

SAVE THE AECs!!! (Area Education Committees)

(Transcribed by Joseph Fauchon)

Native people are under attack again! They urgently need your support in defending their right to influence their own destiny. All Saskatchewan people who believe that Métis and Non-Status Indians in Saskatchewan have the right to participate as equal partners in the social, cultural and economic life of Saskatchewan are invited to join our struggle.

SOME RECENT GAINS IN NATIVE EDUCATION

In recent years, the Métis and Non-Status Indian people of Saskatchewan have taken some fundamental steps in assuming a greater degree of collective self-determination in adult education programming. In 1979, the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS) incorporated the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research as its educational and training arm. The Institute was mandated by AMNSIS to be responsible for the development and implementation of education and training programs.

The Institute was established because a variety of empirical evidence had indicated mass unemployment amongst Native people. It was believed that this unemployment was, in part, the result of serious education and training deficiencies. Native people simply lacked the knowledge and skills required to obtain and maintain meaningful employment in the existing labour market. At the time, AMNSIS, educational authorities and some government officials agreed that if Native people were to overcome these barriers, opportunities must be provided for them to gain access to unique education and training opportunities.

To ensure that a sensitivity to the special needs of Native people was reflected in programming, it was agreed that it was necessary for them to have greater control over course selection, course content and delivery. The Dumont Institute was expected to play a lead role in the development of a community-based, Native adult education network.

In 1980, a joint review committee composed of two persons appointed by the Department of Continuing Education and two appointed by AMNSIS, held meetings throughout the province. The committee recommended that for Native people to have a major input into the Provincial-funded Non-Status Indian and Métis (NSIM) program, committees should be established to work with community colleges in the delivery of courses. It was recommended that Area Education Committees (AECs) in the seven southern AMNSIS areas be established. The committee became responsible for an overall plan for the expenditure of the area's NSIM allocations.

By September of 1981, all seven committees were appointed, and have been in operation since that time. A sub-committee of the Dumont

Management Board, comprised of representatives of each of the AMNSIS areas was formed as a provincial policy committee, making decisions on such matters as the formula for allocating funds to the regions. The staff of the Gabriel Dumont Institute has played a supportive role to the AECs.

These events represented fundamental steps on a developmental path that was intended, over the long run, to reverse the tragically low participation rates of Métis and Non-Status Indian people in meaningful adult education and training.

THE GOVERNMENT'S DESTRUCTIVE RESPONSE

It now appears that the Provincial government may reverse the progress we have made in establishing the appropriate decision-making structures.

In the late summer of 1983, the members of the AECs and the Gabriel Dumont Institute received a most unwelcome letter, dated August 10, and signed by Gil Johnson, the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Manpower. The letter bluntly stated the Provincial government's intention to transfer the complete authority of the NSIM Program back to the Community Colleges.

The Gabriel Dumont Institute, AMNSIS, and the majority of Native people in the province, cannot help but be outraged by the provincial proposal. At the Dumont Board meeting in July, attended by senior Advanced Education and Manpower representatives, those in attendance were unanimously supportive of the following words spoken by one Métis community leader:

"These plans reek of paternalism and colonialism. I cannot see how, in this day and age, any government with any decency, with any understanding of our problems, could try to dictate this to us!"

The Dumont Management Board and the AMNSIS Provincial Board are on record as being opposed, in the strongest possible terms, to the elimination of Area Education Committees and the reversion of control over the NSIM program to the Community Colleges.

ALL PROGRESSIVE INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS IN THE PROVINCE ARE REQUESTED TO LEND THEIR SUPPORT IN OUR EFFORTS TO SAVE THE A.E.Cs!

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

- If the province's intentions are realised, the following will be lost:
- A comprehensive planning and development structure (see attached chart) for Native adult education and occupational training will be destroyed. That system has been worked out in thoughtful

detail through lengthy negotiations by Native people, with the (former) Department of Continuing Education. The system was designed to ensure the co-ordination of a variety of financial support systems and supportive social agencies-both private and public, and including AMNSIS and both federal and provincial governments to respond to the multifaceted dimensions of the special educational needs of the Native people. The system was carefully worked out to ensure both Native, grass roots input, and comprehensive, rational planning to achieve maximum results. Hundreds of hours of work time and thousands of dollars in publicly supported personnel costs will have been wasted if the AECs are dismantled.

