

**CIM MINERAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE
TORONTO, ONTARIO
MAY, 1994**

**SESSION: PARTNERSHIP WITH STAKEHOLDERS
TOPIC: PARTNERSHIP WITH ABORIGINALS**

**TITLE: PARTICIPATION OF THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY
IN THE CANADIAN MINERALS INDUSTRY**

AUTHOR: D. L. JOHNSTON

The avenues and degree of participation by aboriginals in the Canadian Minerals Industry have changed significantly during the thirty years of the author's career in that industry.

The typical 1950's cycle of mineral industry involvement of a local non-Europeanized aboriginal was as an individual employee. The employment relationship would begin with the best of intentions by both parties of permanence and terminate when the pioneering employee was unable to reconcile the attendance behaviour required by the employer and the social-sharing behaviour demanded by family and friends.

My employer, Cominco Ltd., has been a mine operator and developer in the North since the 1920's. Cominco's early experiences with employment of non-Europeanized natives at the Con Mine in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories from 1938 to 1986 was a negative experience from both the employee and employer ends. A series of classic failures in employment of individual aboriginals was a large part of the history. A few Metis or natives from other areas were the permanent aboriginal employees at Con (two percent). Racial prejudice was overt on the street in Yellowknife and I assume in the workplace.

The history of aboriginal employment at the Pine Point, Northwest Territories operation (1964 to 1988) was somewhat better but also frustrating. The mine was equidistant (eighty kilometres) from the Dene communities of the Hay River Indian Reserve and Fort Resolution, both on Great Slave Lake. Despite a large aboriginal presence and many well-intentioned efforts, employment of aboriginals at Pine Point never got much beyond ten percent. These would have been half local and half northern prairie aboriginals. One continuing success story was the railcar loading and covering crew led by Ed McKay, a local aboriginal. This predominantly aboriginal crew did its own recruiting and several are on Cominco pension.

The relationship between the mine and communities suffered from mutual cultural misunderstanding and negative reinforcement by anti-development missionaries within the communities. I am also sure that racial prejudice was present both at the mine and in the

communities. The company moved in and set up an operation with emphasis on overcoming Governmental and technical obstacles to the project. The concerns, fears and desires of local aboriginals were not factors to be concerned about in those days. The die was cast early on. There could not be a constructive relationship; there really was no basis for one.

In Greenland we built the Greenex operation on Marmorilik fiord (1973 to 1990). Several communities existed within a weekly boat or snowmobile commute of the mine. Employment of native Greenlanders grew until they were the largest group within the workforce (forty percent).

Cominco's Polaris operation on Little Cornwallis Island, Northwest Territories was developed between 1972 and 1982. The indigenous population in Canada's Arctic Islands are Inuit. The nearest community is Resolute Bay 100 kilometres south and east of the mine site.

A Socio-Economic Agreement was reached with the Government of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories maximizing employment of northerners at the operation. Success has been modest. Participation and turnover rates of northerners have been high. Over the mine life northerners have comprised ten to fifteen percent of employee numbers. More northerners than southerners have been hired, but most cannot tolerate the family separation and do not stay long. One exception which both surprises and gratifies me is that a contingent of Yellowknife Indians have remained on the payroll for many years. We were not nearly so successful with their fathers and uncles at the Con operation in Yellowknife in the 1960's.

Cominco Alaska has the Red Dog operation on land obtained by the Inupiat aboriginals as part of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement. The NANA Corporation, owned by this group, has an agreement with Cominco which ensures availability of employment for NANA members (fifty percent of employees) and a royalty participation which grows with time. The political and environmental hurdles facing this project were overcome with the active

help of the NANA group. NANA has entered the camp catering business with the Marriott Corporation, and is also involved as a diamond drilling contractor.

Cominco's experiences outside of Canada are often played back to us when we meet with aboriginal groups within Canada.

