

*Section 2: Indigenous Participation in the Academy*

**Revisiting “Learning to Mediate Social Change: Interviews With Two Community Leaders”** (A 1975 Interview with Indigenous Leaders by Amarjit Singh)

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**Abstract:** In 1975, Faculty of Education member Dr. Amarjit Singh interviewed two community leaders in Labrador: Bart Jack of Sheshatshiu, Nitassinan<sup>i</sup> and the late Bill Edmunds of Makkovik, Labrador. A lightly edited version of these interviews appears below.

Mr. Bill Edmunds was the first vice-president of the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA), founded in 1973. The LIA was the second regional Inuit Association in Canada; following the 2005 settlement of the LIA land claim, it is now the Nunatsiavut Government. When Dr. Singh interviewed Bart Jack, Mr. Jack was President of new the Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association (NMIA), which would become the Innu Nation in 1990. He was then a young man, having completed his formal education only four years before. Mr. Jack would become a negotiator with the Innu Nation, the umbrella political organization for the Innu of Labrador that would, among other things, achieve an international profile with its campaign against NATO’s low-level military flying program in Labrador.

Around the time of the interviews, Jack, Edmunds, and other Indigenous people in Newfoundland and Labrador were organizing for the first time. There were several reasons for this: the *Indian Act* was not applied in the province when it united with Canada in 1949, which had negative rights and resources implications for the Innu, the Inuit, and the Inuit-Metis/Southern Inuit of Labrador and the Mi’kmaq of the island.<sup>ii</sup> The push to organize in this province was part of the pan-Indigenous movement across Canada that emerged as a reaction against Prime Minister Trudeau’s White Paper that had strongly recommended the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into Canadian society. Cree leader Harold Cardinal’s response, the Red Paper, can be considered foundational to this movement.

At the time of Singh’s interviews there was a great deal of discussion in the province about the possibilities associated with oil and gas discoveries off the coast of Newfoundland and, later, Coastal Labrador, the first discovery being near Mr. Edmunds’s home community of Makkovik. I was a child at the time but I vividly remember the heightened sense of anticipation that marked that period; our hard scrabble province seemed to be on the cusp of far-reaching change, there seemed to be a consensus that we’d be rich and that riches would do us good. Indeed, Singh’s interviews took place in St. John’s where the Indigenous leaders were attending a conference on oil and gas development. With reference to hydro-electric dams, the leaders express their concerns about industrialization and its threat to Indigenous societies, cultures, and economies; these concerns are just as valid today as we are about to witness the construction of a dam at Muskrat Falls, Labrador that is opposed by NunatuKavut Community Council, the political organization of the Southern Inuit, some of whom have been arrested for protesting at the construction site. Thus, some 38 years later, as the province plans for hydro-electric development in Labrador, these views are again being expressed by Indigenous leaders and their people.

Jack and Edmunds clearly felt that the rewards of resource development were not being distributed equitably between the regions and peoples of the province. One of those advocating for a better distribution of resources is Mr. Edmunds’s son Randy Edmunds, the Member of the House of Assembly

for Torngat Mountains, echoes his father as an outspoken critic of the province's longstanding neglect of Coastal Labrador. While Bill Edmunds had to create a political platform – the Labrador Inuit Association – his son has assumed one on the provincial stage. In turn, Bill Edmunds's daughter, Janine Lightfoot, is the Aboriginal Liaison Coordinator at Memorial University's Grenfell Campus where she provides support services to Indigenous students.

Both Bill Edmunds and Bart Jack raise concerns about the lack of opportunity for Labrador students to attend high school in their home communities. At the time students as young as 12 from the North and South Coasts had to go to Northwest River in Central Labrador if they wanted to go to continue their education. This was a long boat ride away and home was not accessible. In the 1970s, early school leaving rates in Labrador were extremely high compared to those in the more urbanized centres in the province, undoubtedly because of the lack of local high schools. Black Tickle on the South Labrador Coast, for instance, did not have a high school until the late 1980s. Bart Jack also links the near absence of culturally relevant curriculum to the high early school leaving rates, a pressing issue today as seen in Elizabeth Yeoman's interview with Marguerite McKenzie. Bill Edmunds points to difficulty recruiting teachers and the need for more accurate content in teacher recruitment efforts. There remain lessons to be learned from their words today; later, in Maura Hanrahan's article, we will see how Memorial University is responding to these challenges.

