in caring for the herd, the feed, and pasture, students returned the loaned stock and branched out on their own. “A similar plan should not be impossible in Canada” (Canada, 1947, p. 981).

A key concern among the Aboriginal presentations (24%) was the lack of adequate funding in order to sustain the existing school system. Reverend Ahab Spence, a converted minister who also taught at the Little Pine Day School, estimated that in order to fund Aboriginal

schooling adequately, parliament would almost have to double its appropriation from approximately \$14 million annually to at least \$25 million (Canada, 1947, p. 1068). According to Spence, the main dilemma plaguing the entire school system was financial. “The Indian Department is not allotted enough money to carry out the task which it is expected to do” (Canada, 1947, p. 1051). Many briefs supported this conclusion. Thomas Gosnell of Port Simpson argued that “the problem is that the department says they are always broke...” For approximately \$16,000 Gosnell built the Crosby Girls Home for the Women’s Missionary Society of the United Church at Port Simpson. This building included a bathroom and was big enough to accommodate 30 pupils. Nevertheless, the school built on his own reserve by government contractors apparently cost approximately \$15,000 but did not include bathroom facilities or running water. “There is no toilet, no bath, no sink, no basin.” Gosnell concluded that there “must be a leak in the fund somewhere” (Canada, 1947, p. 792). Parents also complained that children enrolled in day schools received Family Allowance cheques (introduced by the federal government in 1945) but the families of residential school attendees did not, a situation which further diminished some Aboriginal parents’ financial means (Canada, 1946, p. 802).

Interestingly, 23% of Aboriginal briefs and presentations communicated that they favoured retaining religious instruction in their children’s schooling. “We do not want our children sent to non-religious schools,” argued the Lower Kootenay Reserve Band in British Columbia (Canada, 1947, p. 170). Likewise, the (Alberta) Fort Vermillion Band “would prefer to see [their] children without instruction rather than have their education taken out of the hands of (...) Priests and Sisters, who for more than half a century [had] been sharing in all [their] adversities” (Canada, 1947, p. 200).

On the other hand, 13% of Aboriginal people called for the immediate abolition of denominational control over their children's education. The Big Canoe Councilors at Georgina Island, Ontario, requested that the employment of missionary teachers be replaced by "a day school system supervised by a school board, as in white communities, so that a properly qualified teacher will always get the appointment" (Canada, 1947, p. 1440).

Some 12% of Native submissions also expressed overall satisfaction with the existing system. However, this statistic must be viewed cautiously, since the extent to which Aboriginal people had control over their submissions is unclear. The brief presented by the Fort Norman (Northwest Territories) Natives constitutes a disturbing illustration of the extent to which the SJC provided a vehicle to forward the aims of non-Aboriginal interest groups. The brief itself explains that the community was satisfied with the "very good residential school at Fort Providence" but an accompanying letter stated that "The senior Chief of the Fort refused to sign saying that the Indians at the Fort did not wish to have nuns teaching at the school" (Canada, 1947, p. 521). It also alleged that pupils at the school at Providence were poorly fed, with many children who had been hospitalized refusing to return to the school. Likewise, it is difficult to assess the circumstances prompting a March 11, 1947 submission from the Lower Kootenay Reserve Band (in British Columbia). Chief Bosil and several councilors retracted their letter sent to the SJC on July 15, 1946. Apparently, the band wished to withdraw the letter which "asked for the removal of the Principal and Sister-teachers" since it was allegedly written "without due consideration and examination. We find their management of the school under the financial difficulties which they have to contend with, not only acceptable but highly commendable" (Canada, 1947, p. 170).

The statistics calculated for this research project are revealing in other ways. Only 8% of Aboriginal briefs and testimonies called for the integration of Aboriginal children into public schools. Fewer still requested a shift in control of the system from federal to provincial authorities (6%); education for adults as well as children (3%) or a curriculum on par with that of provincial schools (9%). One of the reasons for not wanting a comparable curriculum was that many observers believed that teaching Native children required an understanding of and adaptation to children's particular linguistic needs. According to Chief Teddy Yellowfly of the Blackfoot Reserve in Alberta, the children's first few years of schooling proceeded slowly since they first had to learn English. "It is unreasonable to assume that the Indian child can learn in half the time subjects taught to white children in the neighbourhood" (Canada, 1947, p. 550). Others (6%) argued that the curriculum itself was not appropriate and should be infused with Native languages as well as "Indian lore, customs, and handicrafts" (Canada, 1947, p. 963).

Only 7% of Aboriginal submissions lamented the loss of parental choice that might result if the schools were taken out of the hands of religious orders. During the Committee's deliberations, it was revealed that the government was considering policy to force children to attend the closest school to their home be it secular, Roman Catholic, Anglican, or United. Many Aboriginal parents rejected the idea of having their children belong to one faith but finding themselves forced to attend a school under the control of another denomination. Fewer still (5%) pushed for greater Indian control of Indian education, particularly through the development of elected boards on which parents could serve. Andrew Paull argued strenuously that no one had the right to decide for a parent where to send his/ her child to school. "That is a matter that belongs to the father and mother... Britain fought against religious control... And so did many Indians..." (Canada, 1947, p. 888).

