

# The Politics of Northern Frontiers



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**THE POLITICS OF NORTHERN FRONTIERS**  
**in Australia, Canada and other 'first world' countries**

— A Discussion Paper —

*Peter Jull*

**North Australia Research Unit**  
**Australian National University**  
**1991**

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*Dedicated to*  
*Gordon Robertson*



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## TO THE READER

The subject of this small volume is the north and outback of Australia and Canada, as well as the northern regions of 'first world' countries generally. The politics of the title are the politics of national policy, ethno-politics, and the politics of knowledge, but rarely party politics *per se*. Political issues in the north transcend the usual categories of party platforms.

This paper is written for three purposes:

- to assist individuals and groups in several countries now discussing indigenous social and political development;
- to draw attention to recurring elements in the problems of 'northern development' in a number of countries; and
- to help the author in his own research by opening discussion with Australians about present and future federal, state, and territorial government policy and the way ahead for indigenous peoples.

It must be obvious to everyone that the hot deserts of central Australia are much different from the cold deserts of the lands and islands of arctic Canada. The discussion here, however, will be about similarities and shared political patterns which seem more surprising than differences. This is not merely quixotic. In these shared patterns there seem to be clues to the difficulties, universal among national governments, in understanding and dealing with the north.

The overall subject of this volume is social consensus and its institutional and legal manifestations which reconcile regions and peoples within a shared territory. That shared territory may be the Northern Territory (NT) or Queensland or all Australia, or it may be Canada, Quebec or the Northwest Territories (NWT). The word that best describes such a subject is 'constitutional', although that word should not frighten readers. The discussion is intended to be accessible and as clear as possible for any reader.

This discussion is also intended to be practical. It is distilled from personal experience at various levels of government in the public administration of northern policy, in creation and revision of political institutions and self-government frameworks, as well as in intense discussions on northern constitutions and national constitutional amendments. Even in the northern hemisphere the author talked with a number of Australian federal and state ministers and senior officials over the years before coming to Australia in 1986, thanks to the initiative of Australia's High Commission in Ottawa. Often, as well, he has been a privileged observer and sometimes a participant in meetings of northern peoples and their political leaders in several countries. He has had the opportunity not only to hear first-hand of their concerns but also to discuss points of interest with them in more detail. The author has also been fortunate in contacts, usually lasting many years, with public officials, journalists, academics, organisations and many generous and astute ordinary people in northern regions - and in southern bureaux concerned with northern regions. One of the more harmless errors southerners make about the north is that public affairs there are undeveloped. In fact, northerners are more intense and constant in their discussions of public and political issues than most southerners. (Perhaps this is because government is relatively more powerful and the citizens relatively more powerless than in the south.)

Now there is a reassuringly growing pile of literature on northern regions. A list of some particularly useful publications is found at the end of this volume. Occasional reference

is made to some of these in the text of this essay, although such notations have been kept to a minimum. There appears to be a great need for materials directly useful to indigenous and non-indigenous teams involved in political discussions and negotiations in the north. There are some suggestions in an Appendix for social science research topics of immediate relevance.

In 1983 the research coordinator of the Canadian Inuit project to create a self-governing Nunavut Territory presented the project chairman, Dennis Patterson, now 'premier' of the Northwest Territories, with the final draft of the constitutional discussion paper, *Building Nunavut*. He specifically warned that disappointment could follow its release. He likened the document to a prism, taking something that is all around us like light and turning it into something else. He warned that whereas before publication many people were in excited suspense about what *a constitution* might look like, once they had read the discussion document they would be instant experts and a little annoyed that there was not more to it. They would also be irritated that one or other favourite subject was ignored. All of this happened approximately as feared. Without that document, however, the discussion - and Nunavut itself - would not have come into focus.

The author will be happy to see this volume disappear under a heap of additions, emendations, abuse, whatever, but he does hope that it will be replaced, at the least, by something more useful to the negotiators and practitioners of northern policy and politics.

Peter Jull,  
Darwin.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE NORTHERN MYTH

'Northern development' is an archetypal myth. It belongs to the Anglo-Nordic peoples and their Celtic relations in Iceland, Ireland and the North Atlantic islands. We in Australia and Canada today are their genetic or cultural descendants. In Viking times there were no nation-states. That old North Atlantic society can still be sensed today in the remarkably similar 'feel' of such widely separated ports as Trondheim, Reykjavik and Sligo. At the same time another people, the Thule Inuit, were moving swiftly from west to east across the islands and coasts of arctic North America. They were displacing and absorbing a previous migration, the Dorset Inuit. Both Inuit and Vikings were expanding peoples with certain forms of decision-making. They were both pre-political in that the vigour of their advance outside of their old homelands and the difficulties they faced in climate and hostile populations made areas of settlement and mode of life provisional.

King Alfred interrupts his writing of a holy work to tell us the story of one Ottar who lived near the present Tromsø in North Norway. Ottar was visiting his court and had just told him of a voyage on which he sailed north and east to the White Sea, in about 880 AD. Ottar talked also of the remarkable Sami (the Lapps) along the way and those who lived near his home base (see Ottar's tale translated in Jones 1986, 251-4). He made clear that he exacted tribute on a significant scale from these people, and that they had many goods of value to the Europe of the time. Parts of his tale seem to have been puffed up for the gullible, and other parts all too real. Ottar's combination of exploration, exploitation and exaggeration set a standard for northern development to this day.

The sagas of the Norwegian kings, based on contemporary poems and stories, deal occasionally with North Norway. Typically a young would-be king is ensorcelled by a Finnish witch, meaning that he meets a Sami girl when sailing to the far north. There he is surrounded by witchcraft and the strange. The spell of Lapland is real enough for any of us who visit there today. As the midnight sun wheels around the spring and summer sky, the ever-sleepless eye viewing the ever-changing light on rockscapes, barren coasts and islands is apt to become awed, confused. The region became a place where strange tales quickly crept into the historical lore of the Norse.

For their part, the Sami have now translated one of their own widely shared stories into a hit movie, *The Pathfinder*. In this a Sami youth survives the brutal murder of his family by roving Norse who then try to have him lead them to the main Sami camp. He does so, but tricks the Norse to their death in a rockslide. There are many places in Lapland today where one may be shown the 'exact' place where this event occurred, so pervasive is this story of the single-minded homicidal Norse. A thousand years and more of such aboriginal-settler relations in the mind's eye have done little to reconcile the two peoples. Norway has recently amended its constitution and recognised Sami rights and culture in law. These are important precedents for all countries. Further Norwegian action on land, water and resource rights, as well as self-government, is expected in coming years (Jull 1988c; Brantenberg 1991).

Another variation of the archetypal cultural quest is that of Erik the Red. He ventured west to Greenland and his family reached the mainland of North America. The story is told in varying versions in Old Norse sagas. Despite the very small number of persons who have visited the scenes of these stories they still hold a fascination for many down the years. There are at least two repeatedly reprinted paperback versions available in Australian and Canadian bookshops at this time. Erik, 'red' for his murders as well as his

beard, sails from Iceland to exile, and explores Greenland, the first European to do so. Returning briefly to Iceland for supplies, family and friends, he tells of a new country, 'Green Land', with its wonderful sheep meadows. This has often been thought a bit of deceptive advertising for a country mostly buried under a deep ice cap with a coastal fringe of bare rock. Perhaps it was that, in part. However, on summer days when the Eriksfjord (now known by its Inuit name, Tunugdliarfik) is chilly with small icebergs floating by, the deep meadows are warm and humming. When an environmental change recently closed the Inuit coastal fishery in the region, Inuit sought out the Norse ruins. Where there were most Norse buildings, they knew there must be the best meadows. They have now established a profitable sheep industry and Erik's farm itself has become a busy little community of about 70 people.

The Eriksens had great hopes for their new land, America. They established buildings which, in the constitutional practice of the day, assured them the sole power to call a parliament, the Norse *thing*. Leif the Lucky would await an auspicious moment for this grandest northern development ever attempted, the settlement of North America. We know from various sources that both King Olaf Tryggvason (Olaf I) and King Olaf Haraldsson the Saint (Olaf II) of Norway, two equals in will and violence, took a lively personal interest in the Eriksens and their distant adventures. Their eyes were on the New World fully 500 years before Columbus reached the Bahamas. As the longtime patron saint of national unity in Norway, Holy King Olaf might no less reasonably serve a Canada today wracked by fears of disintegration. When other Norse were found occupying the Eriksen buildings in Newfoundland, violence erupted as some of Leif's siblings reclaimed them in an explosion of axe murders. Leif, in perhaps the first New World cover-up - Viking-gate? - told the offenders once they were back in Greenland to keep a low profile on their home farms for a good long time. He also made sure the incident was not debated in the annual *thing*.

There were also the relations with the *Skraelings* - Inuit and Indians who gave the Norse a very difficult time wherever they landed. The sagas are very clear that Baffin Island, a part of the Inuit Nunavut of today, and Labrador, then occupied by Inuit along its entire Atlantic coast, were well known to the Norse. Also, the Norse travelled far to the north in Baffin Bay every year, to North Greenland and no doubt to the islands of the Canadian arctic archipelago. There they obtained valuable trade goods for Europe such as falcons, polar bear skins (or even live bears), walrus and narwhal ivory, and walrus hide for making ship's cables. While we do not know all the places they may have visited in the arctic, the St. Lawrence or the American east coast, we do know that they had a bad time. Death, infighting, hostile natives, and ill seasons stalked the Eriksens.

The puzzle which has exercised adventurers and scholars into our own time is the location of Vinland, the North American land found by Erik's family. One of these modern Norse adventurers has located Leif Eriksen's base on the northern tip of Newfoundland. It is now a World Heritage Site and its several buildings have been reconstructed. But despite much ingenuity expended on the location of Vinland, this land of wine and grain has remained elusive. Now the answer seems to have been found, by the unlikely means of literary criticism, and it is a very good joke.

The monk who wrote down the story in Iceland was probably a member of the Eriksen family himself. He must have relished turning this land of disappointments and horrors, of lost opportunities and defeat - a coast which Jacques Cartier was 500 years later to call 'the land God gave to Cain' - into the biblical Promised Land. He took his description - both words and images - from the Old Testament rather than from life (Jones 1986, 283-5). No doubt those who first read the tale found this droll in the context of the then well-known disappointments of the Norse in Vinland. Even the armada of settlers Erik first took west to Greenland in 985 AD lost many dozens of persons in wild storms off Cape Farewell. Our monk knew better than anyone, from the oral tradition of his family, just

how tragic the new lands had turned out to be. His 'Vinland' was an ironic comment, black comedy from the outset. Meanwhile, there are still individuals who pursue the dream of a Canadian Shangri-La where some happy souls in the middle ages found a promised land.

The irony would be sharpest for early readers who were aware of the wider tragedy unfolding for the main Norse settlements in Greenland. The Norse had settled deep in the Greenland fjords, away from the stormy coasts. But as a new wave of Inuit settlement moved into Greenland from the northern islands of what is now Canadian Nunavut, these supremely confident arctic people occupied the outer coasts and islands. (Erik had found the remains of camps and kayaks of the preceding Dorset Inuit population when he first explored Greenland in 982.) The Norse were eventually hemmed in and felt at risk, with the Inuit taking away their hunting and fishing areas. Access to vital trade goods in the north was also lost, and the climate was worsening in the so-called Little Ice Age. Stories come down to us from both Norse and Inuit of mutual contacts and even sports days gone wrong, ending in immediate bloodshed or later revenge massacres. Inuit gave as good as they got, it seems. They also formed a view of Europeans which had many unfortunate consequences for later European fishermen and whalers wrecked on their coasts, unable to expect humane treatment.

Perhaps more critical to the survival of the Norse community was its inability or refusal to learn from the Inuit. The Norse had serious problems with suitable arctic shelter, their buildings becoming laughably, desperately improbable as they stuck on extra rooms all higgledy-piggledy and moved farmyard animals in with them while the cold deepened. Meanwhile, shelter, warmth and food were problems for which their Inuit neighbours had excellent answers. Although Inuit eagerly picked up new ideas from the Norse, even for musical instruments, the only thing we know that the Norse borrowed are the striking designs seen on Icelandic sweaters, now a high fashion based on ancient Inuit women's neck ornamentation in Greenland.

