Introduction : Is Community Development Necessary ?

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James Thurber and E. B. White once wrote a book with the intriguing title "Is Sex Necessary ?". Anyone surveying the field of socio-economic development in the so-called underdeveloped parts of the world might be tempted to ask a similar question about what seems to be another obvious fact of life — "Is Community Development Necessary ?"

While there is a great deal of discussion about community development in Canada (Journal of the International Society for Community Development, 1966), there also appears to be a certain lack of enthusiasm about the term and the technique, and some distrust of the whole philosophy elsewhere in the world (Ponsioen 1965). Indeed, Canadians seem to be becoming enthusiastic about the idea of community development at a time when other countries, with long experience of the technique, are beginning to have serious doubts about its utility. As Canada embarks upon large scale intervention programmes in the social and economic fields that attempt to improve the lot of Eskimos, Indians and low-income groups, it may be that the technique of community development will be touted as a cureall for social ills, and promoted as a short cut to solutions to complex problems.

A glance at recent history will illustrate the dilemma of community development in Canada at the present time. Much of the practise and philosophy of community development has its roots in the British colonial experience. Britain is alleged to have acquired her Empire in a fit of absence of mind. In the twentieth century, seeing that the social, economic and political disadvantages of a colonial empire outweighted the benefits, the British, empiricists as well as imperialists, initiated a policy aimed at bringing the colonies along the road to self-government. Before the arrival of the British and other colonial powers, traditional societies had developed complex,

functional social structures that worked extremely well, socially, economically and politically. The arrival of the white man, equipped with superior technology and an ethnocentric view of life that provided some very firm ideas on how people should behave, shattered these traditional societies.

A new set of models for human behaviour appeared as western technology and culture spread over the world. By the middle of the twentieth century, no place, no matter how remote, had escaped the impact of western man. Occasionally the contact between western ways and traditional cultures was quiet, peaceful and mutually rewarding. More often it was sudden, warlike and disastrous on both sides. The process of cultural contact that began slowly after the Age of Exploration in the Fifteenth Century accelerated in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. The British were in the van of this movement. They saw themselves as trustees of traditional people, maintaining the law, preventing oppression, raising the standards of living, assisting in economic development and in general turning Africans and others into reasonable facsimiles of Englishmen so that they could, in time, govern themselves. The view of world society in about 1900 was one that showed the white man at the top of the tree, secure in the rightness of his position and incurably optimistic about the prospects for progress. From this peak of perfection, with the Englishman at the apex, there stretched down a series of "lesser breeds within the law". The more traditional peoples were "like" the white man, the higher up the scale they rated. This view still persists. Until recently there was a great deal of simplemindedness about traditional societies. Viewed from the perspective of ethnocentric administrators and anthropologists, traditional cultures were seen as quaint or vulgar, good or bad, and a great deal of attention was paid to the more pathological aspects of their daily lives. The concept of a culture or a society as an integral, functioning whole with its own way of assigning rights and responsibilities and of allocating resources and meeting needs has only recently emerged in the anthropological literature of the twentieth century. Without romanticizing traditional cultures, their significant characteristic was that they worked in terms that were acceptable to most of their members. Life may have been "nasty, brutish and short" but it was the only life they knew, and one that

was hallowed by tradition and confirmed by constant reinforcement through the value system.

In 1922, a study was carried out of African mission education. This resulted in a White Paper on *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa*, issued in 1925. This suggested that progress should rely not only on schools, but should come through improved agriculture, development of native industries, improvement of health, training people to manage their own affairs, and the inculcation of ideas of citizenship and service. Three main principles were stressed (Central Office of Information 1962:3):

"1. That education should be intimately related to all other efforts, whether of governments or of citizens, for the welfare of the community.

2. That material prosperity without corresponding growth in the moral capacity to turn it to good use constitutes a danger.

3. That the real difficulty lay in imparting any kind of education which would not have a disintegrating effect upon the people of the country."