Bill Edmunds promotes student exchanges as a way to educate others about Coastal Labrador. In this, he reiterates Bart Jack's concept of education as a "two-way" system, with non-Indigenous people in the province and elsewhere needing to learn about the original people of Labrador. They foreshadow Jacqueline Ottmann's analysis.

Today most Coastal Labrador communities have high schools, including tiny Norman Bay with its seven students. A significant number of courses are completed via distance education. In her article elsewhere in this issue, Jodie Lane of the Nunatsiavut Government explains how Inuit high school graduation rates today are relatively high yet Inuit students still face enormous barriers and have to draw on their own resilience as well as community support as they pursue their post-secondary education. Maura Hanrahan's discussion with Amy Hudson, a native of Black Tickle, takes us inside the experience of a student transitioning to Memorial University and, later, the University of Victoria. All of these articles – from 1975 and 2013 – poignantly call us to support Indigenous students from remote areas of Labrador in multiple ways – as well as to learn from these students. In some senses, the academy has appropriately responded to these calls – at the May, 2013 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Summit at the University of Regina, it was noted that there are now over 1,100 Indigenous PhD graduates in Canada – while, in other ways, we are still learning – and learning to learn.

### **Learning to Mediate Social Change: Interviews With Two Community Leaders**

**Amarjit Singh**                      **From *The Morning Watch*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1975, pp. 1-4.**

Is Newfoundland society changing? Is it going to change? In what direction is it going? Who are the change agents? What are their perspectives on society, culture and change? What is the scientific, cultural base of perspectives held by change agents?

What are the interests and ideologies of those who have the power positions in the organizations? How do their interests and ideologies differ from other groups in society? Who is to be changed? For what purpose are they to change? Who is going to evaluate whom, how and on what criteria? Who is to benefit from change? What is the price of change? Who is going to pay what price in

the change process? What are the long term consequences for the life chances of various groups of people in Newfoundland society?

Is the biography of Newfoundland society, culture, and individuals in it to be compared with the biographies of other societies, cultures, and individuals in them? These are some of the questions which have been raised by many peoples in the world when confronted with schemes of planned change. Any scheme of planned change involves conflict of human values. There are various factors of change associated with political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of change. Each aspect of change is based upon certain images of progress. The images of progress provide a source for defining obstacles to progress in various aspects of change. There are then political considerations, economic considerations, and sociocultural considerations for overcoming perceived obstacles to progress.

Change can be brought by force or cooperation. If change has to be brought by cooperation, then human values must interact with politics, economics, and culture. That is, people caught in the process of change must mediate politics, economics and culture. The failure of many schemes of planned change is often due to a lack of a viable concept of community and society. The planners generally do not listen to the people whose life they propose to plan. Many of the problems of change arise out of the insensitivity of professional planners to incorporate the ideas and expression of people involved. It is not unusual to find out that the professional planners are too much flattered by their neat techniques of social engineering and evaluative procedures. This is not to say that professionals and technicians do not play a useful role in planning change.

At the time when various agencies<sup>iii</sup> are involved in bringing about change in communities in Newfoundland, it seems appropriate that we opt for community development thinking which incorporates the ideas, expressions, and values of those people whose life is directly involved. With these thoughts in the back of my mind, I had the opportunity to interview two community leaders — Mr. Jack Bart and Mr. Bill Edmunds. I believe that mediating the change is a learning process, and that much can be gained in the area of cooperation by listening to others.

#### INTERVIEW WITH MR. BART JACK

**Amarjit Singh:** Bart, you are president of the native people (Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association). You are in St. John's attending the Conference On The Potential Impact On The Province Of Future Commercial Oil And Gas Discovery Off Newfoundland. I would like you to tell us something about what you think are the educational, social and research needs in your area.