In other words, the Norse vikings, those icons of our culture with their legendary courage and will, seem incompetent in cross-cultural situations or when faced with new environments. In that they may be said to resemble their Australian and Canadian cultural and blood descendants of modern times. Their deliberate exaggerations as well as our later misunderstandings of their words remain important lore for us and our children a thousand years later. It seems that we have not yet learned to accept the exotic northlands we have felt bound to settle, or their peoples whom we have felt the need to subject, on anything like their own terms. We have been myth-making from the outset. In this context the transfer of 1940s wartime triumphalism, in which news, propaganda and wish-fulfillment merged, to post-war peacetime boosterism for northern development becomes more understandable. It may be a comfort to us all to know when we are irritated by flapdoodle put out by governments in Darwin or Yellowknife that it is a thousand-year-old tradition. However, cultural self-delusion provides no basis for public policy-making today. As in the world's space programs, it is applied expertise and experience, not hype, that succeed.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NATIONAL NORTH

Northern regions do not fit comfortably into today's Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) club, the so-called 'first world'. There is among the busy white settlers an air of innocence as they pursue often quite explicit 19th Century agendas of material expansion. There is also a quality of the 'third world' in the desperate living conditions of non-European peoples in parts of Australia, Canada, the USA and the Soviet north - although those problems have been remedied by the Nordic countries, to their credit. And if one steps into the world of indigenous northern peoples, into another culture, one has an entire new experience of place and of one's country - one founded solely on what the continent offers rather than on imported ideas. As Dr HC Coombs has said, in Australia we have 'set out to destroy our own environment with its many resources, and replace it with one from the northern hemisphere' (HC Coombs, 1991, personal communication).

Of course, on more detailed inspection we find that these first impressions hide as much as they reveal. The simple faith in another gold rush to solve northern ills overlooks much that has been learned since the trial and error development of the last century. Those frontier days had many human victims on both sides of the skin colour frontier. Any innocence today is fake: the *faux-naif* world in which we pretend we do not know the probable results of our actions and policy choices. As for 'third world' conditions in some of our remote areas, the real 'third world' overseas is often a better place to live than our 'fourth world'. The 'fourth world' is the world of indigenous peoples marginalised by other peoples, but in much of the 'third world' local communities and cultures are still intact. Meanwhile, the distinct cultures and societies of indigenous peoples in their last remaining homelands amid our 'first world' are under tremendous pressure. In their farthest corners they are now being pushed to abandon their past ways once and for all. This comes at the very moment when a new wave of world human rights and environmental appreciation is coming to recognise their importance to all humanity.

Northern regions are constitutionally anomalous in that the forms of government typical of areas of close human (southern) settlement and the finality of proprietary rights are lacking. What is more, where northern governments now exist, their legitimacy is challenged morally and often legally by the most permanent element of the northern population, i.e., the indigenous peoples. Whether in Queensland or the Northern Territory, northern Quebec or Canada's northern territories, governments claiming sovereignty over northern areas have felt it necessary to take special steps to assert that sovereignty in the eyes of the local residents. The nervousness about Aboriginal loyalties in North Australia when Japanese attacks began in World War II would not have occurred, surely, if Australia had thought its policies had won local confidence. The brightly trimmed uniforms of Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish border officials, as out of place as tropical parrots amid the sub-arctic earth tones, remind us that dividing up a people, the Sami, has almost nothing to do with local circumstances. As elsewhere, powerful or paranoid Europeans and their overseas descendants have seen border maintenance as the first axiom of political power. The spontaneous rage of southern Canadians whenever the USA seems to be thumbing its nose at the protocols of sovereign recognition in the arctic seas illustrates the extent to which European peoples have assimilated the logic of the recent and by no means 'natural' symbolism of nationality. (The best recent discussions of the ill fit of ethnicity and statehood are found in Anderson 1983 and Hobsbawm 1990.)

National policies of social and political assimilation in northern regions demonstrate the seriousness of national determination. Today it seems to be the Russian republic which is groping towards policies of genial accommodation with indigenous peoples while Quebec, not amused by the Oka incident of 1990, reinforces its insistence on control. Much of the tension between Inuit and the Quebec government down the years has been the classic one of an insecure government insisting on its rhetorical prerogatives to a population which judges credibility by action (notably in the form of local funding of services and housing which have not always met local expectations). The Northern Territory government has active policies which attempt to demonstrate, e.g., through local government legislation, the jurisdiction of that government in all parts of the NT, including on federally-secured Aboriginal lands. Whatever Canada's policies earlier in the century, e.g., worry about Americans operating defence facilities, today Ottawa has apparently learned that accommodation with the indigenous peoples is much better than the heavy-handed assimilation of past times. Indeed, the NATO northern countries as well as Sweden and Finland have shown a consistent recent trend of national accommodation of indigenous aspirations and autonomous institutions as the way of sensibly and peacefully insuring loyalty on the national margins (Jull 1990d).

The fact is that nation-states are new in the north. Even if they have long claimed northern territory, they have only recently attempted to provide it with public services and socio-political opportunity equivalent to the settled south. The truth of Norway's ancient policies in the north is only now being unearthed, but Sami remember the determined Norwegianisation campaigns of modern times. Norway's reforms of the 1930s in respect of northern villages were significant and its post-war reconstruction of the north even more so. Canada was embarrassed by American criticism of its treatment of Inuit and made amends in the post-war years. The war itself was the major source of local political initiative and activism post-war for the Torres Strait Islanders (Beckett 1987). Although Soviet leaders had all too much first-hand experience of the far north pre-1917, their policies have oscillated between humane cultural support and accommodation on the one hand and Stalinist brutality, including the remarkable anti-shamanism campaigns, on the other. In all the OECD northern areas, however, one striking fact stands out: national governments today expect loyalty and total commitment from societies much older than themselves - societies whose laws, customs and cultures they have over-ridden with greater or lesser degrees of force. The only thing which may be remarkable is the generally high degree of acceptance by the northern societies of this state of affairs. The regular rumblings behind the scenes in national capitals about the dangers of northern pluralism and land claims (which are sometimes likened to the Palestine question) are more a testimony to bad conscience among the rulers than revolutionary, irredentist or separatist spirit among the ruled.

The two sides of the northern coin are, rather,

- that northern politics are not simply an extension of the White Man's southern hegemony, but a special politics of cross-cultural relations; and
- that northern indigenous peoples, the permanent northerners, have a clear and definable agenda for reform, a quite conservative agenda as it happens, but one which governments have been either too ethno-centric or too uninterested to acknowledge.

To the extent that national governments fail to come to terms with the legitimate and peaceful indigenous agenda, they will heighten the already serious problems of social breakdown and chronic under-development in the north. If northern indigenous people were really so hapless and silly as some whites like to suggest, they would have assimilated long ago. They did not. Their courage despite pressure and lack of resources testifies to their determination to survive.

The move to adopt policies accommodating and actively assisting indigenous autonomy and self-government in the northern hemisphere has been neither spontaneous nor idealistic. It developed in the different countries independently, and derived from sorry experience through trial and error with well-meaning programs which failed. It came to be seen that a people cannot have their lives managed by others.

Even definitions of the north can have serious implications. The northern reaches of Western Australia and Queensland, and of seven Canadian provinces from Atlantic to Pacific, are less well serviced than formally constituted northern territories. Prime Minister Trudeau attempted without success to obtain provincial agreement on a constitutional commitment to redress north-south disparities *within* provinces when he accepted constitutionalising Ottawa's commitment to redress disparities *among* provinces. Political settlements are needed in areas which are unorganised but which are in fact indigenous homelands. Inuit needed some time to convince the military that their formalities with provincial capitals and federal departments were not enough for approving test flying and other military activities in and over Inuit lands of which those headquarters had little or no knowledge.

A most unfortunate use of definitional ploys is found today in Norway. National authorities, with the assistance of some academics who should know better, have shoved 'the north' offshore, preferring to deal with good old non-human topics like marine jurisdiction and Spitsbergen than the difficult issues of cross-cultural relations, social equity, environmental protection, land and water rights, and the inshore fishery which plague *Nord Norge*, a region of three clearly defined counties (Nordland, Troms and Finnmark). Every Norwegian school-child knows that those counties are 'the north', but the national authorities seem to be in doubt. A political revolt by the north in the 1989 national election has sent a message, but Oslo has not yet wanted to hear. It should be reassuring to other countries that despite Norway's thousand-year history of northern development, that often progressive country can still fall into such easy traps. The result is a growing political regionalism, a result one would expect.

Northern policy is not well developed in any of the countries under discussion. The Russians have had very *active* policies, but in many areas these are now seen as having been *wrong* policies (Dahl *et al*, 1990). Canada has often been seen to be a leader in humane and progressive northern policy (even by American authors, as shown in several pieces in Westermeyer and Shusterich 1984). There can be no question that the most recent policy overview from the Canadian government would be envied by northerners in some other countries (DIAND 1988). It has also shown considerable development from earlier policy statements. As one astute northern expert put it some years ago, the problem in Canadian northern policy is not to find encouraging words but to find which, if any, in the sea of official words reveal actual policy (Hamelin 1979).

It is tempting to discuss the national north at more length. The subject is too little discussed, and usually then only in relation to specific projects or policies. Sometimes it seems that national governments today have fallen into a grandfatherly nap on northern matters, now and then waking with a start to ostentatiously protect a bird or lizard, or fund a native language project. Wider purpose often seems to have been lost, and a mood of uncertainty not only about policy but even about whether national governments have a role anymore to have taken hold. In fact there are many important roles for national governments today in the north. This author was alarmed when the draftsman of Canada's then emerging model of national northern policy was unable to state or defend it convincingly during a 1984 debate where this author was representing the constitutional minister of the Northwest Territories (NWT). For that and related reasons, a group of eminent Canadian military, cabinet office, diplomatic, scientific, environmental, indigenous movement and economic policy experts got together and produced a northern



policy (Robertson *et al* 1988) which the Canadian government and political parties have approved. However, there is only one significant aspect of national policy which needs discussion here.

National governments in the post-war years have wittingly or unwittingly based northern policy on the assumption that what is good for the south is good for the north. The north has therefore received everything from religion to Boy Scouts to toothpaste, and sometimes even friendly college boys and girls on summer holiday to teach indigenous folk the housekeeping habits of southern cities. Governments undoubtedly see indigenous youngsters whom they have educated at great cost, individuals now lambasting them in the press, as ungrateful. But these sentiments of dissidence and anger are not new; only the means of expressing them are recent. Northern indigenous people have learned quickly the most modern techniques in their politics. Policies of *de facto* assimilation are unacceptable to the most determined political population of the north, the indigenous people. National administrations have set up efficient systems for delivering high quality services quickly. What must be done today, however, is to establish northern political institutions responsive to local needs and with the power and means to determine the appropriate services, and power to institute and manage them.

Because northern problems have deep roots and no quick solutions, national governments have an opportunity to look to the longer term. This does not mean that there will not always be the quick dollars for a new facility or road before an election. That is as natural as the changing seasons. However, the novel developments in indigenous northern society together with the crying need for self-governing autonomies and sustainable development strategies provide scope for innovative and supportive policies and programs. Unfortunately many governments still base their approaches on the classical employment and development assumptions of earlier decades, even as these are being abandoned by 'first world' countries themselves.

## CHAPTER 3 THE SETTLER NORTH

The most misunderstood and uncertain group in northern regions may be the settlers. Nonetheless, they are on average the most well paid persons with the best facilities and in the best jobs. The settlers can leave when they are fed up or out of work, not a practical option for indigenous people whose cultures are quite local. In areas with party politics they may be represented by one party much more than another, although nominal Right and Left divides mean less in northern regions than elsewhere. There are always those on the 'idealistic' Left who would pave paradise for a few parking lot jobs, and those on the Right who recognise in aboriginal rights a genuine conservative agenda. (In Canada the national Conservatives were for many years, including the term in power from May 1979 to February 1980, strong advocates of indigenous autonomy, self-government and socio-cultural maintenance.)

The settlers in the north represent the national majority, but their brand of blunt politics often tinged with social Darwinist sentiments no longer in favour in southern cities makes this a doubtful asset. Their real asset is much narrower: as elected politicians they may impress many southern white politicians as moral equals, whatever their social attitudes. They often lose this advantage over time, prolonged familiarity with their views breeding impatience in southern centres.

Perhaps the clearest development in this line was the failure of the NWT legislature in the 1970s to accept indigenous views of the future. Regional indigenous associations funded across Canada and in the north provided capable indigenous oppositions. After some years of conflict, the NWT became a product of their outlook, a region in which they have gained a large number of their demands. The White Man's hegemony was finally discredited within the white community itself. A new generation of racially relaxed whites, and indigenous persons themselves prominent in the indigenous associations, came to power in 1979.