All this, of course, has a surprisingly modern ring. The two great dramas of our day — world-wide urbanization and world-wide industrialization were only beginning in 1925. But the winds of change had started to blow — perhaps only as gentle breezes, but blowing nonetheless. In 1935, the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies issue a memorandum on educating the people in rural communities. It stressed central planning and the need to co-ordinate departmental activities to avoid overlap and duplication in the provision of services and resources. Again, this has a familiar ring. The memorandum was strongly influenced by the first survey of the Colonial Empire published in 1932. Economic surveys inevitably end up with statements about co-ordinating effort and avoiding duplication. The subtle interweaving of social, economic and political aims and the necessity to examine their interrelationships — as well as those of different groups and departments of government — was already apparent at this stage. In the Depression world of the Thirties the inability of western man to control his own economy left little time, money or energy for attempts to control those of far away

"backward" colonies. Where there was no profit for private enterprise and no voters to influence the central government, the missions carried on the work of educating traditional peoples and of keeping them alive, albeit at a minimal level.

With the 1939-1945 war came a need for raw materials, and a new prosperity for the colonies. Cut off from the home country, many colonies had to grow their own food. Tribesmen entered the army and the colonial residents were marshalled to fight a distant enemy. In the Far East, the colonial powers were humbled by the Japanese. The traditional peoples of the world began to see and to understand a new sort of world. Where before they had considered their own cultures to be supreme and their villages to be the centre of the world, the initial contact with white men presented another view of the world, one in which the white man considered *his* ways and *his* culture to be superior. Two world wars and a major depression shattered the white man's faith in both his own ability to control social and economic events and in the simple myth of linear progress. In the post-war world, an Einsteinian view of the world — of the relativity of peoples and cultures existing in their own time-space — began to develop. Honigmann (1966:75), discussing the concept of cultural relativity, notes :

> Cultural relativity recognizes that behaviour is always appropriate to a particular time and place, to a particular system of culture. Many of our ways of doing things have evolved in our culture through hundreds of years. They can't be fully adopted by other people until those people have sufficiently changed their system, their religion, their ideas, their social relationships, in order that the new forms may fit.

In a changing world, there was need, not merely to force new ways on old people, but to attempt to learn from these peoples ways of organizing society that would lessen the stresses and strains brought about in western societies by excessive individualism and an obsession with material gains.

In 1949, the United States woke up to the conditions in the so-called underdeveloped world. As Shannon (1957:1) notes : "Underdeveloped areas became a focal point of world interest in 1949 when President Truman gave almost singular attention to their problems in his inaugural address." The British Colonial system

had developed with very few people and with very little money. With the interest of the U.S. in the problems of the underdeveloped world, large funds and big staffs became available to solve the problems of development. Economic materialism, with a heavy ethnocentric bias based on American experience and "know-how" began to loom large in the developing nations as Americans moved in to "help" them.

Out of the chaos of the Second World War and the accelerating pace of change came the new concept of community development. Community development was to solve social and economic problems by setting up systems so that people helped themselves and also managed somehow to co-ordinate things. The concept of self-help keeps popping up in the community development literature. No traditional society was able to function without a large measure of self-help, mutual support and co-operation. The unbridled individualism of twentieth century man makes the idea of self-help attractive. Frequently it is government agencies and others carrying out community development programmes who have to be taught self-help and co-operation. If nothing else has come out of community development projects since the war, the realization that traditional societies have self-help mechanisms that existed before the concept of community development was discovered by the western world should now be apparent. The concept of obligation and helping other people, it now seems, is not a luxury — it is a necessary condition for human existence (Firey 1960:229-230).

The term "community development" seems to have been first used at a Cambridge Colonial Conference in 1948. At the 1954 Ashbridge Conference, community development was defined as

> A movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and on the initiative of the whole community.

This definition was taken over, almost intact, by the United Nations, which defined the process in *Social Progress Through Community Development* (United Nations : 1955).

> Community development can be tentatively defined as a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest reliance upon the community's initiative.

This definition, suitably modified, is the one that still stands to-day. Of course, no-one will quibble with this definition — it is so vague and all-encompassing that no nation from the most democratic to the most authoritarian will deny that this sort of approach is part of the national philosophy.

In the past twelve years, an enormous amount of energy and money has been devoted to attempting to lift the living standards of the world's people. Community development has played a part in this overall development process. In the main, in overall development and community development terms, the results have been good only in places, poor as often as not, and frequently expensive in economic, social and human costs. One problem has been that to economists and like minded specialists, development has meant an increase in material wealth, in per capita income, in goods, while to socially oriented people, development has implied more schools, more welfare programmes, more local decision making. (Buck : 1965; United Nations, 1963:160)

A casual glance at the literature on socio-economic development will reveal this dichotomy, and also show the weeping and wailing that goes on among western development specialists as they see their best laid schemes "gang aft agley". The slums grow larger, oppression still persists and most of the world's population still goes to bed (if there are beds available) hungry, sick and dispirited. The post-war experience has shown that good will and money are not enough. The current vogue for community development in Canada may merely be an oblique way of saying, on viewing other attempts at socio-economic development, "Let's hand over everything to the local people — they cannot possibly make a worse mess of things".