- After only two short years of operation, the AECs will be terminated. Given the fact that committee members facing the uncertainty created by the province about the AECs future, have operated in a state of "limbo" for the past year, the AECs virtually had but one and a half years to become acquainted with their responsibilities.

Historical Background

Native Adult Education in Saskatchewan did not become a priority until the mid-1960s. During the 1950s improved educational opportunities for Natives were directed at the children in the public school system. During the mid-1960s a labour shortage developed and the upgrading of Native adults was seen as a method to alleviate the shortage. Between 1965 and 1968 the province redirected its funds so that some ad-hoc programming could be undertaken. These programs emulated the federal government Status Indian adult education program, which placed an emphasis on upgrading, life skills, homemaking and leadership courses. By 1968 it was recognised that a unique education and training program was needed to meet the needs of Natives in the province. The training and upgrading courses existed in the province but Native adults were not participating or succeeding in programs. It was recognised that problems and barriers existed that prevented Native adult participation.

In 1968 a new funding project was created and was known as the NRIM (Non-Registered Indian and Métis) Program. In 1969 the program expanded and funding was controlled by the newly created Saskatchewan Indian and Métis Department. This new department was also responsible for the delivery of programs under the NRIM umbrella. This approach was seen as being ineffective and the control of funds and approval of programs was transferred to the Adult Education Branch of the Department of Education. While the need for unique programs was recognised nobody was able to identify what the unique training needs of Natives were. There was as yet little recognition of the need for education and training programs with Native content or programs recognising and responding to the differences in culture and learning patterns unique to Natives. As a result no resources for overcoming these problems were available for the people designing courses and programs for Natives. The emphasis was still on the upgrading, life skills and homemaking courses that were already in place for Saskatchewan adults.

In 1971 the new Saskatchewan government replaced the Saskatchewan Indian and Métis Department with the Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS) in the north and the Human Resources Development Agency (HRDA) in the south. Control of NRIM funds and program approval were the responsibility of the Department of Continuing Education. HRDA contracted the delivery and support services to the Métis Society of Saskatchewan (now known as

AMNSIS). At this time it was being recognised that self-image was an important component of success. Self-esteem is determined by the family, peers and society. High self-esteem leads to a positive view of oneself and creates motivation for learning and development. The alternative is true for one with low self-esteem. The view one has of the history and culture of ancestors contributes in great part to the self-image. Society had, at the time and to a lesser extent today, developed a discriminating and biased view towards Natives that was evident in the attitudes and values of people. Natives developed a poor self-image based on the use of materials that reinforced this view in the education system. It was recognised that creating a 'Nateness' component to education would not be enough. This would have to be linked with human rights legislation, affirmative action programs and cross-cultural education to achieve the goal of bringing Natives into the mainstream of society.

HRDA allowed greater Native input into educational/training program development. It was felt that this would lead to the development of a successful strategy for planning and attaining a Native adult education system with a strong Native historical/cultural component. The AMNSIS field staff developed a means to recommend programs, which would be approved by the Department of Continuing Education. This resulted in an emphasis on upgrading programs in the urban areas and social demand for courses in rural areas. There was no link between courses or programs and job availability or career development. Support programs and material were not in place to attain the information needed on labour market needs or the identification of job oriented training needs. The resources needed to research and develop courses with a Native historical/cultural component were not made available. Finally the necessary support services were not around. These included such things as day care, counselling services and housing. The only people able to benefit from the new system were the few people involved in delivering the service.

AMNSIS involvement led to Native complaints of political tampering with course choices and trainee choices. In response to these complaints the government created the community college system to help centralise identification of needs, plan programs, implement courses, control funding money and pay out training allowances. Large community college regions replaced local school boards. The NRIM program was delivered through the community colleges and in 1975 the Department of Continuing Education took over the responsibilities of HRDA. In 1976 the new program was in place and AMNSIS participation in the delivery of programs was phased out. The NRIM program was based on the Native population in each community college region. Local input still existed but the community college had the final authority. While political influence was minimised the urban emphasis on upgrading and life skills and the

rural emphasis on social demand courses (sewing, cooking, etc.) continued. Special Native courses did not materialise. Instead, Native students were integrated into larger and more culturally varied student bodies that used NRIM funding to offer the courses. There was still no link between labour market needs and courses offered. The support services were scattered and varied from region to region. AMNSIS criticised the new program for the following reasons:

- inadequate training resources and training allowances
- little Native input into course selection
- lack of Native studies and Native content courses
- lack of Native instructors as well as lack of understanding of Native culture
- inappropriate job training courses
- no services to plan, develop or organise a Native Adult Education system
- Community Colleges spending NRIM money on non-NRIM purpose
- lack of support services to overcome barriers (counselling)
- no link between job training and labour market needs
- funds spent on non-training programs
- paternalistic delivery of courses led to further dependency rather than independent self-determination

Students were paid for taking courses regardless of their training or non-training emphasis. This led to course-taking replacing the dependency on welfare. Yet the courses did not lead to a career. Thus, the system of dependency on welfare was replaced by a new system.