Stereotypes among indigenous people notwithstanding, the northern whites are not all wealthy and powerful. They are often persons aware of their limited education or skills, their futures hampered in more conventional settings in the south. They are people whose comfortable lifestyle has come only with very hard work and very long hours, and they probably are more grudging of the high-fliers who frequent the government-financed hotels at photo opportunities than indigenous people are, even if they do get an invitation once in a while. They experience all the frustrations of running a business on narrow profit margins confined by the plethora of taxation and regulatory red tape which is typical under all modern governments. Their angry or rude or redneck verbal responses in private to 'Indian-lovers', 'tree-huggers' or 'people in ivory towers' are belied by their discreet efforts to get their children better education and more opportunities than they themselves had. The major reason that the north is 'undeveloped' is precisely the scarcity of easy money. The entrepreneur who strikes it rich, like the panner in the gold fields of earlier times, is very much the exception. Those satisfactions on offer are ones of lifestyle choice - being one's own boss, enjoyment of the northern outdoors, the ability to be a big frog in a small pond, or distance from one's relatives. This is not the picture of a triumphant class, but of an embattled one.

The larger category of northern settler today is the salaried professional or manager. A 'remote' location may be a good career move for experience or promotion in national firms or organisations; it may also include some valuable 'northern allowance' benefits.

In the north a young person with a little imagination and push will find responsibility and a quick rise through the ranks at a young age when city cousins are just queuing behind all the dull old men. Certain northern occupations may be fine adventure - as a jackaroo or outback nurse - before 'settling down'. The NWT government, for instance, has managed to attract an excellent staff who are worldly, educated and contented in the north. Because northern governments have more responsibility and wider activities than typical southern ones - e.g., administering indigenous people and substituting for absent private enterprise in carrying out 'essential' tasks - they provide exotic jobs and opportunities rare in the south. The people in salaried jobs bring important skills and up to date ideas into the north. Unfortunately they usually are cycled through quickly, without making or attempting to make an impression on social and political cultures, staying a few years at most, and leaving the fundamental power structures unchanged.

The nature of the settler's life clinging to the margins is well illustrated by social culture. Much northern social culture is ersatz. For instance, a common criterion is how long you have lived in the north. That is, an old hand of 7 years will patronise a mere 18-months resident. (This is often carried over into the aggressive political discourse typical of the settler north. It quite overlooks the 40,000 to 60,000 year presence of Aboriginal or 5000 years of Inuit peoples which should surely make *them* the only real northern experts.)

Furthermore, most settler culture reference points are far away. There is pride in the +40 or -40 degree temperatures endured, even though these are a matter of little comment by the indigenous residents. However, they are a great way to wow your aunt in Sydney or Toronto. The fact that many of those relatives want to be wowed is no excuse. The insistence by many Australians that Darwin must be just an airstrip in the desert littered with beer cans is eternally fortified. If the media do a North Australia piece it will usually be something like the outback pub that confirms stereotypes. Until recent years Toronto media habitually ran only silly news of Vancouver as if to confirm that everyone west of the Rockies was mad. Northern whites also fuel their own myths. Sometimes this is essential - as in tourist promotions. Often, however, it is a sad and defeatist tactic, showing that despite the fact that 'we' are all deprived up here, and that we can drink more, stay up later, and swim more happily in crocodile-infested or ice-strewn waters than southern city-dwellers, we mourn the apparatus of our culture in its mainstream edition.

The development of new hybrid cultures in some places is promising. Greenland's elite share fully in both Inuit and European traditions, and their art is an engaging and successful result of this. By Tromsø's docks in Norway one can enter either a recent social centre where only blonde, straight and crisply pressed Nordics sit languidly and a little sadly in the large empty room, or across the street enter a crowded gregarious department store cafeteria where the lined faces, tobacco from old pipes, heavy outer wear, accents and shuffle of worn Sami boots under the tables speak of a regional culture more enduring than southern fashions. Nevertheless, the national administrator for Finnmark could, in the 1980s, insist on the equal rights of all Norwegians to develop or enjoy the wilderness of the region (whose name means 'Lapland') despite the fact that virtually all of it was used by Reindeer Sami, River Sami and Sea Sami for their livelihoods 'since time immemorial'. It was as if Sami did not exist. A Swedish shop in Ottawa, part of an international chain, had a few facts in large letters on the wall by a map of Sweden. One 'fact' was that Sweden was an ethnically homogeneous country and the next was that the Sami lived in the north! Obviously both could not be correct at the same time. Some Sami artists have had a great deal of bitter fun in recent years with this theme of the invisible or vanished Sami. One of the classic works of cross-cultural relations is Harald Eidheim's *Aspects of the Lappish Minority Situation* which brilliantly explores some of these issues (1971), as do more recent essays (Mathiesen 1990, Thuen 1990).

The insistence by white settlers on *their* law and *their* political institutions - in other words, on their power relative to the indigenous people - was once confident. In recent years it has become less so. Power has not deserted the whites but it requires a new finesse which they and their institutions do not always possess. A northern premier may make much of the message on indigenous issues he is going to deliver to the assembled southern governments, and he may make sure his northern corps of loyal journalists trumpet it. Those attending the conference may nonetheless remember that his outburst was inappropriate to the occasion, confirming many in thinking his northern territory too immature for provincehood or statehood. Inter-governmental relations - i.e., the formal side of northern-national white relations - is only now being studied (Warhurst 1990; Dacks 1990). Too often the white northerners carry inferiority feelings into such forums. So do even large States or Provinces on national margins, of course. In Canada, the Inuit most of the time, and the Dene when angry, have shown themselves more capable of mounting an effective campaign in the national capital than the NWT government. The reasons for this are not clear, although Inuit and Dene have used experienced southern and Ottawa insiders to help whereas the NWT government has often been clumsy. (The current NWT premier, Dennis Patterson, has nonetheless played a very difficult hand as well as it could be played under the very difficult inter-governmental circumstances of recent years, a tribute to both his intelligence and commitment.)

Our interest here in the settlers is their political function. They have traditionally held back northern social change because such change would diminish their power and make them share élite positions and benefits with others such as young indigenous leaders. This is both understandable and human. If they wish to retain power, however, they will have to change both their tactics and their strategy. Circling the wagons is not enough. Young articulate professional whites will have to be recruited for political tasks and as politicians. They will have to develop and learn how to use the smart political weapons of modern times. One unfortunate Canadian provincial premier was sent into battle with the Trudeau government carrying a thick binder of random papers meant to look like a formidable briefing book. His chief aide believed that was all that was needed to impress, and that the chemistry of politicians together in a room would do the rest. Governments in Western countries today do not make decisions on the run, and if they do, they are not governments for very long. Trudeau and his team knew their stuff and the provincial premier emerged empty-handed despite the big political buildup beforehand. The tendency when populist governments are in power, however, is to surround themselves with persons who will not make them feel too stupid and whose value is loyalty more than effectiveness. In North Norway the old Labour dinosaurs, and in the NWT the Right dinosaurs, have been put out to pasture by younger blood and by the voters.

The only effective strategy for white settlers is an historic compromise with the indigenous people. Indigenous organisations should also make use of the expertise and goodwill of many northern whites and build political alliances with them. Such whites think it better to respect the privacy of the indigenous community - only speaking when spoken to, as it were. This white delicacy often surprises indigenous northerners when brought to their attention. In the NWT many whites, often to their own surprise, have now realised that with inexperienced indigenous people making large claims settlements and setting up development projects with the interest, there is a whole new market for white skills - as managers, joint venturers, etc. The new money can create a mini-boom in tough times. A fine report on Alice Springs in 1990 reminded the whites there that despite their habitual complaints about the Aboriginal presence and lifestyle, that presence was the most sure rock of the local economy, a fact of more than passing interest during the national airline pilots strike (Crough *et al*, 1989).

The white northerners' dream of hegemony is a passing fancy. If they really wish to help bring about the future they imagine in glossy brochures and political speeches they will

have to come to terms as equals with the indigenous community. To the White Man, Provincehood in Canada or Statehood in Australia may be the dream of the future (for those few who think about it), while for indigenous peoples it is a land claims-centred political settlement. Land claims have been the indigenous peoples' constitutional process. The regaining of territory, of 'looking after country', and being able to feel free there and make the important daily decisions themselves have become the indigenous counterpart of white dreams of statehood.

Canada was built on accommodations by the French with Indian peoples, by the English accommodation with the Indians through the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Jay Treaty of 1794 and with the French through the Quebec Act, 1774, and later constitutional enactments. While Canadians think in liberal universalist terms as much as do Australians, they at least have some useful precedents for accommodation today. Australia has accommodated racial, cultural and historical diversity through arrangements for the overseas territories, for Torres Strait, and for a number of Aboriginal regions like the Pitjantjatjara lands, Arnhem Land and the Tiwi islands. This tradition should be built on in the cause of national unity and social well-being in outback and northern Australia.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE INDIGENOUS NORTH

The title *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, for Judge Berger's landmark report on northern development reminds us that northern regions are two places at once (Berger 1977). The White Man's frontier of adventure, isolation, difficulty and forbidding nature is the indigenous person's bountiful home. Even today when urban Australians and Canadians may marvel at the Bush Tucker Man or Inuit hardiness through television documentaries, they have little conception about the realities of life without the accoutrements of modern industrial cities.

Some recent books such as Altman's *Hunter-Gatherers Today* (1987), Brody's *Living Arctic* (1987), and Henriksen's *Hunters in the Barrens* (1973) enable the outsider to grasp the essential feelings of the indigenous lifestyle. Such material should be required reading in schools to dispel white mythology and instil respect for our oldest national traditions. It would also remind us that while we have imposed our European sense of order on often reluctant material and insisted that our way is 'the way it is', there is a whole other way of understanding our continent. The indigenous way is older and is also tailor-made to the realities around us, as reflected in the stories, laws, customs and culture of living peoples. (In a later chapter, 'Sustainable Development and the Environment', some implications of this knowledge for management of territory are discussed.)

The indigenous peoples of the northern regions under discussion include Australian Aborigines, a number of peoples who were originally called simply 'Australians' by the British settlers. (Later those settlers specifically excluded them from the category 'Australians' for all civil purposes.) Torres Strait Islanders have often been forgotten in the official names given to indigenous institutions and programs. Inuit were left out of Canadian official thinking until the 1939 Supreme Court reference established that 'Eskimos' were Indians within the meaning of the Constitution (although the federal Indian Act carefully stated that they were not Indians within its meaning). Only the amendments negotiated by Inuit in 1981, becoming law in the amended Constitution from 1982, brought 'Inuit' and 'Métis' into that document where Indians had long resided. Sami in very recent years have gained some significant recognition in Scandinavia.

From the explicitly political viewpoint, the commonly shared features of northern indigenous peoples include:

- relatively small populations occupying relatively or absolutely large areas;
- a collective desire to continue to live *in situ* as a people;
- customary and usually unwritten land, water and resource use conventions with the force of law, but these unrecognised by the governments of the countries which have claimed sovereignty over the north;
- environments and related renewable resource economies which are directly or indirectly threatened by social and economic developments introduced by outside interests or governments;

- social and cultural conventions and stability threatened by influxes of outsiders or by new social patterns imposed by governments (e.g., in social 'betterment' projects);
- a tradition in recent times of paternalistic administration by outsiders rather than indigenous political control;
- lack of indigenous managers in the major economic and political organisations of the region;
- lack of mobility compared with white workers because one can only be fully a Faroese, Dene, Inuk, or Torres Strait Islander in one's home region;
- discrimination against northern people in society and employment by virtue of ethnicity, skin colour, language, or regional identity;
- lack of access to natural resources because these are assumed to be too great for a few northerners, and the lack as well of public services equal to those for national whites because there are 'too few' northerners to justify the costs; and
- a new ethno-politics or regional politics emerging in which the preceding elements are the major data.