The community development process has been widely touted throughout the world as a simple way of solving complex problems, and as a short cut to economic solvency, social stability and political freedom. Not only have community development programmes not solved problems, they have created many others. By introducing an unrealistic set of expectations, community development programmes have often made the realization of even modest goals impossible or remote. *Reader's Digest* (Stowe 1962) notwithstanding, such projects as that carried out in Vicos, Peru, by an American university have

compounded rather than solved socio-economic problems. Too much of community development has smacked of the "quick and dirty" approach to complex problems. Too much of the technique has smacked of "co-optation" rather than of co-operation, with local people brought in to rubber stamp ill-conceived projects cooked up in isolation in central offices without reference to local needs, abilities and resources. Too many centrally planned schemes have been foisted off on the local people and turned into "community development projects" only at a last resort. Too many unbridled individualists and too many vague "do-gooders" have sought to work out their own personal problems at the expense of local peoples who had no margin for error. And always the local people have been caught in the crossfire between different departments, disciplines or specialities or treated as pawns, as agencies and individuals fought over power and money to "help" them. Somehow the best community development projects seem to have been run out of small offices located in the field, with limited funds, and staffed by men and women who give the impression that they are not too sure what they are doing.

Only too frequently, an unstructured approach to social and economic problems is confused with an undisciplined one. Both personal discipline and scientific precision are essential prerequisites for community development projects. The operational and personal limits of all the people involved, local and outsiders, and of the physical environment, must be precisely determined before any project is initiated. And this takes time — a lot of time.

Small projects seem to work best in community development, if they are staffed by groups and individuals concerned with co-operating rather than with competing, with admitting the limits of their ignorance rather than boasting about the extent of their knowledge, with sharing rather than with taking, with creating abundance rather than with bewailing scarcity, with lighting candles rather than with cursing the darkness. Community development makes large personal as well as professional demands.

The concept of community development is undergoing a re-evaluation at this time. In an article entitled "The Fuzziness of Definition of Community Development" (Biddle 1966), the author,

with the air of a referee setting down rules before tossing the ball back into play, suggested the following aids to defining community development :

"1. That, for the present, all approaches which claim to be Community Development be accepted as legitimate contributions. None of us is wise enough yet to rule any out completely.

2. That each interpreter acknowledge there are other approaches as well as his own.

3. That each, in writing about his work, try to state his own concepts, purposes, and even biases, so that he can fit his own position into some scheme of the whole.

4. That each try to learn from the experience of contrasting programmes.

5. That each try to find some central core or common denominator amongst the many varieties."

The Canadian Research Centre for Anthropology has recently expanded its operations in the field of community development, although courses in community development have been given in connection with the Centre's activities for nearly ten years, based mainly on the need to train students in the Institute of Missiology in its philosophy and technique. In 1967, the Centre published *Community Development in Canada* (Lloyd 1967) — a review of the state of the art in 1964-65. This provided a baseline for the study of community development in Canada. Lloyd's book revealed a large variety of programmes and a wide diversity of interpretations in Canadian community development practise. At this stage there cannot be a definition of community development as a philosophy or a technique that covers all situations in Canada. This is a promising, and a perilous, situation. Hopefully, a useful functional and philosophical definition of community development can be worked out before the experts get hold of the term and break its arm.

In line with Biddle's suggestions, then, the views put forward here are purely personal ones. My own belief is that community development is a general term for defining and dealing with the complex processes of socio-economic development and change. It implies the idea of controlling social and economic factors in such

a way that all benefit. It is not a value free concept of the sort beloved by social scientists. It implies making judgements that health is better than sickness, a full stomach better than an empty one, local participation in the decision making process better than enforced compliance. The process involves the whole of man and the whole of humanity — it means drawing upon all available resources by creating conditions where people can share what they have, be it food, material goods, or, most important, knowledge. The term community development is best split into two for closer definition and operational use.

