

NATIVE WHITE RELATIONSHIPS IN A NORTHERN OIL TOWN

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ABSTRACT/RESUME

Norman Wells, NWT, has long been the site of an Esso Resources oil refinery. Historically almost all employees have been White residents of the community. The company altered work schedules and employment conditions at a time of plant expansion in order to increase the numbers of northern Native employees. This reverse discrimination had serious effects upon White employees, but resulted in surprisingly little disruption of Native-White relationships. In spite of some inevitable hard feelings, the community appears to have recovered from the changes.

Norman Wells, Territoires du Nord-Ouest, a depuis longtemps été l'emplacement d'une raffinerie de pétrole d'Esso Resources. Du point de vue historique, presque tous les employés ont été des résidents blancs de la communauté. La compagnie a modifié les plans de travail et les conditions d'embauche lors de l'expansion de l'installation afin d'augmenter le nombre des employés autochtones du nord. Cette discrimination inversée eut des effets graves sur les employés blancs, et cela est surprenant, perturba très peu les relations autochtones-blancs. Malgré quelques amertumes inévitables, la communauté semble s'être remise de ces changements.

Fully integrated work situations are officially favored in both Canada and the United States. In the latter this is formalized in the concept of "equal opportunity employers," with appropriate inducements and sanctions. While the legal issues posed by the phenomenon of reverse discrimination have not yet been completely resolved in Canada, there is clearly growing pressure for programs designed to minimize the competitive disadvantages experienced by minority group members.

This paper reports on the experience of developing an integrated work force at the Esso Resources oil field operation at Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories, aspects of which were widely interpreted by White residents as reverse discrimination, and the effects this had on Native-White relationships in the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature search revealed little in the way of comparable studies. There is an extensive literature on resource development impacts and "boom towns" in Scotland, the American West, British Columbia, Labrador, North East Alberta, etc., but most studies are primarily concerned with economic effects. They have very little to say about effects of industrial employment on relationships between locals and non-locals or Natives and Whites. (See for example Bowles, 1982; Davenport and Davenport, 1980; Detomasi and Gartrell, 1984; Gartrell et al., 1980; Inglis, 1984; McNicoll, 1982; Summers and Selvik, 1981). There are probably situations comparable to that found in Norman Wells at mining or other resource development sites in Melanesia, South America and Africa, but they appear to have been very little studied, and we were unable to find any relevant sources.

Beveridge and Schindelka (1980) provide some information on the positive quality of working relationships between Indian and White workers employed at the Gulf Minerals Rabbit Lake Mine in Saskatchewan, as does Hobart on the similar situation at the Nanisivik Mine on Strathcona Sound, Baffin Island, but these are not community situations (Baffin Region Inuit Association, 1979). The Nortran program for training Northwest Territorial Natives for oil field employment resembled the Norman Wells situation in that the Native trainees received benefits unavailable to their White trainers, but again the focus was not on community reactions (Hobart, 1984). However, the consequences for Native-White relationships of these two situations were somewhat similar, as we shall see.

BACKGROUND

Unlike most other settlements along the Mackenzie River which originated as traditional Native camping and/or trading post sites, the Norman Wells location has no historical significance for Native people. Its importance until recent years has been related only to the oil at that location, first remarked in the form of oil seepages by Alexander Mackenzie when travelling down the river which

bears his name in 1789. However it was not until 1914 that oil leases were actually staked in the area and the discovery well which found oil in commercial quantities was drilled in 1919.

The first, very small refinery was built on this site in the early 1920% to supply the modest western Territorial demand for gasoline and diesel fuel. In 1939 a new refinery was built capable of producing a wider variety of products, and more wells were drilled to a total of four. In 1942 the production capacity was expanded considerably in order to supply military needs in Alaska during World War II. Since then production has expanded relatively steadily to a level currently in excess of one million barrels of crude oil per year. Most recently, in response to both oil field and market considerations, Esso resources has received permission to expand production yet further and to begin shipping the increment to southern Canada via a specially constructed, small-scale pipeline in 1985. The expanded field will require a significant increase in the size of the Esso Resources work force.