The Tahltan's in northern British Columbia work as mining, construction and road maintenance contractors with Homestake's Golden Bear operation. This group was quick to seek an arrangement with Cominco during planning for the Snip operation, also in northern British Columbia. A general commitment that Snip will hire when possible from the Tahltan communities of Iskut, Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek was made in the absence of a formal socio-economic agreement. Communications between the mine and communities are frequent and several Tahltans have stayed with us since start-up.

Land claim settlement processes and Government interventions through the project permitting process have added to the involvement of natives in the Canadian Minerals Industry. The uranium producing operations in northern Saskatchewan (75 percent aboriginal population) employ up to forty percent natives. There has been extensive cross-cultural training and company-sponsored education upgrades to allow aboriginals to participate more successfully.

A similar success story is unfolding in northern Alberta at the Syncrude operation. Here the numbers are large but the percentage of aboriginals in the workforce is low.

In 1971 I recall a meeting in Whitehorse at which one Jean Chrétien, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was castigating the mining industry for not employing more natives. I told him that our Company had hired many but could not keep them long, and that I resented the inference that we were not trying. I noted also that perhaps the pot was calling the kettle black since DIAND did not have any local native employees I was aware of in Yellowknife and perhaps they should set an example!

The Government of Canada has since taken up the challenge of employing aboriginals in DIAND and more particular in devolving powers to the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) which has an aboriginal majority. GNWT employs many aboriginals throughout its departments. Aboriginals are a majority of the population in the Northwest Territories and are well represented on project review boards.

These few examples show that today's minerals industry participation alternatives for aboriginals may include: Working directly for a mining company; working for an aboriginal-owned business servicing a mining business; sitting on a board passing judgement on various aspects of mining developments; or receiving income through entitlement as a member of an aboriginal group because of resource ownership.

Enlightened aboriginal leadership is looking to the minerals industry now for several key items:

1. Recognition of their inherent interest in preserving the physical environment and the productivity of the environment of fish and game.
2. Recognition of their unique cultures and place in Canada.
3. Employment opportunities for their children directly with mines or indirectly through their service businesses.
4. As much training and education as possible for their people.
5. Continuing communication with the mining operations on their plans and activities.
6. Development proposals and agreements on owned resources.

There are good reasons for wishing to create voluntary and constructive relationships between mining companies and the aboriginal community:

1. The land claims settlements are allowing aboriginal groups to choose large land holdings with professional advice as to mineral potential.
2. Aboriginals are three percent of the Canadian population with 47 percent of aboriginals being under nineteen years of age and 97 percent below 65 years of age. The comparable statistics for Canada's population is thirty percent under nineteen years of age and 92 percent under 65 years of age.
3. Canada cannot afford to have a significant and rapidly growing maintenance bill for under-employed aboriginals while trying to cope simultaneously with the costs of a rapidly aging population. Escalating immigration is not an acceptable solution for most Canadians.
4. On practical grounds, the mineral industry must employ local people in its enterprises. If we do not, we will face alienated local groups who use their political power in obstructionist ways.
5. Aboriginal leaders, enthusiastic about the potential that mineral development holds for the betterment of their peoples' lives, formed the Canadian Aboriginal Minerals Association (CAMA) in 1992. Our industry needs all the help we can get in countering the anti-development forces in Canada.
6. It is important that we Canadians rid ourselves of the flawed stereotypes we hold of aboriginals in Canada. Voluntary communication and solicitation of real mutual cultural understanding with aboriginal groups will do the job.

Aboriginals have achieved the significant advance in their minerals industry participation through political avenues, claims negotiation and individual education efforts. The privately-controlled (non-government) mining companies have too often been reluctant grooms at forced weddings. There have been noteworthy exceptions thankfully, and some sterling efforts once the challenge of fostering aboriginal participation was accepted.

In conclusion I feel that, whilst there have been many positive developments in the nature and degree of aboriginal participation in the Canadian Minerals Industry, the future is very much open.

The ball is in the court of the Canadian Minerals Industry. We shall clearly have future opportunities to answer the call to develop prosperous operations in Canada in collaboration with aboriginal partners to the benefit of all Canadians. The future of a healthy Canadian Minerals Industry and a healthier social climate in Canada may depend on doing what is right and logical.