The categories by which indigenous people are known are often arbitrary ones imposed by outsiders. 'Indians' only exist in the Americas because Columbus thought that he had found India. Otherwise we would know Dene or groups within the category Dene by their own names. Inuit have begun to apply the one term, 'Inuit', to all of themselves, although most Aleut resist inclusion. Many names result from confusion, such as 'Nootka', something the west coast people of Vancouver Island said to Captain Cook and which he took to be their identity. Other names like 'Eskimo' and 'Slavey' are unflattering terms applied by other indigenous peoples. Pre-white Australia had many peoples, languages and cultures, and complex regulations of trade, marriage and other contacts among them. Early British in Australia talked a sort of baby-talk to indigenous peoples, assuming them very stupid, although often these people were confidently multi-lingual unlike the British themselves. Many pidgins began that way. In short, our categories for and assumptions about indigenous peoples are not only often arrogant, but also wrong. Many of our most caring fellow citizens operate on those words and assumptions to this day, viewing indigenous peoples as an undifferentiated mass of born losers. (In federal Ottawa in the mid-1960s, memos in the Northern Administration Branch often bore a slip by their authors, writing 'indigent' for 'indigenous'.)

There are three categories, not all mutually exclusive, which concern us in northern regions:

- European indigenous peoples (e.g., Faroese);
- non-European indigenous people who form their own governments within traditional territories (e.g., Greenlanders, Indians on reserve); and
- non-European indigenous people who are numerical or sociological minorities in jurisdictions dominated by others (e.g., NT Aborigines today).

The importance of Europeans like Icelanders, Shetlanders and Faroese in our consideration is very great. They help us overcome our ethnocentric tendencies by showing that the political dynamics of northern peoples are rooted in socio-economic realities shared by all northern peoples rather than in the exotica of aboriginality. Of

course, one cannot say absolutely there is no difference. Faroese on the streets of Copenhagen or most Sami in Oslo would be assumed to be ordinary Danes or Norwegians and they speak the national European languages as well as anyone else. At the founding conference of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) in Canada, 1975, there was a daily protest by some or other Latin American delegate that white people (i.e., Sami) were at the table. The cases of Iceland, Shetland and the Faroes are therefore of considerable importance because those peoples have committed themselves to sustainable development, to linguistic and other cultural policies and even to quarantine of outsider work forces in no less tough a manner than that demanded by some northern Australian and Canadian indigenous peoples. Furthermore, those European cases are success stories.

It is possible to make another point. Denmark may be the most civilised country on earth by social, cultural or political standards, and has had a long tradition of progressive liberalism. However, if Denmark were only known through the literature of its Norwegian (until 1815), Faroese, Icelandic (until 1944) and Greenlandic subjects, the picture would be one of an arrogant and insensitive colonial master. The master-subject relationship is 'the dram of eale' in the cross-cultural context. Colonialism and domination carry within themselves the seeds of their own corruption. Likewise, peoples long dominated usually go through some painful processes to stand on their own again. It may be particularly interesting to note that Greece, Portugal and Spain have peacefully acquired liberal democratic government after dictatorship, not to mention parts of Eastern Europe, and to speculate on why this situation should differ from certain other countries. Perhaps the liberal values generally shared by the European intelligentsia and the pan-European humanities are responsible.

The situation of people like the Torres Strait Islanders, the Tiwi, the Pitjantjatjara and others in Australia, or the Inuit of Nunavut and Nunavik in Canada, is favourable to strong regional government. Their population majority status and powers to determine local access enable them to operate even Australian or Canadian systems - on which Nunavut is carefully built, for example - as 'aboriginal' or 'indigenous' self-government. In Greenland which has the powers and budgets of a quasi-national entity or the North Slope Borough which has large revenues one can see how indigenous cultural policy may be developed, and how different it may be from the well-intended measures of previous white administrators. Here the fact that we are talking about 'first world' situations becomes important. In Papua New Guinea a given group may continue its traditional ways without interference, but in 'first world' settings the peoples gaining powers and funds general within 'first world' society can deploy new policies against the assimilationist forces of national development.

Sections of the Australian press affect to believe that British imperialism was more benign than that of other countries, a view not supported by new studies of Indian-white relations in early French Canada (e.g., Jaenen 1986), but the usual problem here is that we take the cultural preferences around which we order our society to be universal and true. In reality they are only our preferences developed from our own tradition. Power attracts flattering imitation, but superficial fads and fashions may not run very deep. In Lapland, graffiti are almost always in English, in both Norwegian and Sami neighbourhoods, and are all on very similar themes. All that may prove is that small boys of a certain school age are given to graffiti writing and showing off their growing mastery of English as a third language.

The desire of peoples to maintain their society and aspects of their traditional culture is quite unrelated to those material and other elements they may import. English literature is littered with serious and joking reference to imported fads, and many canonical English authors like Chaucer were basically translators of Italian or French sources. In North Australia and northern Canada we are discussing populations with an extensive territorial



base and a socio-cultural critical mass which will ensure the survival of distinct societies of indigenous peoples. The use of Aborigines or Inuit make of introduced local government forms, however British in origin, may be quite different in their workings from those intended by its authors.

Non-European peoples who are minorities can, of course, become majorities in confined territories - Indian reserves, regional governments, etc. Australian and Canadian federalism are political systems whose particular virtue and value were seen by their founders to be an accommodation of regional cultures. The various international covenants Australia and Canada have signed commit us to respect the cultural integrity of indigenous peoples, at least by the best available interpretations. What is more, a sort of standard in indigenous policy is being established by the Nordic and North American countries, and this standard includes autonomy and self-government.

The fundamental challenge of indigenous peoples is that they have a claim and a way of life rooted in the lands, resources and environment of Australian and American continents. Despite the legal (and lawful) fictions we have established to deprive them of it, they have persisted in areas where they have not been physically removed. Australians and Canadians spend much time talking about what would be 'good' for these people, but that is not the issue. The issue is that they themselves have the right as distinct communities to decide what they wish to do, at least within the established system of internationally recognised states.

The specific contents of indigenous cultures are described in a vast and apparently limitlessly growing literature. It will be a major step when North Australia and northern Canada are the subject of studies by the indigenous peoples themselves. There is no doubt that our countries will be enriched by the indigenous understanding of the world around us. Of course, indigenous people may not want to stand around in the costumes our tourist bureaux wish to promote, or, as at Friendly Cove, British Columbia, they may reject our overtures until a high price for their complicity in Captain Cook re-enactments is exacted. But none of this matters to the essential political right of indigenous communities to define for themselves, and to keep on defining through mechanisms of self-government, what they wish to do and how they wish to do it. The implicit assimilationist assumptions of much Australian public comment and thinking are heading in precisely the wrong direction. Canada fortunately achieved the impossible some years ago: the unity of the Indian peoples prompted by the issuing in 1969 of an Indian policy white paper which they all rejected utterly. The 'native movement' in Canada was born. Australians are still in the early days of indigenous political activism, however.

## CHAPTER 5

### EXAMPLE 1 - NUNAVUT TERRITORY, CANADA

A most comprehensive new approach to indigenous self-government is the projected Nunavut Territory in Canada. This will be made up of the eastern and northern portions of the existing Northwest Territories, a region approximately one-sixth of Canada's land mass with about 18,000 inhabitants. Over 80% of these inhabitants are Inuit. The Inuit of Nunavut (which means 'our land' in the Inuit language, Inuktitut) presented their proposal for a new government in a new territory as part of their land claims. Ottawa insisted that claims, which benefit only legally defined Inuit (and non-Inuit spouses), and self-government, which affects all residents of the region, be negotiated in quite different processes. (Nevertheless, regional government formed part of the earlier Inuit claims settlement in Quebec.)

Today there are three regional administration districts making up Nunavut, based in Iqaluit (formerly named Frobisher Bay), Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay, and a single land claims settlement also corresponds to Nunavut. In other words, administrative and political realities are already supportive of Nunavut. The Inuit traditional culture across the region shares lifestyle and tradition, as Rasmussen's 1927 account of his travels through makes clear. The Inuvialuit, that is, the Inuit to the west by the Beaufort Sea and Mackenzie River delta, have a somewhat different tradition and many of them descend from 20th Century migrants from Alaska.

As a region Nunavut is unique. There are no roads except within villages. Roads are now being sought by some, but the impact on wildlife, especially caribou migrations, and the local people, could be devastating. The dusty places at the end of the road in the north of the Canadian provinces are not a promising precedent. At present Inuit have some hope of containing their social problems in modern communities serviced by air and the summer sea-lift. There are almost no trees anywhere in Nunavut, except a few stunted specimens in some sheltered hollows by the tree-line west from Hudson Bay. March is the most bitterly cold month inland; the long winters and winter darkness, even though compensated by the midnight sun of spring and summer, make the region attractive to few whites. For Inuit, however, the coasts, seas, rivers and islands of their homeland, and the bird cliffs and tundra inland at certain seasons, provide a rich bounty, although caribou migrations inland sometimes proved so uncertain as to cause starvation. Today the livelihoods of land and sea are threatened by new forces: rapidly growing population in the new centralised communities, poisoning of the food chain and its habitat by the industrial world's pollutants finding their way *via* Gulf Stream and northern rivers into the otherwise pristine arctic basin, and the White Man's development projects like offshore oil exploration, ice-breaking ships, mine wastes and other dumps. Nobody knows yet how serious is the degradation of arctic biological systems but the growing evidence from many fields is grim (CARC 1990a).

The modern politics of Nunavut can be divided into two phases. The first phase from the early 1950s saw Inuit faced with a massive and determined national government attempt to bring them the accoutrements, infrastructure, health and education of the White Man, a condition for which was the concentrating of the people from scattered camps into villages. In the early years this moved slowly and accelerated vastly in the 1960s. A new lifestyle underwritten by social assistance payments of various types, and new life ways in southern-style bungalow houses, were provided by young white English-speaking officials who displaced the elders of the local people in authority. Facility in

English rather than community standing became the qualification for prominence. To this day modern Inuit political leaders in their 30s and 40s debate the qualities of an 'Inuit leader', recognising that some who may be leaders in government eyes may have little or no respect within their own communities back home where elders occupying no formal positions still call the shots. This upsetting of Inuit social and cultural patterns, of livelihoods and decision-making, was a powerful shock to the society and at first it seemed to some officials to be in fatal decline.

The second phase came with the late 1960s when the industrial world's hunt for oil, gas and minerals became frenetic in the arctic. Now the Inuit became profoundly concerned by the White Man's activities on land and sea and sea-ice threatening their wildlife food species and their habitat. The solution was beginning to appear, however, as young Inuit with brains, and a determination to help their people, began to get better schooling - especially in the Churchill, Manitoba, school which many of the future political leaders attended. When the federal government at the end of the 1960s began to fund indigenous organisations to conduct *de facto* political work, or at least to represent Inuit to policy-makers and press, the Inuit could organise, despite high travel costs and then very limited communications facilities. Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (or ITC as it is usually known even by Inuit) was the umbrella organisation for all Canadian Inuit. ITC has always been dominated by Nunavut and has been most effective on Nunavut issues. After one or two false starts the Inuit put forward general proposals for a claims settlement and a new territory with its own government, to be carved out of the NWT. After long years of negotiation, anger, recriminations and a terrible toll on the lives of Inuit claims principals in ulcers and other stress problems, the thick and detailed Nunavut claims settlement was signed in April, 1990, and the final detailed points, e.g., land selections, are being tidied up now for final implementation in the near future. The Nunavut government project is now before the Canadian cabinet. Although the NWT government and Inuit have put a joint proposal with a timetable for implementation to the Prime Minister, as Hamlet said, 'if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.' Inuit are ready and the only question now is how soon a Canadian government will complete the task. As many people have pointed out, action now would send two important and urgently needed messages: one to indigenous Canadians that Ottawa was serious about their interests, and one to the world that, Oka and the end of indigenous-government constitutional talks notwithstanding, Canada is sincerely redressing the centuries-old grievances and meeting the needs of indigenous peoples.

A number of specific points in the Nunavut story need elaboration. On the claims settlement, Inuit have secured government acceptance of their position that the sea and sea-ice are as vital to them as the land, and that on the sea they live, hunt and travel for much of the year while it is frozen. They have also won rights to help regulate and manage 'the offshore', and to benefit from any developments there. Indeed, their use and occupation has provided Canada's case in international law for claiming the waters of the arctic islands as internal.

The other significant novelty of the claims settlement is the creation of several new statutory authorities. With half their members named by Ottawa and the territorial government, and the other half by the Nunavut claims body, these will plan, regulate, manage and control all developments, species and environments within the entire land and sea area of Nunavut. By this means Canada has coincidentally provided a most promising response to the Brundtland Report's call for indigenous resource management in those parts of the world where indigenous peoples still live on their ancient territories (Brundtland 1987, 114-16). Indeed, from the lichen roots (as 'grass roots' are known in Nunavut) the main focus of the Nunavut claim has always been a demand that the cavalier incursions and activities by the White Man be stopped and that responsible control of species and environment be returned to the Inuit themselves. A recent book gives even the most ignorant reader a powerful insight into what the Inuit and northern

Indian worlds feel like from the inside, and how those people relate to the arctic and sub-arctic environments (Brody 1987).