From the early 1920's to the early 1960's Norman Wells was a tiny "company town," with a population of only a few score. The Esso workforce was essentially White, augmented by two or three Metis who worked the year round, and a larger number of Indians who worked during the summers at the dirty jobs of cleaning and filling oil barrels. Tiny and isolated though it was, this community was not troubled by the high turnover rates characteristic of most northern White work forces. During the long years of the depression, from the late 1920's to the late 1930%, "the Wells" provided steady dependable employment at a time when people were very happy to have it. Thus the local tradition developed that Norman Wells people stayed: the old timers were content with their situations and they effectively passed this norm on to newer recruits. The small company town situation, with company store, nursing station, club, church, etc., helped to reinforce this pattern so that a stable, close-knit community crystalized, with patterns that persisted into the 1960%.

In more recent years the Federal and the Territorial Governments established a number of offices in Norman Wells, the local economy became more diversified, and the local population grew from 185 in 1956 to 297 in 1961. By 1970 the population had stabilized at about 360 people and it remained at this level throughout the decade. At the same time, the Native population increased slowly as well, so that it comprised about 15 percent of the total. But it continued to be essentially a White community, where Esso Resources had pre-eminent influence because the oil field and associated businesses provided the economic base, though the influence of the growing local business and government employee sectors was increasing steadily.

About 1976 Esso began to change a number of its policies at the Norman Wells operation. Esso personnel together with their service and support facilities had occupied an "Esso Compound", about two km. down-stream from the rest of the emerging village, where stores, the school, government offices, the nursing station, and the housing of non-Esso employees were located. Functionally and interactionally it comprised an independent and separate community, little involved with the remainder. Esso officials recognized the importance as

well as the inevitability of eliminating this division. Accordingly, plans were set in motion during the late 1970's to move existing Esso residences into the town residential area and to build new homes there when they were needed. About the same time it closed down the company nursing station, store, and recreation centre in order to insure the speedy integration of employee families with the rest of the community. Needless to say, those changes, initiated as company policy, were less than popular with many of the "old timers."

A second set of changes focussed on recruitment, staffing and work scheduling. These were introduced for a number of reasons: the testimony of Native people during the Berger Inquiry of 1975-76, the Territorial Election of 1979 which demonstrated the rapidly increasing political power of Territorial Native people, and the growing skill and competence of many Native people. There were growing indications that it would be more difficult to get White employees and their families to make the kind of long-term commitment to the Norman Wells work site which Esso had been able to count on for almost half a century. Thus it was apparent that the White-oriented staffing policy which had been the basis of the Norman Wells operation would have to be changed.

What was needed in its place was a policy which would be effective in recruiting competent Native workers, with minimum disruption to the lives of the workers, their families or their home communities. At the same time it was important to create vacancies which Native workers could be hired to fill. Together these necessitated a new approach to staffing at the Norman Wells site and this took the form of reorganizing all the work on a rotational basis with the exception of the central administrative functions. Under the new arrangement all field and refinery personnel were to work 12 hours a day, for 14 days, then return home for a 14 day rest break, while their places were taken by "cross shift" partners.

This approach appeared to have the desired consequences and some further benefits besides. From the perspective of the Native people, the possible disruptions induced by employment were held to a minimum. Workers and their families did not have to relocate to Norman Wells and experience the isolation from kin and community, the difficulties and the alienation that relocation from a Native-run to a White-run community would have inevitably induced. Native communities supplying workers were spared the loss of some of their most competent members and families. The most difficult aspect is the two week long absences from home which this employment scheme requires. However, this is made somewhat less onerous because serious trapping necessitates relatively frequent absences from home, and some Native men have had prior industrial employment under similar conditions. There is some compensation in the fact that the other half of every month the worker is at home free from wage employment demands. The alternative, relocation of families to Norman Wells, would certainly have more disruptive consequences for most Native families. Finally, the financial rewards for accepting this employment, relative to virtually all other generally available opportunities, are very high. Surveys conducted in Native villages supplying rotation workers indicate that majorities in excess of two thirds of the respondents say they think the rotation employ-

ment is a good thing for their communities.

When the field and the refinery operations began operating under the 14 days on and 14 days off rotation schedule, the then current (White) workers were required to adopt this schedule as well, which upset many Norman Wells residents. A few were already rotating to work from their homes in the Prairie provinces, but as indicated above, most employees had relocated to Norman Wells. These latter were required to move back to their homes in the South and commute like the others. While some were happy about this change, many were not, feeling that they were actually being squeezed out, and some resigned. The result of the modest increase in the total work force, and the resignations which the change to rotation employment induced, was to create a number of vacancies which Native people were recruited to fill.