**Bart Jack:** First of all, I would like to comment on the conference. I think it's not focusing too much on the local needs as such. I think it's only a conference on stocks and bonds and whatever you can get out of it. Well, that's the main thing as far as these people are concerned. As far as we are concerned, the native people, we feel that much will be changed when this oil discovery goes in. For instance, the way of life will be changed. For many years the native people on the coast have been dependent on the land and on the sea, fishing and hunting. All this will change dramatically as the years go by – when oil discovery goes into full swing.

The education, I guess, will change, too. For the good or for the bad, I'm not the judge for that at this moment. At the moment the educational needs in Labrador are very tremendous. There's only one high school in Labrador which is central. The coast doesn't have any high school. They have to send their people to Northwest River, which is about 100 miles from Makkovik, where the actual oil discovery is. If the industry moves into Makkovik they will supply a school. But that's not the answer to the whole problem because this oil industry will create some problems as well

as probably solve a few. They will be able to solve the problem of communication; they will be able to deal with education; but in the process they will create more problems than there are right now in the community. They will create problems in regards to the people's traditional hunting and fishing way of life. There'll be disruptions in the general overall way of life in the community and at this moment I don't think the people in Labrador are ready. It was pointed out by some here the rate of progress in regards to industry may be expressed as 'slow', but for Labrador this kind of "slow" is actually a fast pace of life and I don't think that the community can grasp this at the moment.

**Amarjit Singh:** You said that you had one high school. Do you think one high school is sufficient? Do you think the high school is serving the needs of the area? Obviously university is involved, high school is involved. What role do you think university or school play? What kinds of programs should be introduced? What are they not doing?

**Bart Jack:** First of all I'll start from elementary level. In the elementary school age, there should be programs relevant to the communities. What I mean is that no person or no children on the coast should study about New York because there's gonna be no place like New York on the coast. This is irrelevant. They should study about their own environment, their own history and their own way of life because that's the life that they've understood and have lived and their parents have lived for so many years. Then we go to high school. They should try to establish right now programs that are practical to the students because high school students are very rare in Labrador. There's no need for me to mention the scarcity of university students from Labrador.

Not very many achieve university status. Therefore, I think, they should generate and accelerate development right now from elementary to high school. They should introduce programs, relevant and practical to the students. By practicality I mean they should start teaching them their own way of life. The students should have an option regarding what he or she wants to learn. Right now, there's no option. They have to learn exactly what the people in Toronto do; they have to learn exactly what the people in St. John's do – which is to me, very very impractical at the moment.

**Amarjit Singh:** Would you like to see your people coming to universities? Or would you want them to go only as far as high school?

**Bart Jack:** Well, we'd like to see them coming to university but the way of the university is not always to learn about big cities, big towns and big industry. You can make your way to university in learning what you want to learn. University can be a good thing for the people of Labrador, but at first there should be programs that they understand in order for them to get ready for university. University prepares you for a way of life.

**Amarjit Singh:** Many people in Newfoundland are talking about Labrador. Also, they are talking about the oil discovery and the impact of oil on Labrador. What is the feeling in terms of separatism? Is there any movement in which the people of Labrador are saying: "we want to be separated from Newfoundland"? Newfoundland, of course, is taking much of the resources from Labrador. Shouldn't the benefits go to Labrador rather than Newfoundland? I hear some people get into this kind of discussion. What are your feelings and attitudes towards this?

**Bart Jack:** Well, there is no doubt that there is a feeling like this and there has been for many years and probably will continue to be because of the way the Newfoundland province treats Labrador. I can see myself now in the same situation if Labrador was getting all the revenue and Newfoundland was depleted of resources. The reason for that is, I think, the people in Labrador

had been neglected for so many years. This neglect is still predominant in the communities, especially the coastal communities, not very much in the inland communities like Goose Bay, Happy Valley and Wabush. The coastal communities have been far more neglected than any other community on the island of Newfoundland.

The reason for this is, I think, very simple. The people in these communities have not, up to this time, or with very little effort on their part, tried to fight for their rights. It's just like an ostrich – if an ostrich is attacked by an animal, it puts its head in the sand – it doesn't want to defend itself. Well, it's the same thing with the people in Labrador. I think they have to learn now, I think they have started to learn now, to demand things. For example: as we heard at this meeting here, the Labrador delegation – of which I am part – have demanded a meeting in Labrador such as this, to have a meeting on the impact of all industry in Labrador. I think the people in Labrador have to learn to do that right now in order for them not to be swept under the carpet.