The political and constitutional development of Nunavut is no less innovative. Although Canada like Australia has a constitutional past of leadership-driven constitutional creation and amendment, Inuit have pioneered work in 'popular' (i.e., 'of the people') constitution-making. After a 1982 plebiscite conducted by the NWT government when the eastern half of the NWT voted 4-1 for Nunavut in a very high voter turnout, the Nunavut Constitutional Forum (NCF) was created. NCF was made up of Inuit and white NWT cabinet ministers from Nunavut and the heads of the main Inuit political associations. Through a series of public discussions, with TV, radio and print media present, NCF discussed the main issues for a Nunavut government. The public was virtually a party at the table, thanks to the extensive coverage. A number of background studies and a history were written (Jull 1983a), and at a large and intense week-long workshop in March 1983 a comprehensive proposal, *Building Nunavut*, was prepared (NCF 1983). Tabled in the NWT legislature in May, it was later published in glossy 4-language format and taken to the communities, along with other relevant materials. The NCF visited every Inuit community in the NWT and after brief initial presentations, hours of question and answer followed. The lengthy meetings were attended by virtually the entire adult population, except in the largest community, Iqaluit, where a poor turnout but more full news coverage occurred. In September 1985 a new version of *Building Nunavut* was compiled from the many suggestions and further studies, workshops and other input (NCF 1985). This was adopted unanimously at a constitutional conference which included all the elected community, Inuit organisation, regional council and NWT legislature Inuit throughout the region. (There has never been, before or since, such a complete NWT Inuit political gathering and one can only regret that the opportunity provided did not see a broader agenda.)

Division of the NWT to create an eastern Inuit territory was proposed by both Conservative and Liberal governments in Ottawa in the early 1960s. There was even a coat of arms drawn up. Minority government wrangling lost that chance. The Inuit have had support from all parties and successive governments in Ottawa to create Nunavut today. However, a dispute between Inuit and Dene/Métis about the siting of the western boundary of Nunavut, and some (largely unwarranted) beliefs that a united NWT might better position some Nunavut small businesses to benefit from future Beaufort Sea oil and gas development, have slowed things down. Also, the uncertainty of the Inuvialuit has been a problem: wanting to enjoy the numbers of all Inuit in a united NWT but fearful of becoming a peripheral region in Nunavut. It has often seemed that the 'bottom line' for the Inuvialuit is a strong regional government of their own. The federal government which alone can finalise any boundary and pass the Act creating Nunavut has also lain quiet, thereby encouraging by default a handful of political entrepreneurs to keep trying to change the boundary line to take in such-and-such a mineral deposit or to suit some other bright idea. The Inuit commitment to Nunavut is not going to go away, and both recent Liberal and Conservative governments, Canada's only two national governing parties to date, have repeatedly pledged themselves to it.

Sometimes visitors to the NWT capital, Yellowknife, are told that 'Nunavut is dead', that it will not happen. Many researchers and the press do go to Yellowknife, so they sometimes are deceived by such talk. Nunavut has always been an eastern Inuit concept, a reaction to the Yellowknife government in part, and a reclaiming of the direct relationship Inuit had with Ottawa until the beginning of the 1970s. The Nunavut plebiscite vote in Yellowknife in 1982 had an extremely low turnout, indicating a lack of interest in whether the NWT was divided or not. The plebiscite was so decisive in the east, however, that both NWT and federal governments formally adopted division of the NWT as their policy. Many officials and others in Yellowknife and the towns of the western NWT want Nunavut now in order to end uncertainty which has hamstrung

government and business alike. The Dene and Métis of the western NWT also voted for Nunavut in the plebiscite because they saw a shakeup and breakup of existing political institutions as the only way they would ever succeed in moving the White Man to constitutional reform. (In 1985, federal northern affairs minister Crombie in a public speech stressed that a constitution for the western territory comprising the non-Nunavut parts of the NWT must include provisions to accommodate the culture, needs and rights of the Dene and Métis.)

Land claims settlements are now automatically constitutional documents in Canada, thanks to national constitutional amendments achieved by Inuit. The special rights they confer are not vulnerable to other constitutional provisions on civil rights. For instance, a white cannot appeal against the right of an Inuk or Indian to fish when or where he, the white, cannot. Both the claims settlement with its many social, economic and financial components, in addition to the public bodies it creates, and the Nunavut Act providing the constitution of Nunavut, will be federal legislation. They cannot be overturned by hypothetical white majorities in the north. Although northern whites, in the western NWT particularly, at first opposed land claims settlements, they came to see that only such federally sponsored settlements would bring the indigenous people to the negotiation table at all. The federal government was the 'honest broker' because northern whites could never be trusted, at least in Inuit and Dene/Métis eyes. Federal power and action in respect of indigenous people is no longer seen solely as divisive, but by more whites as something which enables whites and indigenous people to overcome social, cultural, economic and other divisions which exist in fact (if not in theory). This is a matter which Australians might usefully consider in respect of their own north.

The significance of Nunavut goes beyond its purely local reality. During the formal and informal constitutional talks between Canada's governments and the indigenous peoples from 1978 to 1987 there was great interest in Nunavut by all governments. It became something of a model and in his opening speech at a national constitutional conference Prime Minister Trudeau recommended it as an ideal one for Canadian indigenous peoples. He saw it as far superior to tiny sovereign states like those in Europe which, he said, have little real power except to issue colourful postage stamps. Many people overseas also showed interest in Nunavut, and it became a symbol of the indigenous future. Sami artist Hans Ragnar Mathisen, overflying Canada and looking out at the arctic night on his way to an indigenous peoples' conference in Australia, made a beautiful woodcut of Nunavut as a star being born. Canada's Inuit leaders presented this to Prime Minister Trudeau on his retirement in 1984.

The NWT has been a residual zone of Canada from which territories (Yukon) and provinces have been progressively carved. The rump remaining today, 34% of all Canada's land area, has no inherent logic. The Inuit were never asked if they wished to be part of it and their interests have centred first in their own territory and next in Ottawa. The western and eastern NWT were administered utterly separately until the NWT government took over the old Arctic Administration in the early 1970s. Inuit are not 'separating' in any sense, they are just trying to maintain what they have grown used to. Their needs, their marine orientation, their geographic and linguistic and cultural unity, and their aspirations in no way coincide with the forest lands, the rivers or lakes of the western Mackenzie River valley. For many years the Inuit have shown themselves exemplary democrats - regularly having the highest voter turnouts in Canada, sitting in endless discussions and meetings about issues of the day, deciding by consensus, and taking over the services and administration of their communities. Their Nunavut government project has been much more profoundly canvassed than any national, provincial or territorial constitution in Canada ever has been. Detailed Inuit and government preparation for Nunavut has gone on for years. A final, firm commitment, implementation timetable and implementation task force for Nunavut are now needed. Canada has nothing to lose and a great deal to gain. (Meanwhile, a recent round table

discussion on Nunavut among all the major interests provides a unique insight into practical nation-building in action, see CARC 1990b.)

## CHAPTER 6

### EXAMPLE 2 - NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA

The Northern Territory (NT) today has some 150,000 people of whom about 22% are Aboriginal. This is not the whole story: there is tremendous transience among the non-Aboriginal group to an extent which cannot be measured because so many come and go between 5-yearly censuses. The NT has two principal regions for most purposes, the Top End with Darwin, population 73,000, as its hub, and the Centre with Alice Springs, a town of 30,000. Population statistics have become hostage to NT politics, and an innocent human geographer may suddenly find himself in a storm if he cites figures showing net out-migration. It has become booster dogma that the population is growing and that white settlers are more permanent, whatever the statistics.

The NT has been divided into two Aboriginal regions for recent administrative purposes. In the Top End the Northern Land Council is the body created by federal legislation to look after Aboriginal interests, while offshore the Tiwi islands - Bathurst and Melville - have their own Tiwi Land Council. In the Centre the Central Land Council fills the same role. In Alice Springs, also, is the Pitjantjatjara Council looking after the interests and lands of the Pitjantjatjara whose lands adjoin each other across NT, South Australia and Western Australia borders (Toyne and Vachon 1984). In this volume such outback regions are considered as 'northern' for all practical purposes. The approximately 20 Aboriginal 'town camps' around the perimeter of Alice Springs are united in the Tangentyere Council, another unique organisation - an Aboriginal government in effect - carrying out many basic and other services. Although some Alice Springs voices have dismissed the town camps as temporary eyesores, Tangentyere's findings have been that they are more stable populations than the white community in Alice Springs, that some are peaceful suburban areas and that in any case the Aboriginal economy provides Alice Springs with a stable third of its cash income (Crough *et al.*, 1989). This may be no small consideration for the whites who learned during the 1989 airline pilots' strike just how vulnerable the town economy could be. Darwin and Alice Springs are very different places for Aboriginal people. Darwin is a relatively tolerant multi-racial city full of Europeans and Asians from many lands and with a high degree of intermingling. Here the Aboriginals can get along more easily than in Alice Springs, by their own report. As one woman said, musing on the ambiguous treatment of mixed-blood people which she experienced in the two NT centres, 'In Alice Springs you were outcast, and you knew it!' (personal communication).

There are two separate NT histories, although a third one on the communities like the Chinese and the various ups and downs they have suffered makes affecting reading (Jones 1990). For the indigenous people, the various cultures and language groups lumped together under the term Aborigines, some of them like the Tiwi and certain desert people have been relatively less disturbed than others because the White Man did not want their lands. Other groups suffered varying degrees of displacement and genocide (Downing 1988). When Australia brought in legislation for the prosecution of war crimes committed in other countries, some Aborigines thought it ironic that such crimes, clearly supported and often carried out by government authorities in outback Australia in the same period as the rise of the Nazis in Germany, went discreetly ignored. Some authors have shown that some groups have coped better than is often realised by means of the various survival strategies open to them (Peterson 1985). None of which is to underestimate the appalling treatment meted out in northern and outback Australia. Downing finds that attitudes have changed little among important sections of the NT public since the days of physical extermination (Downing 1988, 45).

For the whites, northern development has been a succession of illusions of the type common in all northern frontiers. Like Fort Prince of Wales at Churchill, Manitoba, the British established short-lived posts on the Australian north coast, most efficient at killing their white inhabitants but of little strategic, economic or developmental significance. Transport and communications have been critical factors in shaping northern demography and development (Wade-Marshall 1991) just as they were in Canada. The lure of gold was another factor, and to this day there are many who overlook the disappointments of past cultivation and pastoral industries to make claims for a fine agricultural future, even one assisted by the Greenhouse Effect. The extreme climate has not been kind, with good years followed by long droughts, and flash floods at other times from sudden rain proving no more helpful to whites in the country. Of course the Aborigines have managed quite well, and whatever the problem of fattening cattle, kangaroos provide lean and sure meat supplies regardless. The white economy has been one of trial and error. That boom-and-bust cycle, together with dicey white-Aboriginal relations, has come to represent the character of the north. This is reflected in the great Australian novel of life in the Top End, *Capricornia*, by Xavier Herbert (1938).

Today the situation is different. Public spending in one or other form provides stable economic underpinning, although as in the NWT *laissez-faire* and free enterprise are the official household gods. It is assumed that because Darwin is closer to Asian population centres than to the urban south-east of Australia, prospects for major developments are inevitable. The inevitable has had a way of not turning up, however, and a major foray into the market through a Darwin 'trade development zone' to attract Asian manufacturers turned into an unhappy TV serial farce in 1990. Offshore oil exploration in the Timor Gap is another hope, and one which seems to have drawn little of the concern or scrutiny that such projects have done in the northern hemisphere.