A final aspect of the new staffing policy has been the development and implementation of an elaborate training program. This makes use of a competency based approach which emphasized worker self-study with the assistance of the work supervisor. It is designed to help the worker to move up the advancement ladder at the maximum speed of which he is capable, and so to promote training of the growing work force required with completion of the field expansion in 1985.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM

The implementation of the program has proceeded largely according to expectation. The number of Esso employees residing in Norman Wells has declined substantially, the work force increased to 197 by 1982, and the proportion of the number of Native employees increased during this period.

One of the problems initially associated with the new approach has been the high turnover rate among the Native employees. There are a number of reasons for this instability. The most important is that few people in the Native communities from which Esso Norman Wells employees are recruited have had prior experience with permanent industrial employment. Thus, most tend to think of such employment in seasonal or short period terms, rather than as a career. Some workers quit because of family or community difficulties associated with their Esso employment. Another common cause is seen when workers have misunderstandings about the size of their pay cheques, or perceive an injustice on the part of a work supervisor. Native workers are often loath to discuss such matters because of the awkwardness involved, but they brood about them, and often quit, giving no reason or only a plausible excuse.

COMMUNITY REACTIONS: THE NORMAN WELLS SURVEY

A central interest of this paper is in the reactions of Norman Wells residents to these changes with particular reference to the effects on Native-White relationships. Data are available in the form of the responses to a community wide survey which was jointly sponsored by the Norman Wells Hamlet Council, and by Esso Resources in the summer of 1981.

The survey schedule was rather lengthy, consisting of 175 items dealing with perceptions of the community, Esso's influence and Esso employment and staffing policies. Particular attention was given to the perceptions of prejudice and discrimination in a variety of contexts in the town among both Native and non-Native respondents since the latter might feel discriminated against at work, given Esso's Native employment program, and the former might report differential treatment in this White-dominated community. The content of the questionnaire was discussed with both the Hamlet Council and Esso Resources questionnaire and was finalized following pretesting in Norman Wells by the two local interviewers.

The composition of the sample was to include all current Esso employees and their wives and all of the adult Native residents of Norman Wells, as well as 25 non-Native men and 25 non-Native women who were neither Esso employees nor married to Esso employees. These sub-samples were readily identified from available lists of Esso employees and of adult community residents. Sampling ratios appropriate to the selection of the men and women lacking employment connections with Esso were applied to the list of such people in the community.

The interviewing was carried out during the summer of 1981 by two local trained women, one Native and one non-Native, who interviewed the Native and the non-Native respondents, respectively. The sample which was finally obtained did not meet the specifications of the research design for several reasons. The designed called for 150 people to be interviewed, but a total of only 93 interviews were completed. However 20 of these, all from non-Native sample members, were lost when the package in which they were mailed just before the mail strike of July, 1981 was never delivered, and all efforts to trace it proved fruitless.

In addition to the problem with the mail service, sample erosion was caused by the absence of a number of sample members from the community during the interview period, and by some refusals. In a few cases the interviewers were not able to arrange interviews with people who were working very long hours during the busy summer season, and several sample members left the community permanently before they could be interviewed. Twelve of the 105 people who were contacted refused to be interviewed. These sources of sample erosion were all more characteristic of non-Native than of Native sample members.

Of the 73 questionnaires which were received, 21 were from Esso employees, 4 were from employees wives, and 48 were from people not Esso employees. Thirty eight Native people, of whom 16 were Esso employees and one was an employee's wife, were included among the respondents, as were 35 non-Native people including 5 employees and 3 employees' spouses. Seventeen of the Native respondents were male and 21 were female, while among the non-Native these numbers were 17 and 18 respectively. The sample is well balanced in terms of the proportions of men and women and Native and non-Native people but almost 70 percent of the respondents who were Esso employees or employees' wives were Native.

In all but a few cases the interviews were held in homes, either the respon-

dent's or the interviewer's. Third parties were present during part of about 15 percent of the interviews, but in only one case did the interviewer feel that this person may have influenced the respondent's answers.