There is no general agreement on what constitutes a community, other than that people are involved. (Gould and Kolb 1964-114.) The word community is loaded with folksy images of people living together in harmony. The literature contains 94 definitions of community (*ibid*). Community development workers, in a sense, have to create their local communities and ensure that the people in these communities can move into the outside world, into the larger world community. By selecting a group or an area to be developed, a community development project creates a community. Certain things can be done on the ground, but in many cases what is needed is to make members of the local community aware of the larger world community "outside" and to teach them how to draw upon it. The reverse process should also occur — the members of the local community should be able to inform the community development worker of the availability of resources within the designated community. This two way exchange, this sharing of knowledge, is fundamental to community development practise. In the long run, perhaps the only meaningful community into which people can and should integrate in a global village is the world community and the community of man. And they should be able to integrate in the time and place and way of their own choosing.

"Development", a word fraught with problems of definition, is defined in my own thinking at the present time as a technique as follows;

> The application of science and technology to extend man's control over his physical and social environment with the aim of improving human welfare and maximizing the choice of individuals in the social, economic and political spheres.

Community development might be termed applied social science. But, in a society that is a good with things, but poor with people, applying science, social or otherwise, is a fairly perilous pursuit. One thing that may come out of community development in the future is a matching of the mechanical technology of western man with the social technology of traditional peoples. For community development implies a relationship and an exchange among equals. The process implies that all can give as well as receive, that all can share, and that all can learn. It involves ethical considerations, not material well-being alone. It involves an understanding of the complexity of the most "primitive" society and of the most "backward" human being. It involves an understanding of the limitations of the physical environment, of social structures, of value systems. It involves the construction of operational structures that are neither too rigid nor too loose. In involves the blending of practise with theory in the establishment and maintenance of theoretically sound, practical and ethical projects and programmes. Community development is no panacea, no short way to eldorado or to utopia. And if it is treated as such in Canada, then its promise may well fade in a welter of journalistic clichés, "demonstration projects" that demonstrate only folly, and ill-planned, ill-conceived "self-help" programmes run in a manner reminiscent of George Orwell's most pessimistic predictions.

In the past few years, the Canadian Government has embarked on massive intervention programmes — the Health Resources scheme, Indian and Eskimo housing projects, ARDA (Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Administration) programmes in the Gaspé, New Brunswick, and the Interlake region, manpower retraining and relocation. These programmes are complex, costly, and touch people at the very roots of their existence and their being. The history of such projects has not always made happy reading, especially in the United States. One outspoken American social critic has called the U.S. War on Poverty "political pornography" (Alinsky 1965). Any programme that deals with people obviously requires a high degree of technical competence and of human sensitivity. The hands and minds of most western men have been blunted by contact with the machine. Our cities are fine places for automobiles, poor places for

people, and the computers in our office buildings frequently enjoy temperature controlled conditions that human beings are denied.

To a new Canadian like myself, Canada seems to be an astonishingly open society, compared to Great Britain. The country seems to be less of a "vertical mosaic" than an unfinished jigsaw puzzle. The pieces are all here, or can be obtained. The pattern is emerging, but slowly. Obviously a major task is ahead for Canadians in every walk of life and especially for those whose profession or preference leads them to working with people. Canada has inherited the benefits of the Democratic Revolution (liberty, equality and fraternity), the Industrial Revolution (quantity, uniformity and cheapness) and the Welfare Revolution (equal shares for all) without too many of the liabilities. She possesses the prophet of the Electronic Revolution, Marshall McLuhan, whose work is founded, in part, at least, on that of Harold Innis. Anyone interested in community development in Canada would do well to read Innis' book *The Bias of Communication* (1951); it says a great deal about the nature of the country they are setting out to change. Canada is comparatively new, and its problems range from those characteristic of so-called underdeveloped countries (the unskilled drifting towards the bright lights of the city) to those common in advanced industrial societies (skilled workers automated out of jobs). Perhaps, in Canada, some attempt can be made to outline the dimensions of those problems that prevent the mass of humanity from living a healthy, rewarding and useful life. Perhaps, in Canada, we may be able to devise methodologies and to train students to identify socio-economic problems and to deal with them in a realistic manner that is neither too hasty nor too slow. Perhaps, in Canada, new dimensions in social science and social action, dimensions that are theoretically sound, practically possible, and ethically based can be explored.

The papers in this volume of *Anthropologica* deal with a wide range of research and experience that has a bearing on community development. They all attempt to present new perspectives on the processes of socio-economic development. If they do nothing more than reveal the complexity of society and of the process of community development, and help to prevent an oversimplistic view of what these processes involve, they will have served a valid purpose.

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