

The Eskimos*

There are altogether about 13,000 Eskimos in Canada, spread out over the Northwest Territories, Arctic Quebec and Labrador. Although many of them still depend to a great extent on game and fish for subsistence, they have enjoyed marked improvement in their circumstances in the past ten years. Their traditional nomadic way of life is giving way to that of a more settled wage-earner and they are becoming established in permanent communities where opportunities are greater for education, health services and employment. In addition to those self-employed in such activities as fishing, hunting and trapping, many of whom are members of co-operatives, Eskimos are working in a variety of fields—as civil servants, clergymen, aircraft pilots, miners, carpenters, mechanics, diesel and tractor operators and oil drillers. An Eskimo manages the CBC radio station at Inuvik and another produces Eskimo-language programs for the CBC Northern Service. Eskimo women work as interpreters, waitresses, nursing assistants, secretaries and clerks, in southern as well as northern communities. However, the number in actual wage-earning employment is as yet relatively small and it is the Federal Government's role to prepare, through education, as many of them as wish to do so to enter wage-earning employment and, so that wage-earning opportunities will be available to them, to create a kind of economic climate in the North which will encourage private enterprise to invest in the development of the vast resources of that area. Various federal programs of highway, access road and air-strip construction, resources cataloguing, provision of bulk oil storage facilities and cheap power are under way to assist in this objective.

In satisfying the first primary need of the Eskimo—the safeguarding of his life—the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is now in reasonably regular contact with most of the Eskimo people, even though a good portion of them still follow their nomadic habits. The full range of social services applicable to all Canadians is extended to the Eskimos. Medical care provided for them through the years has been such that the annual natural increase among them is now between 3 and 4 p.c., indicating that the Eskimo population will double in a period of about 20 years. The increasing size of families and the general movement toward living in settlements in many areas have created a need for permanent housing. Through a loans and grants program, initiated in 1959, Eskimos are encouraged to buy their own homes. A \$1,000 or \$2,000 subsidy, depending on the size of the house, covers part of the cost of construction and the owner may borrow the remainder from the Eskimo Loan Fund and repay it on terms adjusted to his income. A man's labour in building his home reduces the total cost. Through this program, basic housing has been provided for more than 1,000 Eskimo families but, because the need is still great and urgent, a new four-year rental housing program was started in late 1965 under which 1,600 houses will be built over a five-year period at a cost of \$12,000,000. The houses will include one, two and three bedroom designs and will be available at rentals that will cover basic furnishings, heat, electricity, water and sewage and garbage services. The rent to be paid will be determined by the family's ability to pay and the difference will be absorbed by the Government. The families in rented houses will be credited with the value of the householder's labour in the construction, maintenance and improvement of his house. In addition, to enable a family to acquire ownership of a rental house, one third of all rent paid can be applied toward its purchase when the family is ready to take this step.

The second need of the Eskimo is education and training—to give him a better chance in competing for employment, to give those with the interest and ability an opportunity to take their proper place as leaders in their home communities or elsewhere, or to give those who will follow the traditional way of life a more meaningful and satisfying existence. The number of schools in the North has grown from 11 in 1952 to 64 at the end of 1965 and a program for construction of school facilities—elementary, secondary, vocational and pre-school—is under way. By 1971, 132 new classrooms, 64 auxiliary rooms and 54 classroom replacements will have been built, as well as facilities to house 1,550 resident students

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