THE SURVEY FINDINGS

The survey schedule dealt broadly with two areas: perceptions and attitudes relating to the community, and to the impacts of Esso Resources on the community. These are interrelated, since perceptions-attitudes toward the community among both Native and non-Native residents are affected by the new Esso staffing approach, including the departure of some Esso employees, the more numerous presence of rotating and Native employees, and the expected growth of the community with expanded production from the field. It seems likely that the increased significance of Native people in the Esso operation may have given some Native sample members the motivation to criticize some features of Norman Wells that they had earlier "suffered in silence."

The description of findings is organized into sections dealing with prejudice and discrimination, other perceptions of the community, the influence of Esso on the town, and the effects of new Esso personnel policies.

Prejudice and Discrimination in Norman Wells

Prejudice and discrimination are crucial issues in a town with an integrated work force and the potential in this community is much higher than in most other Canadian towns. Discrimination against Native people in the Northwest Territories has been commonplace as it has been in the rest of Canada, by employers, service delivery personnel, and store operators. Native people thus have always been sensitive to the subtle and the not-so-subtle ways in which Whites may discriminate. On the other hand, however, there are important reasons why many non-Natives in this community might feel themselves to be victims of discrimination as well. Esso's Native employment policy has meant that Esso has actively discriminated in favor of Native people and against Whites in filling as many positions as possible. The rotation employment strategy, introduced to facilitate Native employment, has resulted in forcing numbers of White Esso employees and their families out of Norman Wells who have lived there for some time. Furthermore, there could easily be widespread feelings that Esso is more lenient with Natives committing infractions on the job than with non-Native employees, and that it gives Native people a variety of "special" breaks. In brief, this is a community where both Natives and Whites may have very good reasons for identifying and protesting discrimination.

This subject was introduced in the interview with the questions "Would you say there is very much prejudice and discrimination against some groups of people in Norman Wells? If yes, what groups experience this discrimination?" Just over half (52 percent) of the 73 respondents said there was prejudice and discrimination in Norman Wells, 19 percent answering "definitely yes.*" Thirty four percent said there was not, and the remaining 14 percent said they did not

TABLE 1. PERCEIVED FREQUENCY OF DISCRIMINATION IN NORMAN WELLS, BY SITUATION

Discrimination Area	YES A LOT			YES A LITTLE			NONE			Don't Know Total %	Total Respondents %
	Native %	Non- Native %	Total %	Native %	Non- Native %	Total %	Native %	Non- Native %	Total %		
Hiring and firing	26	31	29	26	31	29	26	6	16	26	73
By bosses, mgmnt.	13	6	10	26	17	22	24	25	23	45	73
Fellow Workers on job	8	0	4	58	20	29	30	37	33	33	72
By School Teachers	3	3	3	0	0	0	37	45	40	58	75
Children against Children	8	0	4	16	23	19	29	25	26	51	73
By local businesses	8	3	6	21	43	32	34	20	27	36	73
At nursing station	13	9	11	21	11	16	34	31	53	40	73
In Bars	10	6	8	26	14	20	48	31	29	42	73
By Social Workers	3	6	4	0	3	1	40	23	52	63	73
At Airport	0	0	0	8	0	4	55	49	52	44	73
At Post Office	8	0	4	5	0	3	68	66	67	26	73
By Police	13	3	8	13	20	16	47	43	45	30	73

know. As might be expected from the preceding paragraph, there were no significant differences between the responses of the Native and non-Native sample members. Only 58 people identified specific groups which they felt experience discrimination. Just over half, 20 people, said Natives are the victims, 10 said that Whites are and five said that it is experienced by both Natives and non-Natives. One person each said "young adult Whites", "Native kids", and "everyone".

These general questions were followed by a number of others asking about discrimination in 12 specific areas, including hiring and firing, by bosses or management, by fellow workers on the job, against children by teachers in school, against some children by other children in town, against some groups by local businesses, at the Nursing Station, in bars, by social workers, at the airport, at the Post Office, and by the police. A tabulation of perceived areas of discrimination is found in Table 1. These data show that one-quarter or more of the respondents reported there is some discrimination in eight areas in Norman Wells, ranked as follows: hiring and firing; by local businesses; by fellow workers on the job; by bosses and managers; in bars; by police; at the Nursing Station; and by some children against others.