The problems of lacking the resources to do the research required to provide historical/cultural Native studies courses still existed. The barriers to change for Natives were not addressed. Once again, no courses were created allowing people to cross the barriers and take advantage of existing training programs. Native politicians lobbied government to bring about a change in the community college system that would allow for more Native input, program changes and lead to a plan for Native adult education. The Minister of Continuing Education and the president of AMNSIS met and agreed on two issues. First, development of a Native institutional structure which would play an important role in the development of Native adult education programs. Second, it was agreed that a review of the NRIM program would be undertaken by AMNSIS and the Department of Continuing Education. They would then make recommendations on how the program could be improved and strengthened within the community college delivery system.

The Non-Status Indian and Métis Program

During the winter of 1980 a joint AMNSIS and provincial government review of the Non-Registered Indian and Métis (NRIM) Program was undertaken. The NRIM Review Committee was created as a result of AMNSIS efforts to redress the problems Native people felt were hampering their efforts to obtain skill and job training at the adult level. Through lobbying and meeting with provincial officials it was agreed that two AMNSIS appointees, Chris LaFontaine and Wayne McKenzie, and two government appointees, Elias Nesdoly and Bob Barschel, would form a review committee. The review committee held eight public meetings attended by about 260 people and received eighteen written briefs as well as various oral presentations. In December of 1980 the NRIM Review committee submitted their report, containing 24 recommendations and dealing with the scope of the program, organizational structure, funding, policies and procedures and one special recommendation.

The recommendations made by the review committee included defining five areas of adult education that should be funded by the NRIM program. These are adult basic education, vocational preparation, Native instructor training, cultural/historical programs and Native leadership training. Other recommendations included making NRIM program delivery more flexible, using or establishing regional and local education committees as co-administrators, co-planners and co-implementers of programs, establishing a provincial committee to develop policies and procedures for the overall program, more local involvement in planning training courses, and that the name be changed to Non-Status Indian and Métis (NSIM) Program.

In March of 1981 the Department of Continuing Education initiated steps to set up the provincial NSIM Policy Committee. Initially there were two AMNSIS and two Department of Continuing Education representatives on the committee. There was also a committee that was defining the role of the Gabriel Dumont Institute made up of people representing the Dumont

Institute and the Department of Continuing Education. The overlap of areas studied by the two separate committees led to the conclusion that the two committees should amalgamate and form one committee made up of three representatives from the Department of Continuing Education, two from AMNSIS and one from the Dumont Institute. The new committee started to meet in late April of 1981.

The NSIM Policy Committee established a number of tasks for itself. First and foremost was the creation of Area Education Committees (AEC). This was to be done in co-operation with AMNSIS and was to include the provision of a structure for the AECs; assistance in their initial work phase; and the development of a plan that would provide staff, funding and resources for the AECs in the future. Other tasks included a review and revision of the NSIM policy and procedures manual, examining and recommending what the role of the Dumont Institute would be in the NSIM Program and with the AEC's, defining the roles of the various participants in Native adult education, interpret and communicate the changes to the community colleges, AMNSIS and Native peoples, and develop a comprehensive approach to adult education by identifying resources, training needs and developing job and career training programs.

By the end of August 1981 the seven AECs were in place and each one had held a meeting by mid-September 1981. The committees each had ten members with six being appointed by AMNSIS and one each by Native women, friendship centres, the designated community college in each area and the Department of Continuing Education. Since the AMNSIS regions overlapped the community college regions it was decided that one community college would be the designated NSIM college for each area. The Dumont Institute developed draft proposals for the AECs in the areas of by-laws, personnel policy manuals and an administration and operational manual. These were to provide a format until the AECs could develop their own materials and system or adapt the one created by the Dumont Institute. Providing a staff member for each AEC proved difficult due to the lack of money and the fact that the policy was developed as experience was gained. The community colleges, as active participants in the NSIM Program, were given the authority to use NSIM money to find and hire a co-ordinator for each AEC. This was done after consulting the AECs.

