

At the end of formal schooling, the Indian must make a crucial decision—to return to or stay on the reserve, or to earn a living in a wider Canadian society. Integrated schooling helps him to accept the latter choice more readily. A placement service, with officers at Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, North Bay, Toronto, Quebec City and Amherst, was set up by the Indian Affairs Branch in 1957 to assist these young people. Jobs are found for selected young students who want to work in the larger cities and they are counselled and guided as they cross the bridge into non-Indian society.

Apart from these younger people, a great many Indians both live and work off the reserves, or live on the reserve and work outside. The Mohawks of Eastern Canada have made a name for themselves as high-steel workers. British Columbia Indians are known as reliable and hard-working longshoremen, and have long been successful salmon and herring fishermen. Naskapis from northern Quebec are part of the working force at the iron mines at Schefferville. The Dokis Band near North Bay live on rich timberlands and are loggers and pulp cutters. Walpole Island men in southern Ontario are skilled workers in a boat-building factory at Algonac, Michigan. These are random examples which indicate that, given the education, training and the opportunity, the Indian can compete on equal terms with others in industrial society. Prejudice on the part of employers is lessening and those who employ Indians do not consider them to be different from other workers after they have adjusted to regular working hours.

In the more isolated areas of the northern Laurentian Shield and the Mackenzie District, the Indians depend largely on trapping, domestic fishing and hunting for a living. As expert outdoorsmen and conservationists, they have helped, for example, to restore the once-depleted beaver population from Quebec to Saskatchewan and put it on a sustained-yield basis. In some areas of the North, the Indians have been assisted in launching commercial fishing programs. Here the main problem is transportation, and private operators and the provincial and federal governments have been assisting them by flying their catches to railhead for shipment to the consuming markets in both Canada and the United States.

Superimposed on these various strata of employment are traditional methods used seasonally by the Canadian Indian to supplement his income: potato-picking in Maine, berry-picking in the States of Washington and Oregon, wild-rice gathering in southern Manitoba, northwestern and central Ontario, frog-picking, seneca-root gathering, basket-weaving and other traditional Indian crafts.

No matter where he works or what his employment, the Indian must face the problem of adjustment and make his own choice. If he wants to participate in the non-Indian world he may still keep his sense of identity, for integration is the policy, not assimilation, and he may remain a member of his band. On the other hand, if he wishes to continue living on his reserve, the Indian Affairs Branch will provide him with community and housing assistance, financial help through revolving loan funds in farming and fishing and business, relief grants where necessary and assistance in developing leadership.

Much of the leadership among the Indians today stems from the band councils. Each band chooses its own representatives. A few still do so by the old tribal systems—usually electing for life—but the majority have adopted the elective system, with the chief and councillors holding office for two years. All councils may make by-laws. They may, for example, regulate traffic, prevent trespass of cattle, construct water courses, roads, bridges, etc., and protect fur-bearing animals, fish and game.

Twenty-seven bands have reached the stage where they may make money by-laws to raise funds through taxation of property owned by Indians on a reserve. Generally these bands are fairly progressive and are rapidly learning administrative procedures. However, a band must apply for permission to pass money by-laws and, for various reasons of their own, there are several bands in Canada who prefer not to accept this responsibility. Band councils also make decisions on the use of their own money capital—usually procured from the sale of land in the past—which is held in trust by the Federal Government. Capital expenditures are for long-term improvements on reserves.