In most cases the victims of prejudice and discrimination were felt to be Native people, as the data in Table 2 shows. This was reported to be particularly common in bars; by White children against Native children; by workers on the job; at the Nursing station; by bosses and managers; by local businesses; and by the police. However, non-Natives were felt to be victims of discrimination more often than Native people in hiring and firing; by local businesses; and by social workers. In addition there were frequent references to discrimination against Whites by bosses and managers, originating in Esso's implementation of the Native and rotation employment programs.

In most cases, low frequencies of *specific kinds* of discriminatory behavior were reported: only four were reported by as many as 10 of the 73 respondents - non-Natives laid off to hire Natives; easier for a Native than a White to get a job; White children "pick on" Native children; Natives going to the Nursing Station are made to wait longer than non-Natives. Predictability, discrimination against Natives was more frequently reported by Natives, and discrimination against Whites was more often reported by Whites.

Other Perceptions of the Community

It is inevitable that the Native and the non-Native survey respondents should have somewhat different perceptions of other aspects of life in Norman Wells. The Native people were all born in the North, most grew up in the Middle Mackenzie region, and generally they expect to raise their families and to live there the rest of their lives. Most of the non-Natives have a much more transient attitude toward the community. Many hope to earn a quick "nest-egg," a downpayment on a home, a farm, or a small business, and to leave soon thereafter. Others working for the governments or for Esso, are transferred there to serve out a "tour of duty", which typically lasts for two years in the case of government personnel, and may last for three or more among the Esso staff. It would be a rare non-Native resident

TABLE 2: PERCEIVED VICTIMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE IN NORMAN WELLS, BY SITUATION
CATEGORY OF VICTIM

Situation	Non-Natives	Natives	Other Responses	Number Victims	Don't Know	Total Respondents
Hiring and firing	22	12	Workers 2 ¹	13	20	67
By bosses, managers	9	11		17	33	70
By workers on job	2	15	Natives and non-Natives 4	24	24	69
By school teachers	0	1	All children 1	29	42	75
Children against Children	0	16		19	37	72
By local businesses	13	10	Locals 3	20	26	72
At Nursing Station	4	14		24	29	71
In Bars	1	17	Drunks 2	21	52	73
By Social Workers	3	1		25	46	73
At Airport	0	2		38	32	72
At Post Office	0	5		49	19	73
By Police	2	10	Young people 2	33	22	69

who has a long term commitment in the area.

These differences in orientation, as well as the differences in background and in vested interests which characterize the two groups, inevitably affect their perceptions of the community, its needs and problems, and their reactions to the changes in Esso staffing policies.

A number of questions focussed on people's perceptions of Norman Wells as a company town. About two thirds of those responding said they felt that Esso had "just about the right amount" of influence on decision making in the town. However, only 26 percent reported that Esso had consulted enough when making changes in its housing and recreation arrangements in recent years, though an additional one-third said they were not sure or did not know. More Native than non-Native people said that Esso had too much influence (34 vs. 20 percent) and that Esso had not consulted enough (42 vs. 20 percent).

Respondents were asked "how satisfied are you with . . ." ten aspects of life in Norman Wells and "Do you have concerns about..." these areas: the school system; health care services; recreation opportunities; law enforcement; availability of social services; efforts to control alcohol abuse; local government; the general level of safety for Norman Wells residents; social conditions in Norman Wells; and the adequacy of the fire department. At least half of those responding expressed satisfaction with the school system, law enforcement, the general level of safety, and social conditions. Between 43 and 72 percent expressed dissatisfaction with the fire department, control of alcohol abuse, recreation opportunities and health care services. There are substantial differences between the satisfaction expressed by Native and non-Native respondents in respect to seven areas. Natives were more satisfied than Whites with health care services, control of alcohol abuse and the fire department, but they were less satisfied with recreation opportunities, availability of social services, the level of safety, and social conditions in the community.

Up to four specific concerns expressed by sample members about each of these ten aspects of community life were recorded, and often those voiced by Native people differed from those expressed by Whites. Space limitations do not permit expanding on these differences, but generally Native people were more concerned about the welfare and safety of children, safety issues generally, community solidarity, and perceived prejudice and discrimination. Whites were more concerned about standards in the school and health care systems, and the quality and variety of facilities in the community. While differences in relevant information may be back of some of them, generally these together with other differences, suggest that Natives and non-Natives view the community from different perspectives.