Each area received a base fund of 75 thousand dollars with the rest of the money allocated on the area's percentage of usage of NRIM money during the previous three years. The policy and procedure manual was revised with changes being made that responded to Native complaints about the NRIM Program. These changes included putting a greater emphasis on training for meaningful and available employment, not using NSIM money to fund courses already offered elsewhere or fund social demand courses, making knowledge and skill training that leads to job and careers a top priority, outlining roles, membership, organization and appointment of people to an AEC, and detailing the role of each of the groups involved in the NSIM Program.

The Dumont Institute had an important support role in the NSIM program. To achieve this the Institute required some new staff members to work exclusively in organizing adult education for Natives. A proposal for the re-allocation of existing funds was put forward to the Saskatchewan Treasury Board for the fiscal year 1981-1982. The one hundred thousand dollars requested allowed the Institute to hire three persons as well as cover the administrative and clerical costs for the support role. The Saskatchewan Budget Bureau and Treasury Board did not deal quickly enough with the request and as a result the first of the three new Adult Education persons did not come on staff until March of 1982. This meant that the Institute was unable to provide the support services required and was also unable to respond to requests for service from the AECs. This resulted in frustration for both the AEC's and the Dumont Institute. The new Community/Adult Education Unit of the Institute has, since its inception, redesigned the Field Program to fit within its structure and mandate. They have also developed a new program called Training for Effective Committee (TREFCOM) that will help the AECs develop and carry out their assigned tasks. There is also a Human Resource Development Program (HRDP) being developed that will train Natives to enter Adult Education, Management and Counselling professions or continue their training at the university or technical institute level.

NSIM funding for 1982-1983 was determined by the budgets prepared by the provincial committee. Two budget proposals were drawn up and submitted to the Budget Bureau/Treasury Board by the Department of Continuing Education as a part of its overall budget. The "A" budget was approved but it only allowed for a continuation of funding for existing programs. The "B" budget, which called for new funding to allow for the development and implementation of new training initiatives, was initially approved. The change in government that recently occurred in Saskatchewan resulted in a freeze being placed on the new training initiatives money allocated for the NSIM Program. The final decision on what is to be done with this money will be made during the autumn of 1982. The indications are that the government will remove this money from the NSIM budget.

The AECs have run into various problems since their creation. At present the costs incurred by the AECs is paid for by the community colleges and they, in turn, are reimbursed by the Department of Continuing Education. This interim arrangement has led to many problems, the most important being the conflict between the colleges and the AECs over what the spending priorities are and the question of autonomy for the AECs. Because the AEC Co-ordinator is paid by the colleges many problems have arisen. The question of who they are responsible to, whose personnel policies they must adhere to, seniority, security, and academic qualifications vs. Native qualifications make the people in these positions unsure of what to do and how to do it.

The success of the NSIM Program is dependent on many variables. The AECs, as the needs identification and support group, will require some autonomy. This is most important when considering that the community colleges are fulfilling the delivery system role and have been placed in the position of controlling the funds used by the AECs. Unless a change is made the AECs will become a visible support group with only token authority to fulfil its task. This will eliminate Native input into Native career training. It is also important that the AECs have access to the most up to date information on future career/job market needs in the areas. If this is not achieved the result will be that Natives are trained for positions that will be either short term or non-existent at the completion of the training period. It is also probable that too many people will be trained for certain positions and not enough in other positions. The AECs require easy access to all government, industry, university and other job market studies. Where studies do not exist the AECs should be given the funds and/or personnel required to gather this information.

There are still two important components missing from the NSIM program that would lead to greater successes in Native adult education. The first component has been achieved in many of the rural areas but not in the urban areas. This is providing a peer support group of Natives in the courses and classes. The second component has not been achieved in either urban or rural areas. This is providing Native historical/cultural courses as a part of training. These components are an integral part of the SUNTEP and NORTEP Programs, which have been successful Native training programs, implemented in Saskatchewan. One of the top priorities of NSIM Programs should be the training of Native adult education instructors. These instructors could then become part of the NSIM delivery system and this would result in a delivery system that was more understanding of and responsive to the special needs of Native adults.