**Amarjit Singh:** I see a parallel between the way things are happening in Labrador and Newfoundland and the way things are happening in Quebec where they are building hydro dams. There the conflict has been between the people whose land is going to be covered with water. The same thing is happening in Manitoba and British Columbia and other parts of the world where these big industries move in and the people whose life is going to be influenced somehow are unable to influence this trend in their favour. What do you think can be really done to stop or at least to negotiate with these forces in such a way that the benefit goes to the people who have been living there for so many years?

**Bart Jack:** First of all, I am not so certain what you mean when you talk about benefit. Are you talking about whether the people on the Labrador coast are really concerned about what jobs they are going to get out of this, or what other benefits they are going to get out of it? I think what more concerns them right now is how will their way of life be changed in regards to their hunting and traditional fishing life.

In regards to your question about James Bay, I think Newfoundland can avoid this by more consultation with the native people which I think they have started to do right now. In Quebec this was never done. The people were never informed of this hydro development. The government just moved in there and started building dams. Now, the government here has shown at least a bit of concern. They had this meeting and I hope they will continue to have these meetings so that people will be informed.

The other probable solution that can be gotten out of this is to encourage the government to give the native people some money to do their own research, to find out for themselves what kind of impact this oil industry will have on them. In that way we'll have a two-way educational system. The people will be able to educate the government on their own way of life and then the government, in turn, will be able to educate them about the impact that it is going to have on their way of life.

**Amarjit Singh:** If you have to say something to the young people in Newfoundland, especially those who are going through high school and who one of these days will be working for the government and other industries, what would you say to them? What kind of attitude should they develop at this point?

**Bart Jack:** I think the students at present – I was a student only four years ago – should be involved right now with community projects or groups or whatever you want to get involved in because I feel there is nothing to be criticized about. Being involved you get to know the

environment you live in; you get to know the people. Like four years ago I was a student. I didn't know anything about my community and right now I seem to know almost exactly what is going on in my community and probably the future of my community, which is far more important than not knowing anything at all.

#### INTERVIEW WITH MR. BILL EDMUNDS

**Amarjit Singh:** Mr. Edmunds, you are here attending this Conference on The Potential Impact On The Province Of Future Commercial Oil And Gas Discoveries Off Newfoundland. You were listening to us as I was talking to Bart Jack about his area in Labrador. We can continue to talk about that sort of thing. You would like to elaborate on the educational part in this area and you can perhaps give us a good insight into the communities of Makkovik to Nain. Would you please say something about education?

**Bill Edmunds:** First of all, I would like to speak about education and how it is handled on the Newfoundland- Labrador coast. What I mean when I say Newfoundland-Labrador coast is Northern Goose Bay. I came to a committee here years ago and we spoke about education and we talked about education and what was going on along the Labrador coast; at that meeting we spoke about the problems in regard to education. One guy from St. John's gets up and he says, "You got high school in Labrador – you got everything in Labrador, as far as we can gather". I said, "Yes, we have it in Labrador, but you, who are talking now, have never been up to Northern Labrador, and you are saying these things". I pointed out to him that from Nain, Labrador, to Goose Bay is 240 odd air miles, and the high school is in Goose Bay not in Nain, Labrador. There's another one in Hopedale, and a couple in other places. So when I told him that he was shocked after hearing that Labrador is like this.

To go on, today, in Labrador, they have a little better facilities than what they had – say six or seven years ago. The only thing I don't go along today with in the education is that when you reach a certain grade in education you are shipped out from Labrador to Goose Bay. Myself, like all others don't go along with the situation because in some parts of Labrador, there you are with your kids in grade 7, 8, etc.– they're being shipped out to another community altogether and to me they're not mature. They could at least go as far as grade nine. Then they're more mature to be shipped out and leaving their family. It's kind of tough to see your daughter or your son at grade 7 or 8, who's not mature, being shipped out and you know she's going to a completely different community where she doesn't know anybody other than the ones who are being shipped out with her. How can you expect that girl or boy to get educated? Because she's not mature, she doesn't know. So these things have been going on and we've been trying to arrive at some kind of solution for this problem.