Several of the questions in the interview schedules asked respondents to compare the severity of specific social problems in Norman Wells and in the rest of Canada. Generally, alcohol problems were rated as most severe, followed by drug problems, and vandalism and child behavior problems, but larger proportions of respondents rated each of these problems as less severe in Norman Wells than in the rest of Canada in every case. Whites ranked the vandalism and child behavior problems as more severe than the Native people did, but there

were no differences in their ratings of the other two problem areas. Responses to a follow-up question show that the proportions of Native respondents reporting usage of marijuana in the community (55 percent of the total sample), LSD (14 percent of the total sample), and cocaine (8 percent) were at least two and a half times as large as among the White respondents.

Two questions were asked about emotional depression among community residents: "Do you think that a higher percentage of people here get severely depressed than elsewhere in Canada?" and "What do you think it is about life here that makes these people depressed?" Two thirds of the sample said there was a higher incidence of depression in Norman Wells than in the rest of Canada, and only 11 percent reported the incidence was lower. Reasons cited for depression were the isolation of the community (46 percent), the winter dark time (31 percent), the lack of recreational opportunities (25 percent), and the transient, company town atmosphere (9 percent). The Whites more often mentioned the isolation and the winter dark time, while the Native respondents more often referred to the transient, company town atmosphere and the lack of roots in the community.

Because of the importance of communication in moving toward community consensus in identifying and resolving problems, we asked people to assess the ease of communication between different groups in the community, and to identify the problems that they were aware of. One quarter felt that communication was "very good" (5 percent) or "good" (22 percent); 58 percent said it was neither good nor bad, and 56 percent said it was "poor", including 11 percent who said it was "very poor". A higher proportion of Whites than Native people said that communication was good.

The Influence of Esso on Norman Wells

For about a year preceding the time of the survey there was much increased construction activity in and around Norman Wells as Esso began to prepare for the expected field expansion in a number of ways. Questions were included in the survey schedule to probe the perceptions of the ways in which recent Esso activities had affected various aspects of community life. Directed at respondents who had lived in the community for at least 20 months, these questions asked about the good effects and the bad effects of increased Esso activities on eight areas of community life: the school system; availability of health care services; recreational opportunities; law enforcement; control of alcohol abuse; the activities of local government; safety levels in the community; and general social conditions in the community.

Because of space limitations we can only comment generally on the responses to these questions. Most respondents saw the number of ill effects exceeding the number of beneficial ones. More ill than beneficial effects were identified in respect to the school system, health care, alcohol abuse control, and social conditions. In every case Native respondents were much more pessimistic than the White sample members in anticipation of "bad effects".

Careful reading of the individual questionnaires suggests that the Native

people were typically more committed to Norman Wells as home, and thus were more concerned about what makes it a good place to live, as compared with Whites who appeared more oriented toward the economic opportunities which Norman Wells offers. However this does not mean that the Natives who were interviewed are more opposed to Esso activities than the Whites: 75 percent of the Native as compared with 56 percent of the non-Native respondents took the trouble to answer a supplementary question and identified additional improvements to community life resulting from Esso-related activities.

The last two questions in this series asked for a summary reaction: "On balance, would you say that the advantages of these activities for the community outweigh the disadvantages so far, or not?" and "Overall, would you say that these (Esso) activities so far have been a good thing or a bad thing for Norman Wells?" Among the 49 sample members who qualified to answer these questions by having lived a minimum of 20 months in the community, 45 percent answered the first question by saying the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, 12 percent said the reverse, 57 percent said they about balance each other, and 6 percent said they did not know. Whites said the advantages are more weighty more often (52 percent), than the Native respondents (38 percent).

In response to the second question 74 percent said that overall Esso activities were a good thing for Norman Wells, 18 percent said they had been a bad thing, and 8 percent said they were not sure. There were no significant differences between the answers of Native and White respondents to this question.

Sample members were asked "What groups, if any have particularly benefited . . ." and "What groups have particularly suffered in this community as a result of these activities?" Two thirds of the respondents identified "business" as the beneficiary, followed by Native people (19 percent), Esso employees (12 percent), the whole community (10 percent), and southern transients (4 percent). To the second question, 17 people, including 53 percent of the non-Native and 29 percent of the Native respondents, said that no one had suffered. The remainder of the sample identified small businessmen and contractors (14 percent), Native people (12 percent), the community as a whole (12 percent), townspeople not receiving housing and other benefits (10 percent), and those forced out of town by the new rotation policy (10 percent).