A few recommendations that emerged were significantly less important to both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who presented briefs and gave testimonies. Merely 5% of the Aboriginal briefs argued that a commission should be established specifically to discuss education. A further 7% presented the SJC with particular needs for individual schools – such as building repairs. Only 1% of the non-Aboriginal briefs and testimonies were concerned with integration of Aboriginal children into public schools; the establishment of a whole new system; increased funding; and loss of choice which might result should church management be wound down. None of the non-Aboriginal briefs addressed specific needs of specific schools (such as repairs to buildings); the infusion of Native language and culture into existing curricula; the addition of adult education; a shift in control to the provinces; a shift in control to Indians themselves; the need for a commission dedicated to investigating education more specifically; or the matter of discontinuing religious instruction in schools. On the other hand, none of the non-Aboriginal briefs expressed complete satisfaction with the existing system either.

Adding Insult to Injury

It is clear from the preceding analyses that the integration of Aboriginal children into provincial public schools was not high on the priority list of either Aboriginals or non-Aboriginals who provided briefs and testimonies to the SJC. Yet, the minutes and proceedings illustrate that the DIA “favoured integration and was anxious to close the residential schools” (Milloy, 1999, p. 194). In several cases, committee members were not averse to putting words in witnesses’ mouths in an attempt to gain support for integration. After questioning Chief Teddy Yellowfly of the Blackfoot Reserve in Alberta, Member of Parliament W.G. Case boldly concluded that the Chief would prefer a shift to integrated schooling. “I take it you would

personally prefer a public school system,” said Case, to which Yellowfly replied “I personally would prefer both depending on the conditions of the reserve” (Canada, 1947, p. 672).

When Mr. Reginald Hill of Ontario’s Six Nations Reserve argued that Native parents should have the right to choose their children’s school SJC member J. D. MacNicol – who was questioning him – erroneously concluded that Hill was “in favour of the ordinary public schools.” Hill corrected him by replying “No, not entirely. I think there is still a place for the residential school providing it is divided from the church” (Canada, 1947, p. 1379).

Nevertheless, putting words in the witnesses’ mouths was but one of the SJC’s members’ displays of bias. The minutes and proceedings contain several examples of dismissive and often rude remarks made by Committee members to Native witnesses. One of the most egregious examples occurred on May 2, 1947 when Thomas Gosnell complained to the committee that the authorities rarely secured qualified teachers at their schools:

On one of my visits during school hours when I came into that room I saw the teacher at the desk taking a comb and combing the hair of a little pet terrier with the children flying around in the room throwing books at each other. ... At the end of the term the Indian agent got rid of this lady. One or two years later I went on my roamings up and down the coast and I found that same teacher in the Skidegate school, the very same teacher that was fired. (Canada, 1947, p. 790)

In response to this lamentable situation, MacNicol glibly responded “Still combing the dog?”

When Mr. Dreaver of Little Pine Reserve, Saskatchewan, suggested that Indian parents should be given the right to choose a denominational school depending on their religion, SJC member W.G. Case reminded him that the schools “do not teach paganism” (Canada, 1947, p. 961). In response to the comment of Chief Tootoosis – also of Little Pine – that boarding schools were an inferior way to raise children, Senator V. Dupuis sarcastically retorted that “a lot of white people are backwards because a good many white people send their children to boarding schools” (Canada, 1947, p. 968).

Later, in 1947, Chief Teddy Yellowfly charged that the federal government had not fulfilled its treaty obligations to educate native children – a concern expressed by many witnesses. The Chairman of the committee noted that there were schools provided in the Northwest Territories and asked Yellowfly whether the children attended and learned. The Chief replied that indeed they attended but that the children were not being educated. In response, the Chairman asked whether Yellowfly had heard the expression “you can drive a horse to water but you can’t make him drink.” (Canada, 1947, p. 673).

At other times, SJC members revealed their ignorance about Aboriginal education. Committee member Thomas Farquar was unaware that the term “industrial school” had been dropped in favour of “residential school” in the 1920s and used the terms interchangeably. When Andrew Paull complained to the committee about the lack of higher education opportunities for Native learners, Farquar seemed mystified that the Indian agents had the authority to decide whether a student could attend high school. When Paull insisted that – as unfair as this seemed – this was the case, Farquar asked “in a matter of this kind, could not the [Band] council take the matter up directly with the Department?” (Canada, 1947, p. 890). Clearly, Farquar was not aware that in March 1933, Harold McGill, the DIA’s Deputy Superintendent General circulated a letter to all Indian agents informing them that there had been “a progressive increase in the number of letters received direct from Indians on the reserves... which should come directly before the Indian Agent...” McGill noted that this procedure was “undesirable” as it caused “unnecessary waste of time” and interference “with dispatch and order in the conduct of official business.” McGill reminded the agents that “Indian agency organization” was “the basis of [the DIA’s] administrative system” and that in the future, all matters to be referred to the DIA should be done so through “the proper channel of communication”: the Indian agent (Canada, 1947, p. 891). Yet,

committee member C.T. Richard essentially dismissed Paull's concerns, arguing that he did not believe the Department would "be unreasonable to that extent" (Canada, 1947, p. 892).