Now, they will remain to do up to grade 9 and I'd like to see all the communities on Northern Labrador to go at least as high as grade 9 before they are shipped out from their families. University students are very aware that since the kids don't want to leave home at such an early age there are many dropouts. We have one or two people with university experience. When they come back to Labrador coast, what are they? They are low-scale labourers with university experience. By this time, your kids, and their kids, are thinking – why should I go and get my education, why should I go and get my university? Why should I get my degree? Here I am looking at somebody with a degree and still a low-scale labourer. To look at it from my point of view – it's not always going to be like this; there are going to be industries coming up. Then, I think now is the time to change the pattern -- try to get our kids educated. Explain the future to them. I have had no degree, no education and I've still got none and I never will get any. The only thing I'm working on is a bit of experience. I don't think it should be like this today. I think they

should go to university and I think their parents should encourage them to go and get their degree because they're looking forward, not only to 5 or 6 years but they are looking well ahead to 30, 40, 50 years to come – the third generation, the next generation and their generation.

I think education should be regarded very highly, regardless of who they are or what they are even the parents, I think, should really demand that their kids get an education. I'm speaking of myself again right now; I could kick myself so many times! that I haven't gotten an education. When I was going, to school I never had the chance to get a good education. I went to school at Riverhead for 9 months and you can't learn anything in 9 months. So I don't want those kids, mine and theirs, to be in my boots to look at the world today.

**Amarjit Singh:** This is very interesting. When you talk about children going to other communities, parents expecting their children to go to school, the school boards come into the picture. Now, to what extent do you think the people have been capable of influencing the school boards to change their policies in regard to busing children? Is there any dialogue between the parents and the school boards, the schools and the school boards so that the interest and concern of the parents are incorporated into the policies? Do you think that people have been able to do that? Or do schools and school boards still impose their own rationalization and say, well, because of this and that the kids have to be shipped?

**Bill Edmunds:** Well, I really don't know because I don't get involved too much with the school boards. But speaking from what I've heard about the school boards on the coast they're trying every year to have meetings with the school boards, and people coming from other parts of the province are trying to extend classrooms in the community. By more classrooms I mean that if you go as far as 7 or 8 why not go as far as grade nine? Another thing is the lack of teachers. I believe that it should be advertised more than it is now. A person coming from, say, England, Canada, or Newfoundland, hearing about a teaching position in Labrador imagines it to be as it is advertised in books, i.e., living in snow houses. For this reason I think it should be advertised more. Like anyone else, we are Canadians, we have schools, houses, running water<sup>iv</sup>. I think, therefore, it should definitely be advertised more.

**Amarjit Singh:** That's right. May I make one comment? Like you said, you never had any education yourself, but I think by that you mean you never went to school. Obviously you know more about the area and you have more experience than many people can get by coming to school. Schools do not educate people for all the experience which you have and I will say that although you never went to school that doesn't mean that you are not an educated man. Of course, you know a lot of other things and perhaps the young people, in my opinion, are hung up too much on what they learn from school. It doesn't give them any idea about real situations in the community and in the area. This is lacking. In my opinion students should have more opportunities to go into the communities and see how the life is in actual conditions.

**Bill Edmunds:** Very true. Yes, I go along with that 100% because you're in the classroom and you don't learn everything. I think there should be more exchange of students from Labrador coming to St. John's or other places. That's where experience comes in. You can educate yourself more in the outside world. So I really believe in student exchanges.

<sup>i</sup> Nitassinan is the Innu name for the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula.

<sup>1</sup> Although the Indian Act applies only to First Nations, its omission from the Terms of Union was part of Canada's and Newfoundland's failure to recognize any of the Indigenous people of the new province.

<sup>1</sup> The Department of Rural Development, the Newfoundland and Labrador Rural Development Council and its member organizations, the Memorial University Extension Service, the Centre for the Development of Community Initiatives, L.I.P., L.E.A.P., O.F.Y., D.R.E.E. (all government work creation programs), Manpower, the Department of the Secretary of State, The Company of Young Canadians, Frontier College, and The Newfoundland Development Corporation.

<sup>1</sup> Not all communities in Labrador have running water (e.g. Black Tickle).