Effects of New Esso Personnel Policies

As noted earlier, toward the end of 1979 Esso resources began introducing two important changes in its personnel policies, seeking to recruit more people of Native origins, and to provide rotation employment for people living in other northern communities. Of particular interest was the extent to which these changes were felt to be discriminatory. Accordingly we asked "Some people might feel that Esso has discriminated in favour of Native people, and against non-Natives in its operation here. Do you think that Esso has shown this kind of discrimination?" Forty eight percent answered this question affirmatively including 34 percent who said "definitely yes", and 37 percent answered nega-

tively, while the remaining 15 percent were uncertain or did not know. Predictably perhaps, many more Whites answered "definitely yes" (60 percent), than Native people (10 percent). In response to a follow-up question asking for details, all 34 who answered referred to the northern hiring policy and five added that Natives get away with offences for which non-Native workers would be fired.

Complementary questions were worded "Some people might feel that Esso has discriminated in favour of non-Native people and against Native people in its operation here. Do you think that Esso has shown this kind of discrimination?" Eighteen percent of the respondents answered "yes" (8 percent "definitely yes"), 22 percent said "probably not" and 44 percent said "definitely not", while 15 percent were uncertain. Thirty-two percent of the Native, as contrasted with 3 percent of the non-Native respondents answered this question affirmatively.

Respondents were then asked "Do you think that Esso's employment practices have made their work more difficult for some Esso employees?" Sixty-four percent of the 72 respondents answered affirmatively (33 percent "definitely yes") 24 percent did not know, and 12 percent answered "no". Native and White respondents answered this question similarly. Two follow-up questions asked: "If yes, whose work has become more difficult?" and "In what ways has it become more difficult?" Among the 46 persons who answered the first of these, about half (58 percent) said the supervisor's work was more difficult. Five people said it was more difficult for Natives being trained, four specified the rotational employees, three answered "White people", one said "apprentices", and seven said "everyone." The non-Native respondents more often said it was more difficult for supervisors and Whites, and only Native respondents said it was more difficult for Native people.

Thirty-nine people reported on how work had become more difficult. The most frequent responses were "Natives lack motivation" (13 people), "increased turnover of staff" (7), "its harder working with a Native" (6), "the rotation schedule is disruptive" (5), "Natives are lazy and irresponsible" (4), and "Natives do all the dirty work" (3).

Concerns about "special treatment" of some employees may be endemic in some industrial situations, and several of the survey questions focussed on this issue. The first asked "Do you think that Esso gives some employees special treatment?" Fifty-eight percent of the 71 who answered said "yes", 31 percent said they did not know, and only 11 percent said there was no special treatment. When asked who received the special treatment, 55 percent said it was Native people, and 21 percent said that supervisors did. Other responses included "long time employees" (11 percent) and White office workers (8 percent).

Thirty-seven people described one or more kinds of special treatment, including "Natives get away with more, goof off" (38 percent), housing and other benefits for supervisors (24 percent), giving Natives less desirable and dirtier jobs (24 percent), better job conditions for Whites (19 percent), preferential hiring of Natives (19 percent), and rehiring of Native trouble makers and malcontents (16 percent).

Because "affirmative action" employment programs are becoming not only more commonplace, but more accepted we asked "Do you feel that there should be a special employment program for Native people? (If yes) Why do you feel this is necessary? (If no) Why is it not necessary?" All but one sample member answered this question and a majority, 57 percent answered affirmatively, including 26 percent who said "definitely yes". Among the 29 percent who oppose such a program were 24 percent who said "definitely not". Four percent said they did not know. It is noteworthy that the responses did not split cleanly along racial lines: 50 percent of the Whites, as well as 63 percent of the Natives said there should be a special employment program and 34 percent of the Native respondents said there should not be (the remainder responding "don't know").

Reasons given by 42 respondents favoring special treatment for Native workers included: to train and upgrade Native workers (67 percent), to give Natives equal opportunities to advance (48 percent) and to compensate for difficulties Natives have with White foremen (7 percent).

Among the 28 people giving one or more reasons why special treatment for Natives was not necessary, 57 percent argued for equal opportunities for all and 39 percent for the same qualifications among all employed for a given position. Twenty-nine percent said Natives now have equal opportunities for jobs as Whites, and 7 percent said Natives do not want to be given special treatment.