The NT elections since territorial 'self-government' in 1978 have been the subject of an unparalleled series of studies by academics Loveday and Jaensch. The 1990 election saw the 'premier' send a letter to voters insisting that Aboriginal rights and public services were the real issue of the election, and that these must be taken over and placed in the hands of the NT government (Perron 1990). The NT handling of such issues will be a critical factor in any future constitutional arrangements. There are those who criticise the NT Labor opposition for being too closely linked with the Aborigines but there are others who say Labor just takes the black vote for granted and offers little in return. There is little evidence of much public interest in the issue of Statehood for the NT, although it is a major interest of politicians and their officials who would be the direct beneficiaries. The politics of 'devolution' and 'division' of the NWT in Canada (Jull 1988b; Dacks 1990) make for very interesting comparisons (Dacks 1990; Loveday 1991). As in the NWT also, some indigenous leaders have begun to discuss an essentially Aboriginal territorial government separate from the NT (personal communication).

At present the Aborigines own 35% of the NT land surface and may end up with as much as 50% when the claims process is complete. Many of these lands are simply those unwanted by the White Man to date. The Aborigines have a very blunt instrument: they have some land and not much else to call their own. That is all they can bargain with. The rhetoric of the NT government on this subject is usually shrill. The situation of Alaska with its divided land and resource jurisdictions comes to mind. But memories of past suffering are more fresh and raw among NT Aborigines. A recent analysis of census statistics shows that although governments often assume the Aboriginal population is heading towards larger places, a trend to disperse in smaller units and out-stations is underway. Major reasons may be a desire to get out from under white administrative control, to get away from problem-prone, violent and overcrowded centres, and to 'return to country' for many reasons cultural and personal.



The NT government has often complained that federal policy creates division in society. It may be more realistic to say that the division already exists, by any measure - social statistics, settlement areas, etc. A simplistic notion of uniformity is often cited as 'equality', although some are notably more equal than others: northern settler whites are on top and, not surprisingly, want to remain so. The sort of political settlement they seek would confirm their advantage and undermine what rights the Aborigines have painfully and belatedly acquired. It is fairly safe to say that such a settlement is unlikely. Even prominent 'conservative' politicians from Canberra tread warily when they visit their NT government allies. Any apparent 'sell-out' of NT Aboriginal interests would provoke national and especially international uproar. It could be argued that any transfer of power respecting Aboriginal lands to the care of a government they mistrust would require, by international norms of reasonableness, at least a supporting plebiscite vote by the Aborigines in question. Even an observer as supportive of the current NT government as Heatley acknowledges that 'there is little doubt that the [land] councils' understanding of its intentions is valid', i.e. intentions 'erode' Aboriginal organisational power in politics (Heatley 1991, 18).

In the NT as in other northern regions, it is the indigenous ethno-political movements which actively or passively (that is, by negative sanction) dominate constitutional and political possibilities. There appear to be three main scenarios for the NT:

- creation of one or more Aboriginal state- or territory-like governments based on Aboriginal land;
- creation of a strong Aboriginal governmental authority within the NT and legally entrenched in a future NT constitution passed by the Australian parliament; and
- creation of unique indigenous self-governing bodies on NT Aboriginal land under federal legislation with financial resources not dependent on Darwin.

The problem is simple, even if solutions seem not to be. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the NT have feelings of minority status, some sense of grievance about powerlessness. As we will see in the case of Quebec, when an indigenous minority is held hostage to the minority feelings of the population among whom they live, resolution is not easy. At least in Australia the national government retains the capacity to broker NT solutions between the two sides. Because of the requirement of section 121 of the Australian constitution, that

*The Parliament may admit to the Commonwealth or establish new States, and may upon such admission or establishment make or impose such terms and conditions, including the extent of representation in either House of the Parliament, as it thinks fit[.]*

an NT constitution will have to be negotiated with Canberra. The Hawke government has made explicit as recently as November 1990 that it has no intention of turning over Aboriginal land rights to the present NT government, even within the context of the general inter-governmental relations and constitutional reform underway, because it 'would be inconsistent with its [Canberra's] special responsibility for Aborigines and would be most unlikely to receive their support' (NTG 1990). Of course, land rights could become a bargaining chip later in that process, just as the Canadian prime minister signed away aboriginal rights in November 1981 (although they were retrieved by the vehemence of indigenous protest and white public support across the country in succeeding weeks).

The NT government faces the prospect of being kings of shreds and patches, with much of 'their' territory beyond their control, unless and until they decide that a policy of racial reconciliation is preferable to confrontation. Unless the Aboriginal peoples feel confident and safe, with some rights recognised in law, they will not accept any purely NT government system. In the Canadian territories the public helped by kicking out intransigent parties and factions whose resistance to aboriginal rights was damaging social peace and delaying economic development.

The prospects are not entirely gloomy. A useful focus for quiet work has been the special NT legislature committee on constitutional development. A former premier, now a minister, has a considerable vision for constitutional progress and a constitution matching a unique Territory with a unique social and cultural mix, while the new Leader of the Opposition, has no less interest in precedents and possibilities (Steve Hatton, personal communication 1990 and Brian Ede, personal communication 1988, respectively). Their reports, and one which the NT government itself quietly submitted to Canberra hinting at binding itself on land rights in a future constitution, may at least show a moderate middle in the slanging (NTG 1989, 39-40). Certainly it is on such prospects that any serious constitutional progress will have to build.

The security which NT Aboriginal people will increasingly seek is made up of self-government as well as the autonomy they now have in some areas. If something like the NWT's misnamed 'Unity Committee' of the legislature went out to investigate the NT grass roots it would no doubt find, as happened in the NWT, that the indigenous people did not accept the legitimacy of the territorial government. It seems unlikely that Aborigines will change their mind while white politicians shout at them. Constitutional development requires consensus. In time the settler community of the NT may decide that only the federal government has the moral authority and credibility with Aborigines to broker a political settlement. As a former NT premier recently said when announcing his departure from the north, constitutional development will elude the NT government despite all its rhetoric on the subject until a major change in attitudes towards the Aboriginal people takes place ('Tuxy calls it a day', *NT News*, February 10, 1991).

## CHAPTER 7

### EXAMPLE 3 - NORTHERN QUEBEC, CANADA

Northern Quebec was the last region of the Inuit north in Canada to see the Thule migration absorb or replace the preceding Dorsets. Around the end of the Middle Ages c. 1500 AD they settled the coasts of Ungava Bay, Hudson Strait and the east coast of Hudson Bay. This is the territory which they today have come to call Nunavik. Their lifestyles are similar to those of Nunavut Inuit across Hudson Strait and Hudson Bay. They are closely related to the Thule people of Northern Labrador (although not to the Dorset Inuit whom the Norse first met in Labrador and Newfoundland c. 1000 AD).

In historic times the Quebec Inuit had contact with white traders and missionaries who were English-speaking. Not until the 1960s did Quebec really 'discover' the north, and the minister to do so, René Lévesque, later the independentist party leader and premier, was distressed to find the north an Anglo-affiliated enclave. Then began a weary time when Inuit became pawns in the chess game of Quebec and Ottawa, with federal services reduced or withdrawn, and promised Quebec services sometimes lost to Quebec's tight budgets. The explosion of talents and national (i.e., Quebec) activities from 1960, known as the Quiet Revolution, was so great that a few arctic coastal villages were easily forgotten. At a time when NWT Inuit communities were seeing large infusions of housing, services and infrastructure, Quebec Inuit who visited them could not help but notice the growing disparity.

The Quebec Liberal government of Robert Bourassa in the early 1970s saw the future in terms of hydro-electric power development. The highlands of north-central Quebec are where Eastern Canada's Ice Ages begin. In balmier times they dump water *via* fast rivers in all directions to reach the sea eventually. Harnessing this power behind colossal dams would transform Quebec into a modern industrial giant, with surpluses feeding the energy-starved USA. Premier Bourassa even went so far as to say that any water not driving a turbine was wasted. All of this would, of course, change drastically the river systems, landscapes and wildlife habitat of a vast region, one where almost the only inhabitants were Naskapi Indians in the east, Cree Indians in the west, and Inuit in the west and north. It could also have unforeseen consequences for the environment of eastern North America.

The Inuit and Cree forced Quebec to the negotiating table through a court injunction halting work on the project. The federal statute transferring the north to Quebec in 1912 had a clause requiring settlement of outstanding indigenous rights. This provided the legal basis for the indigenous court action. It may again be important. While Quebec considers separating from Canada in the months and years ahead to become a sovereign or *de facto* sovereign republic, some indigenous people may well wish to remain with Canada (just as Shetland seeks home rule from London whenever Scotland seeks independence). Various politicians and authorities have even speculated that the 1912 federal Act could be repealed and northern Quebec revert to Canada in the event of Quebec independence. In any case, the 1980 Quebec referendum on sovereignty saw the Inuit vote more overwhelmingly for Canada than even the symbolic Anglo *bête noire* neighbourhood of Quebec separatists, Westmount in Montreal. Although virtually every Inuk voted for Canada, some Inuit leaders were upset that *anyone* in their communities voted for Quebec. Now as then the issue may be one which the cool regional Inuit leadership cannot entirely control in the face of determined demands for action from the villages.

The Inuit and Crees negotiated the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, signed in 1975. This provided the 15 Inuit villages with their community lands, other lands under their control, and rights to use all lands and waters for their livelihoods. (There are no other communities in the Inuit north so this means a near-exclusive right.) In its practical workings the Environment Quality Commission has been particularly successful and deserves Australian and wider Canadian study. There were elaborate procedures provided for remedy when further phases of the hydro-electric power project proceeded, and these have worked. The Agreement provided many other elements. Social service, health, school and environment bodies were created and Inuit now run them with some white help. Large capital funds were provided as compensation for the White Man's impact, the interest of which is to be used to create employment and economic opportunities, and to fund the collective Inuit entity, Makivik, the formal political and legal Inuit entity. The Kativik Regional Government, making up the 15 villages and a regional entity, was also created, so there became two Inuit representative bodies. With Kativik short of funds from budget-squeezed Quebec, Makivik became the more prominent body thanks to its ability to hire high-calibre and well-paid staff. However, instead of doing much high-flying - local griping to the contrary - Makivik has spent most of its money and energy trying to establish some locally useful and labour-intensive enterprises in the villages and to prod federal and Quebec governments into implementing the Agreement in practice.

Being the first land claims agreement in Canada had its problems. The Inuit were attacked by other indigenous groups for 'selling out', but Inuit leaders responded that with major development beginning in the headwaters of their territories they had to get protection, quickly. They also said that while the Agreement was far from perfect it would provide 'the tools', in leader Charlie Watt's habitual phrase, necessary for them to construct a promising future. In light of the extent of abuse they received, one can appreciate the pleasure they later took in arriving leisurely in their executive aircraft at meetings with other indigenous groups, and their magnanimity in picking up the tab in bar or restaurant. The other difficulty of coming first was that governments had no machinery to implement the novel Agreement, and officials were often confused as to their responsibilities. Inuit seemed expected to pay for services which were a matter of right to other Canadians. Makivik has often had to fight tooth and nail to get the basics for them.

A new range of problems opened. The most persistent and trying was how to fuel an economic mini-boom in a region where even experienced white businessmen saw no attractive prospects. The regional airline was an obvious and urgent service, but with deplorable airstrips, planes were wrecked and uneconomical planes used for safety reasons. The white staff who had been loyal for many years were sometimes asked to become managers overnight, and many failed, but the Inuit thought it better to have persons of known integrity than unknown hot-shots handling their money and future.

The confidence of a French-speaking Quebec expanding to fill all the powers and all the space of its territory also made Inuit feel threatened. They had understood the Agreement to be a means for the transfer to themselves of federal powers and creation of a unified service delivery system under their control. This has been the federal policy across Canada and in other provinces it seems to proceed well. However, Quebec has naturally wanted to develop northern expertise rather than leave the north to Anglo interlopers. Nationalist and *dirigiste* governments wanted to throw off the bad old days when Anglo businessmen could call the shots in Quebec and a supine clergy would collude in Anglo power. It was also an axiom of Quebec political thinking that direct federal links to municipal or regional governments were intolerable. Inuit have felt cheated, but Ottawa was apparently not prepared to get into a brawl with Quebec over the Inuit north. (Prime Minister Clark fretted about what was happening to the Inuit as a

result of the federal-provincial stand-off, but was not in power long enough to pursue the matter.)