THE GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE OF NATIVE STUDIES AND APPLIED RESEARCH

In 1976 at an AMNSIS cultural conference held in Saskatoon, the major recommendation was that the efforts should be made to establish a Native educational institute with an emphasis on Native culture and research. An explanatory paper was prepared and circulated amongst all members of the provincial cabinet and appropriate federal government agencies. AMNSIS lobbied the provincial government and in January of 1978 a paper was drafted for joint discussion between the Department of Continuing Education and AMNSIS. At that time the two groups were too far apart to reach an agreement. AMNSIS put forward a position that called for an independent adult community education structure and delivery system while the department wanted to continue with the community college delivery system. The department saw the Native institute as a support structure for the existing system responsible for developing programs and providing Native

content. In 1979 AMNSIS and the provincial government developed a concept for the Native educational institute.

In 1977 it had been decided that the institute would be called "The Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research." The Dumont Institute had three purposes. These are:

- (i) To support Native adult education programming through helping natives develop a knowledge and pride in their history and culture
- (ii) To develop programs and services that could be delivered in the existing system and that would help prepare Native people to participate in meaningful job opportunities
- (iii) To help develop programs and services in the area of cross-cultural education designed to bring about a better understanding of Native people amongst the non-Native population

It was agreed that the new institute should have some independence from A.M.N.S.I.S. but it should also remain responsive to the grassroots Native people. To achieve this it was decided to organize the Dumont Institute as follows:

- The institute would have a common membership with AMNSIS
- The institute would have a separate board to develop and implement policies, procedures and programs
- The board would be appointed by AMNSIS from nominees put forward by;
 - 4 from the AMNSIS board
 - 11 representatives from each AMNSIS political region – 1 from each
 - 2 Native students
 - 2 Native women
 - 2 university representatives – 1 from each university
 - 2 government representative – 1 federal and 1 provincial

It was also agreed that there would be chief Executive officer responsible for overall administration and Directors responsible for each of the institute programs.

The institute was initially to be involved in four program areas described as follows:

- (a) A core staff to administrate, manage, work with the board, supervise and direct the program
- (b) A library resource centre consisting of archival material, Native historical/cultural materials, curriculum, teaching aides and other materials necessary for the support of institute and Native adult education programs
- (c) A research section responsible for cultural, historical and social research dealing with Native education, training needs, curriculum development and adaptation
- (d) A program section responsible for developing educational resources, curriculum, resource materials, teaching materials, etc.

There was to be a fifth program with a section responsible for input and support of Native community education programming. This was put on hold until after the NRIM review and after the institute was operational. New funding was to be arranged for this program section.

On December 1, 1979 the Department of Continuing Education entered into a contract to provide developmental work on the institute covering the following:

- (A) Recruitment, selection and hiring of senior staff
- (B) Developing an organizational structure including a draft constitution and bylaws
- (C) Developing a draft personnel policy and job descriptions
- (D) Developing a draft administration manual
- (E) Developing a three year program plan including proposed programs, budget projections and potential funding sources
- (F) Securing accommodations, furnishings and equipment
- (G) Participate in the preliminary development of the SUNTEP program

This developmental contract expired on May 31, 1980 and at this time the Dumont Institute signed an operational contract with the Department of Continuing Education.

The senior staff were all employed by June 1, 1980 and the majority of the program staff were all in place by September 1, 1980. This covered the core staff, library resource centre, research unit and curriculum development unit. The community education role of the institute was to be developed during this first operational period. The field liaison staff and co-ordinator program was initiated at this time. They are intended to provide a link between the institute and Native people. In this way the institute would be able to find out what people wanted and needed in the way of educational programs as well as inform the people about what the institute was doing. In December of 1979 the executive of AMNSIS was put into place as the first board for the institute. The first institute education conference was held in Saskatoon in September of 1980 with about 200 delegates from AMNSIS locals, the staff of the Dumont institute, AMNSIS staff, federal officials, provincial officials and university officials. At this conference major needs were identified and broad priorities were established.

After the NRIM review and the establishment of the NSIM program the Dumont Institute was able to develop its role in community education. In March of 1982 two steps were taken to achieve some of the goals of the institute. Staff were hired to index and organize the library resource centre archival material. This will result in Native people and the institute being able to research and develop Native historical/cultural materials for use in adult education, cross-cultural education and in any other ways people might require it. Staff were also hired to work exclusively in the area of Native

adult/community education. Their initial work has been in the area of developing programs for Native adults and helping develop the Area Education Committee concept.