DISCUSSION

In the past, discrimination in industrial settings was typically against minority group members; they were the "last hired and the first fired." More recently, particularly with the introduction of "affirmative action programs" in some employment situations, there has been discrimination against dominant group members in favor of the groups which affirmative action is designed to benefit. Recent changes in personnel policy at the Esso Norman Wells oil field and refinery are of the latter kind, but they go farther than mere preferential hiring of the minority group members as vacancies open up. Esso concluded that an effective Native employment program should be associated with the introduction of a rotation employment schedule for all but a few positions. For all who were satisfied with the earlier schedule, this posed an unexpected and unwelcome disruption. Even more upsetting, some White workers who had lived with their families in Norman Wells for some years were told that their jobs were going on the rotation schedule. They were required to vacate the Esso-provided housing they had lived in in Norman Wells and to re-establish themselves in southern Canada and work the rotation schedule, which necessitated separation from their families for two weeks out of every month. Inevitably this was disturbing to workers, their families, and their friends in the North whom they left behind, and to the Norman Wells businesses which lost customers. It was widely seen as unfair and discriminatory on the part of Esso, and accurately understood as designed for the benefit of Native employees and potential employees. Native workers were also seen as "getting away with more" on the job, in terms of offences for which White workers would be reprimanded

or fired. In view of the fact that the extensive adjustments required of the Whites were imposed to facilitate minimally disruptive rotation employment for Natives (they need not move from their home communities), it is noteworthy and surprising that the White reaction was not more extreme. This degree of White acceptance is comparable to that exhibited by White workers training Native apprentices in the Nortran Program (Hobart, 1984). The White trainers knew that the apprentices received housing subsidies, holiday travel time, travel cost reimbursement, and that in time the Native workers would be given preferential promotions which the White trainers were denied. With few exceptions, the trainers understood and accepted the reasons for these discriminatory benefits and certainly did not "hold them against" the Native trainees. Unlike many of the Norman Wells Whites who suffered absolute deprivation, the Nortran trainers suffered only relative deprivation, but the attitudes of the latter were the more positive as well.

The Native people in the sample, most of whom were Esso employees, do have their share of complaints. On the job they report experiencing discrimination by White fellow workers, and being given the hard, dirty jobs. Note, it is possible that because of the recency of Native employment and the high turnover rate among Native workers, in some cases Native workers may be given the unpleasant chores simply because they are always assigned to the crew member having the last seniority. The point is, however, that Native people perceive this as discrimination.

Native people report experiencing discrimination in many community situations as well, in bars, in stores, by the police, in certain service delivery situations, etc. We do not have independent information on whether or not these reports are true. However, given the prejudicial stereotypes of Indians that are widespread in Canada, and the legal discrimination in force until about 20 years ago when Status Indians were denied the rights to vote and to consume alcoholic beverages, it would be surprising if discrimination in some of the areas reported does not exist.

The interview data also indicate that Native and White respondents have some significantly different perceptions of, and orientations to, the community. The most basic difference is that Native people typically see Norman Wells as their home. Thus, their responses reflect more concern about quality of life, community relations and communication patterns. The non-Native respondents, on the other hand, are obviously more interested in the employment opportunities and materialistic advantages which the community offers. These differences in the viewpoints of Native and non-Native people may have contributed to the other sources of stress in the community.

But these varied and significant sources of disagreement and frustration which were introduced during the early 1980's have died down without any significant incidents or disturbances, and this must be seen as one of the most remarkable aspects of the Norman Wells situation. Both White and Native residents have experienced long term as well as immediate ill effects. These must have been most frustrating and galling for the Whites because they have been (correctly) seen as sudden and drastic changes imposed essentially so that

Esso could better accommodate a larger proportion of Native employees. The result has been dissatisfaction and complaints and some bitterness among White residents, but no backlash as such. The Native residents of the community have grievances which originated years ago, and there appear to be more recent incidents, as well, which trigger continuing ill feelings. Thus there are yet smoldering mutual resentments among Natives and Whites alike, and realistically it could not be otherwise. But clearly the crisis of the transition has been passed. The once "lily white" town and industry are well down the road of change and it is noteworthy that the changes discussed in this paper have occurred peacefully and without incident. At this time, with the growing political power of the Dene in this area, continuing evolution toward a more fully integrated community may be expected.

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