The Quebec Inuit today number about 6000 people living in 15 villages and with a number of formal and informal bodies dealing with almost the same range of subjects as a Canadian provincial government. Their relations with Quebec have greatly improved thanks to their good judgment in promoting capable Francophone lawyers and officials into key places and developing a better working understanding of the Quebec and Francophone political culture. French is now taught in Northern Quebec schools and at least that one legacy of federal administration, English speech as the second language after Inuktitut, will soon be a handicap no longer. A variety of ambitious as well as more modest economic activities are developing. These are based on known regional strengths and renewable resources. Makivik has created a unique research department in which white academics and Inuit staff work and learn together in environmental and biological (land, sea and river) sciences, as well as some developmental and social work. So highly regarded is this team that they have been able to fund much of their own work through lucrative contracts for research from federal and provincial governments among others. This department may be Makivik's greatest political and public relations asset in the years ahead, although there are always voices wanting to cut back an activity that is not labelled Development with a capital D.

Some years ago one of the younger Inuit leaders came back spellbound from a meeting with the chief executive officer of a major company. He had seen the large desk without a paper on it, and imagined that the powerful in white society did nothing but greet visitors and practise arts of hospitality. Swept out of sight were the many papers, the ulcer medication, failed marriages, heart attacks, nervous breakdowns, children on drugs, problem drinking, and all the other things we have come to expect behind the easy smile of the modern executive. Now, sadly, the Quebec Inuit leaders themselves have come to know the cost of success.

Quebec Inuit have accomplished so much because they are tough. They have never been able to depend on government generosity, promises of such notwithstanding. They have also been good judges of character and have assembled a capable team of white staff who have given them that edge which can out-manoeuvre governments mired in cumbersome procedures and long lines of decision-making. Charlie Watt has proven a strong leader who gets things done, and the sort of man who is not easily deterred. He is so confident that he never bears a grudge, and his ability to get on with the job is legendary. In spite of that, the death of Mark R. Gordon in 1989, the young spark-plug of the Inuit movement in Canada, was a heavy and tragic loss. Also, the absorption of Mary Simon in international work as President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference has meant that Watt has lost his two closest long-standing fellow workers. Charlie Watt has his own duties now as a lifetime member of the Senate of Canada. Makivik's first 15 years have been ones of phenomenal success, and the Inuit have burned out more of their white staff than of themselves. It is nonetheless a very difficult situation to maintain.

Makivik has illustrated the problems of indigenous quasi-governmental bodies clearly. It was created as an economic development agency; a body charged with the overall socio-cultural well-being of Inuit; and a political representative. If economic or financial criteria slip on one or other project governments are quick to criticise. When those criteria lead the executive to decide against a social or community project they are attacked by others for being cold, heartless or sell-outs to capitalism. The social science community in Francophone Quebec has been largely hostile to Makivik so that many of their academic helpers have been Anglophone, and McGill University in particular has provided expertise.

The question of Quebec's future inside or outside modern Canada may create new problems for Inuit. 'Canada' was an Indian word used in the St. Lawrence Valley, adopted by the French for the country long before the English digested it. Makivik has been leading a movement of Inuit organisations in Northern Quebec to consolidate Inuit agencies and boards and regional government into a new unified system with a single elected legislature and a portfolio system of responsibilities. This would make all the bodies more accountable, would save time and energy and scarce executives, and would theoretically reduce overlap and save money. Now that Premier Bourassa has come back from the political wilderness and again leads the government, new fountains of economic youth are seen in the Quebec highland rivers. Not content merely with hydro-electric power, he has suggested damming the bottom of Hudson Bay, creating a vast reservoir which would coincidentally wipe out thousands of square miles of Quebec and Ontario (and do nobody knows what to continental weather!). From this lake, water would be sent in a huge canal to the thirsty USA. Inuit may be prepared to look at the hydro dams in the first part of this scenario if there are sufficient remedial measures, funds and powers for their Nunavik government available as well. Between constitutional uncertainties and water visions they will certainly need all the levers they can find.

## CHAPTER 8

### EXAMPLE 4 - TORRES STRAIT, AUSTRALIA

At the north-east corner of Australia is the Torres Strait, a maze of reefs and islands, where the 'other' indigenous people of Australia live, the Melanesian Torres Strait Islanders. The Islanders have often felt neglected by Australian governments and media who seem to pay more attention to the Aborigines. Until recently a very paternalistic administration by the Queensland government seemed as much designed to keep the Islanders quiet and out of sight as anything else. Indigenous matters were a State rather than federal responsibility until a national referendum in 1967, although many Australians complain today that the national authorities have tiptoed away from the strength of national commitment to indigenous peoples shown during the Whitlam (Labor) and Fraser (Liberal/National coalition) governments.

The Islanders have as colourful a recent history as it is possible to have, and now a fine trilogy of books makes the region accessible (Beckett 1987, Singe 1989, Babbage 1990). Inhabiting a treacherous strait like the Inuit of Nunavut, their past relations with whites passing through were sometimes violent. Then came the missionaries and a new power structure. Also, an international pearl shell industry in the Strait based on Thursday Island, the regional 'capital', made that island a large, volatile and multinational place for many years, despite its pleasant sleepiness today. This is the South-East Asia of Conrad and Maugham, and indeed Maugham's hotel guest room is still there. The Islanders today number some 6000 in the Strait communities, while some 8500 more live and work farther south, mostly in Queensland, where they have a good reputation as workers.

The Second World War proved as significant as the advent of the white world earlier. That war lapped on the shores of Torres Strait, and close by the Americans and Australians stopped Japan in its outward expansion at the Battle of the Coral Sea. Many Islanders served in the forces, albeit at various disadvantages of pay and conditions compared with the white Australians. The war gave Islanders two most important things: pride in their support for fighting a powerful enemy as equals of whites, and a new awareness of themselves and their human rights born of the egalitarian conditions of military life among typically gregarious and generous white Australians. Afterwards many did not settle very happily back into the firm Indian reserve-like world of Queensland paternalism. The move to the mainland towns for work was both a symptom and a cause of change, and strengthened further the pride of people in their full humanity, no longer mere wards of government. It was only with the Labor party platform of 1989 and the December 1989 Labor victory in Queensland after the long National party reign that major indigenous policy reform prospects have come to Queensland. The new premier was himself once a lawyer working for indigenous people.

In early 1988 the Island Co-ordinating Council (ICC) announced that it would work towards a separate political identity from Australia (Kehoe-Forutan 1988). At the beginning of the bicentenary year of white settlement, this move provoked predictable cries on the Right but a more moderate response by the conservative Queensland Premier and national Prime Minister. A federal inter-departmental committee was established and various promising recommendations made in its public report (Interdepartmental Committee 1988).

The Torres Strait enjoys one of the richest areas of marine life on earth. The Islanders consume very large amounts of locally caught fish and shellfish, as well as the ceremonial foods of dugong (sea-cow) and turtle. The commercial fisheries are almost

entirely run by outsiders. Now there are new mines at the headwaters of rivers in Papua which send effluent down the Fly River into the Strait. Fears and rumours as much as scientific evidence abound as to the possible effects of this, and the Australian Prime Minister has established a Torres Strait Baseline Study to get better data. The coordinator is an anthropologist and is making sure the human side is to the fore. At a week-long conference in late 1990 where scientists, social scientists and officials from Australia, Queensland, Papua New Guinea and Western Province (PNG) met, as well as Islanders and coastal Papuan Kiwai, the distance between social and natural science worlds seemed great.

Like Inuit in Quebec held hostage to tense Ottawa-Quebec relations, Islanders in the view of some of their leaders are captive to Australian post-colonial relations with Papua New Guinea. The importance of the PNG mines in the revenue picture of that country, especially now that Bougainville is shut down, is critical. Nevertheless, a remarkable international treaty between the two countries has the traditional inhabitants at its centre. With time the treaty may prove a valuable and workable framework for social progress and environmental management in the region. The mismatch in power and resources, not to mention aspirations, of the Islanders and Papuans *vis-à-vis* the government members has been a concern of those peoples to date.

Not all the Torres Strait communities are on the Islands. Eco-refugees from flooded islands live at two locations on the Cape York Peninsula nearby. This is just one of the several difficult problems which must be addressed through land claims and regional self-government processes. For now the ICC is not a regional government but a representative body for the 18 individual Island councils. Although it has a high level of spokespersonship and professionalism, it has very limited means. At a workshop in May 1990 the Island council heads and others from their islands spent several days studying the problems they faced. They concluded that they needed more powers than at present and rights to their islands and home reefs. They have also sought access to employment and economic development means with the assistance of some pointed and not always optimistic recent studies (Lea, Stanley & Phibbs 1990; Arthur & McGrath 1990). Although the region is beautiful, matters like the shortage of fresh water, etc., pose practical limits on even tourism development. The Islanders hope that the hiring of consultants with suitable expertise may help them find new income sources.

Although the Torres Shire, the essentially non-Islander public authority on Thursday Island, has been more nominal than active, managed by its administrator, the fact remains that the central community of the Strait is outside the power of the ICC which represents the outer islands and Islanders generally. As well, the federal and Queensland governments have so many agencies and departments on Thursday Islands that official conflict and overlap are endemic (Kehoe-Forutan 1990).

Despite the fact that many white Australians choose to believe that their political tradition is monolithic, there are several Australian Territories, each with unique political and administrative institutions tailor-made to unique historical and social circumstances. The ICC has also been interested in the relationship between the Cook Islands and New Zealand. There is no reason in principle why Australia should not develop with the Islanders an appropriate regional government. The ICC, for its part, has indicated that it is ready to embrace the non-Islander community in a new regional government.

The Islanders are proud Australians, and were appalled when, in the development of the post-colonial relationship between PNG and Australia, the Australian government considered assigning some of them to PNG. This set off alarm bells for them and has played no small part in the background insecurity of the self-government movement. During the workshop on self-government mentioned earlier, some old Australian white veterans visiting Thursday Island blundered into the meeting hall. The Islander leaders



spontaneously and warmly made these somewhat confused old gentlemen feel at home, and took pains to help them relive their proud and distant memories. The Islanders were also proud of their own role in serving under such elders in the war. This was not a tableau of separatism.

The Islanders today have major problems with health services and personal health conditions, with employment and development, with access to and protection of the rich fishing grounds which are their ancient territory, and with mines and other dangerous development prospects which threaten their future. They also have a great deal of personal and community experience of local and regional politics. The remote control style of administration embodied by the many federal and Queensland governments would be better replaced by an indigenous regional authority.

The elements which should be encompassed by a new arrangement include island and reef rights, local government, a regional government with real power and funds, a development agency or board (as is already being considered), and a cultural program and centre (already being considered in part). A regional 'sustainable development' strategy in which Islanders with federal and State governments could develop a coherent management system to safeguard the Strait and its productivity, and to identify community and regional development prospects consistent with it, is also needed. Canberra and Brisbane have shown that they are ready to put programs and personnel into the Strait. All the hard choices have been made. What is lacking is a regional focus. An Islander-run regional government should be that focus. As in northern Canada, governments would find that there are no territory managers or eco-system experts like the indigenous people.

Although Australians, like Canadians, generally think of rights in terms of uniformity of application as much as equality of social opportunity, there are other useful traditions. For instance, a recent report by a federal Parliamentary standing committee in Canberra provides an intelligent discussion of the variety and special needs of Australia's island territories (House of Representatives 1991b). Christmas Island, Cocos (Keeling) Island, and Norfolk Island each has a different system rooted in the unique history and cultural character of each place. Two of the island territories have non-European populations as important elements of Territory society. The main difference between those islands and the Torres Strait is that Torres Strait has had an indigenous population all along, whereas the other islands have been settled from a variety of places in historical times. Such a fact makes the case of the Torres Strait significantly stronger. The report stresses that local culture and needs must be sensitively accommodated, and that residents must have equal rights, before carefully pointing out that equality does not mean uniformity (section 4.11.1). It is also urged that comprehensive environmental régimes be established with the help of the federal National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, quoting evidence that

*...one of the areas in which the ...Act is regarded very much as a state-of-the-art piece of legislation worldwide is that it also caters for traditional people and their requirements in relation to wildlife within a set of priorities that may change from time to time (House of Representatives, 1991b, 4.17.4).*

The report repeatedly stresses the need to develop new legal and administrative régimes in which both cultural flexibility and equality with mainland Australia are achieved, and recognises also that where social conditions and services are deficient, these must be upgraded. The report also urges that the two Indian Ocean territories be associated with Western Australia to help ensure their keeping pace with general Australian development, and even proposes a direct link for them with the federal cabinet to monitor, adapt and over-ride State laws where these may not suit local cultural

imperatives (4.11.21). A reading of the report reminds us that Australian convention is quite as adaptable as any other national tradition, and that the special needs of small and isolated populations and their unique institutions pose no threat to the unity or integrity of the national state.