Conclusions

What can be concluded from this examination of the minutes and proceedings of the SJC? First, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups were represented at the hearings with Aboriginal groups providing 90% of the briefs and testimonies and non-Aboriginal groups accounting for 10%. The priorities of the two groups differed slightly but both groups raised similar issues for the most part. The top priorities for Aboriginal groups were the attainment of qualified teachers to staff their children's schools, followed by the need to maintain or build on-reserve day schools to enable children to live at home while schooled. The number one concern for non-Aboriginals was also the repair and establishment of day schools, followed by increased opportunities for vocational learning.

More importantly, neither Aboriginal nor non-Aboriginal groups seemed overwhelmingly in favour of integrated schooling. Indeed, requests for integration came from only 8% of the Aboriginal presentations and a mere 1% of non-Aboriginals'. It would be safe to suggest that the government's policy shift to integrated schooling did not, in the main, address the concerns and recommendations presented to the SJC. This conclusion is supported by a *Globe and Mail* editorial that ran after the release of the SJC's report during the summer of 1947. The editorial team, it seems, was "somewhat disappointed too, not to find the report being more direct in its recommendations on educational matters... A much better organized approach to Indian education in Canada is urgently needed" ("Still Much," 1947, p. A2).

With so few presentations in favour of integration, how can we explain the federal government's decision to adopt a policy of integrated schooling? In *Aboriginal Self-Government and Education in Canada*, Jerry Paquette has noted that “[p]olicy-making by administrative fiat” has been the main approach adopted by decision-makers overseeing Aboriginal education (Paquette, 1986, p. 35; see also Dyck, 1997, p. 61). This was very much the case with Canada's shift from segregated to integrated schooling for Aboriginal children. Indeed, as other researchers have noted, the DIA was already moving toward integration long before the SJC was even formed (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). “Integration was the latest nostrum of a bureaucracy that had been without an effective policy for Native education since the early years of the twentieth century” (Miller, 1996, p. 382).

Findings from this research also challenge theoretical conceptions of educational policy development as a rational process where problems are identified, where options are defined and where benefits and costs are analyzed before actions are determined (Downey, 1988; Pal, 1992). The development of integrated schooling for Aboriginal learners reminds us that policy development is a complex and integrative process involving social, political, and economic forces outside of schools (Berkhout & Wielemans, 1999; Clemmer, 1991).

As pluralist theories of public policy development remind us, government policy decisions often reflect the competition between organized groups that seek to protect or promote the interests of their members. Since some groups enjoy greater access to resources than others, “some demands tend to receive a more sympathetic hearing from government than others” (Miljan, 2008, p. 35). Such perspectives are particularly helpful in understanding Canada's development of integrated schooling, since the government's policy shift was shaped more by the recommendations of the government's bureaucrats and consultants than by the voices of both

Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals who presented briefs and testimonies to the SJC. A case in point is the presentation of Diamond Jenness, Chief Anthropologist of the Canadian Museum of Anthropology. His “Plan for Liquidating Canada’s Indian Problems within 25 Years” advocated the abolition of separate schools for Native children and their integration into locally-controlled public schools.

That the voices of Aboriginal people would carry so little clout is hardly surprising, given that under the *Indian Act*, Native people living on reserves were “placed under the almost total control of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs whose god-like powers would be exercised by federal bureaucrats in Ottawa and by officials in the field [Indian agents]” (Miljan, 2008, p. 260). Under such conditions, it has become “impossible for Indians living on reserves to assume responsibility and control over their social and economic development” (Miljan, 2008, p. 260). Indeed, throughout the duration of the SJC’s proceedings, Robert Hoey, newly-appointed Director of Indian Affairs, argued both to the SJC and elsewhere that integration was in the best interests of both Native and non-Native Canadians (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). It seems that while the federal government had every intention of implementing a policy of integrated schooling and eventually winding down the federal system, the proceedings of the SJC may simply have served to help government maintain the illusion of a democratic state that appeared – at least superficially – attuned to its citizens’ demands. Sadly, the fruit of this ill-conceived policy decision is borne in today’s poor academic achievement and below average graduation rates among Aboriginal populations throughout Canada.⁴

⁴ For more contemporary perspectives on Aboriginal education, see the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. For challenges faced by Aboriginal children during the first years of integration, see H.B. Hawthorn et al. *A Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada*.

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