In another new report, from the Queensland legislature's Public Accounts Committee, further clear thinking on Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal councils finds its way into humble, practical recommendations (Queensland Parliamentary Committee 1991).

In the Torres Strait there is a golden opportunity for Australia and Queensland to show that the disasters of Aboriginal policy are not the only outcomes of which they are capable. The small population, the strength of local tradition and pride, and the already considerable official attention given the region make a demonstration of Australian goodwill and social justice both possible and practicable. Like Nunavut in Canada, a Torres Strait Islander regional government and claims settlement is both relatively easy and a project worthy of the nation. It is not yet clear, however, that this opportunity is appreciated by Australian official opinion.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE WORLD OF NORTHERN FRONTIERS

The several northern 'territories' of countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have a great deal in common. It will be useful to take a brief look at some other regions to put North Australia and northern Canada in perspective.

Alaska is especially relevant, although the mutual sharing of experience is surprisingly slight even between Canada and the USA. This is unfortunate because Alaska has travelled a political path which anticipates the future prospects of the NT, NWT and Yukon. Furthermore, Alaska today resembles North Australia with a land claims settlement which satisfies neither indigenous peoples nor the State's whites, continuing conflict on environment and development, and white nostalgia for southern-style solutions which would assimilate and marginalise indigenous people (Maas 1991). One way out may be an Alaska state constitution re-negotiated in future whereby unique indigenous cultures and unique northern white culture share territory and accommodate each other's aspirations. Stranger things have happened.

One of the most interesting developments in modern Alaska has been the development of the North Slope. There the Inuit (locally known as Inupiat) used flair and persistence to develop a 'home rule borough' government within the municipal structures of Alaska. The North Slope Borough covers 88,000 square miles and has about 5-6000 Inuit, as well as a similar transient population, many of these latter directly or indirectly working for the oil industry. Inuit used to poverty and neglect have creatively shaped an entire new society, one in which the social problems of 'big oil' and rapid change have been more than matched by optimism and determination to control the Inuit future. Virtually the whole Inuit population has been retrained, and the North Slope school system has seen per capita funding levels higher than anywhere else in the USA, and with cultural and linguistic materials also unknown elsewhere. Homes, community facilities and services have also been built at great cost. But the traditional culture remains strong. In the driveways in front of the two-car garages of the new homes, there are usually two vehicles side by side: a modern American station-wagon and a walrus-hide covered umiak (whaling boat). The fierce competition traditional among whaling crews, each of which had its own 'mess' year-round for social and recreational events, may be responsible for the flair with which Inupiat have taken to the White Man's legal and political systems to advance their ends. It was their hard-nosed and confrontational style which considerably strengthened the final form of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (1971) for all Alaskan indigenous peoples.

Not only did the North Slope Inupiat expand their self-governing powers through determined and unprecedented action in court and elsewhere, but they pursued the other main Inuit agenda item of environmental protection. For instance, they fought through a coastal zone management plan which now formally governs development in north Alaska (Anjum 1984). Their war with the world over the hunting of their traditional sea mammal species - whales and walrus - has led to specially-created Inuit bodies which are now formally recognised nationally and internationally for management of these species (Freeman and Carbyn 1988).

Inupiat also saw that an international approach to certain issues, as well as a celebration of the Inuit revival after the release from decades or centuries of colonialism, was desirable. In 1977 they brought together the Inuit of Alaska, Canada and Greenland in

the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC). In his brief welcome speech the North Slope Mayor stressed that Inuit cooperation to protect the arctic environment was urgent - especially for the seas and shores - and that Inuit must seek to establish the strongest possible Inuit-run governments in each region to save their culture and deal with Big Government and Big Oil on development issues.

Although not all Native Alaska has the resources of the Inupiat of the North Slope, there is a strong movement towards strengthening 'tribal' government. In an ICC-sponsored inquiry, Canada's Judge Berger reviewed the Alaskan experience with claims settlements (Berger 1985). He found that the corporation model of this American claims settlement, passed by Congress, was dividing many communities and peoples, while leaving the land and resources of the people at ultimate risk. Some amendments to the Act have now put off some problems, but many remain. Most importantly, a political divide has opened within the indigenous community itself. There is unquestionably a long-term trend to greater indigenous autonomy and self-government, however. One may hope, as well, that the white Alaskans will not destroy the very qualities of Alaskan life which attract them to the place. They may come to see that instead of homogenising Alaska to a Lower 48 model, the recognition of different cultures, homelands and lifestyles is the essence of Alaska's life.

It must be remembered that Canada has many local and regional developments in indigenous self-government apart from the two cases examined in earlier chapters. Indeed, Canada is a virtual laboratory for the world in this regard. The search for workable indigenous governing forms in the Yukon and western Northwest Territories, where Indian-Métis communities must cope with the larger white settler populations, often in the same communities, is a complex story and still evolving. As well, there are rural and northern Indian bands and Métis colonies in the Canadian provinces working alone or in regional groupings to attain considerable self-government and to participate in new economic activities, including resource development. There is no single or final model in Canada, but many novel and competing ones. Perhaps the most difficult question will be how federal and provincial governments will relate to these new bodies and maintain the necessary flow of funds and services. The earliest cases, in northern Quebec, have shown that existing public administration is not yet geared to cope with this emerging third order of government.

In Norway the first report of the government's Sami Rights Committee in 1984 argues that what are known in international relations terms as advanced countries, e.g., Norway, Australia and Canada, have special obligations to ensure to their indigenous inhabitants the institutional means and resources to maintain their unique culture and society (Sami Rights Committee 1984; Brantenberg 1991). It also insists that countries with unique cultures within their borders have the duty to ensure their survival and collective rights. Australian Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginals, and Canadian Inuit and many Indian groups, clearly fall into that category, just as their homelands qualify for that national protection. That Norwegian study in its principal chapter on aboriginal rights law internationally has been regarded as a leading edge in aboriginal rights thinking. It is additionally important because of the strong links between its authors and the international work on global instruments to establish aboriginal rights.

Norway has now

- enacted a constitutional amendment recognising national obligations to the Sami;
- brought into being a national elected Sami parliament which has an important role in setting national Sami policy, is directly related to the national Norwegian parliament, and is expected to acquire more powers and manage more programs;

- enacted a Sami language law strengthening Sami language use in Sami district government and administration, in teaching in Sami, and in providing Sami language study in schools; and
- is preparing recommendations on Sami rights to land, water and inshore sea use in the north (see Jull 1988c; Brantenberg 1991).

Despite the commitment of Norwegians as a people to the natural environment, and the fact that Ms Brundtland first became prime minister as a result of her predecessor's incompetent handling of a Sami rights and environmental dispute, the damming of the Alta River in the far north, Norway's northern policies are now in crisis. This fact helped defeat Ms Brundtland's government in the last (1989) election. Part of the problem is one of definition. Norwegians at circumpolar conferences have sometimes liked to say that they have no northern problems except in the arctic seas and the Svalbard (Spitsbergen) archipelago. The problems of human out-migration in North Norway, fishing failures, conflicts of land use, sometimes insensitive local Norwegian opinion towards Sami, lack of security for Sami livelihoods and culture, and spectacular failures of northern development instruments such as bank development funds, as well as the dynamics of North Norway as a regional system, fly in the face of such official sleight-of-hand. That failure was written clearly on the wall for the national government by regional dissidence, protest politics and negative votes from the safest of Labour heartlands in 1989. As the only real political voice for the north, the new Sami parliament has a unique opportunity to step into the breach, on behalf of all northerners. It is not often that northern peoples have such scope for winning general political credibility.

The high quality of living conditions, community services and infrastructure - such as roads in even the most remote corners of North Norway - is the fact of life that most forcibly impresses the visitor. Although an area of great hardship in times past, successive Norwegian Labour governments have transformed northern life for Sami and non-Sami alike. An important element of national development has been a policy of equalisation among the townships of Norway north or south.

Speaking to the assembly of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) and its indigenous delegates from all the world (including Australia and Canada) in Tromsø in August 1990, the Norwegian cabinet minister responsible for the Sami office, Johan Jakobsen, said:

*It is a national responsibility for the authorities to ensure that the Sami people are given the means necessary to maintain and further develop their culture, so that they can continue to live as a separate ethnic group in the future.*

*In 1988 the Norwegian parliament amended the Constitution of 1814 by inserting a new article, stating that it is incumbent on the authorities of the state, to create conditions enabling the Sami people to preserve and develop their own language, culture and society (Jakobsen 1990).*

Sweden and Finland are developing their own responses to Sami aspirations in the north, and at this time may be said to be generally following Norway's lead. Their various works in the past have included useful programs, but apart from the Finnish Sami parliament, the response to Sami political aspirations has been very limited. This may now be changing. As various recent commentators from within the Nordic world have noted, the Nordic success in achieving social opportunity and equality, undoubtedly the best of any society existing or known historically, is now faced with the challenge of accepting and accommodating social, cultural and ethnic pluralism. In this latter regard,

much remains to be learned; too often non-conformity is viewed with suspicion, disdain or derision in the Nordic world.

Tri-national activity in Lapland is important. The Nordic Council of governments has its own cooperation, consultation and development group for northern Scandinavia, an area it calls *Nordkalotten*. The Council also supports various tri-national Sami projects and cultural institutions. For their part the Sami have a tri-national umbrella organisation, the Nordic Sami Council. A visitor to Lapland will be struck, as are the Sami, by the arbitrary nature of national frontiers which divide a single people. On the other hand, few borders in the world are managed on such a cooperative and humane basis by national governments. One proposal which is being discussed by Sami would see a tri-national treaty recognise a new Sami entity in the north which would be a largely autonomous government within the Nordic Council made up of large areas of northern Norway, Sweden and Finland (Grahl-Madsen 1986). Although such a scheme may sound improbable, the Nordic countries have led the way in many other areas of socio-political reform in the world and it may be that some significant elements of the scheme could be implemented without much difficulty.

Another Nordic Council group involves the maritime- and fishing-oriented west Nordic group - Norway, Iceland, the Faroes and Greenland. This group is a reconstructed, if humbler, form of Norway's Viking Age empire. Iceland was formally absorbed by Norway in the 13th Century after 400 years as a unique democratic country (at least for freemen). Its characteristic political form was the *thing*, the parliament known all over the Nordic world in ancient times and which evolved into our modern Parliaments today. Both a legislature and a court, the *thing* was also a fair, a summer holiday, a business convention and a marriage market. Its remarkable character and central place in the life of a country shivering under sleet and dark for a large part of the year is vividly recounted in sagas, especially in the greatest of the genre, *Njal's Saga* (Magnusson and Palsson 1971). Iceland's struggles in recent centuries under Danish rule sound remarkably like the usual north-south conflict we have been considering in this volume, and are remembered with bitterness in modern Icelandic literature. The recent Icelandic Cod Wars in which powerful governments, trumpeting their right and might, bullied a remote renewable-resource society seem no less a continuation by more drastic means of our archetypal 'northern development' pattern. In 1944 the Americans, then garrisoning Iceland to deny it to the Nazis who were occupying Denmark, allowed Iceland its final and full independence from Denmark. This angered the punctilious Danes and accounts for some of their suspicion of any North American interest in Greenland. The British garrisoning the Faroes for the same anti-Nazi reason allowed the Faroese to use their own flag but firmly replied to those demanding independence that they would have to settle that with Copenhagen after the war.

The Faroes, like Iceland and Shetland settled from Norway in the 9th Century, today has about 45,000 people. Viking Age Norwegians combined fishing and sheep-raising and those remain the principal economic activities of the Faroes today. A group of rugged treeless mid-Atlantic islands with fishing villages in the coves and sheep clinging to the steep hillsides, they enjoy a very high living standard. Their home rule from Denmark was enacted hastily and virtually unilaterally by Copenhagen in 1948 to prevent separation. Today the Faroese language variant of Old Norse, unintelligible to the Danes, is restored after centuries of Danicisation were rejected. The government, industry, financial institutions and everything else - especially the world-renowned fishing fleet - are in Faroese hands. Nor had they an easy time of it. However, despite centuries of poverty and hardship, the rebirth of Faroese autonomy and national pride has been a tremendous success story (West 1972).

The renewable resource economy of the Faroes, perhaps the tightest environmental protection régime on earth, high living standards, and a successful home rule which

provides real autonomy and self-government, must be an inspiration to others. However, the Faroese go about their business quietly. As world leaders and tourists rush back and forth across the Atlantic on the world's busiest inter-continental air route, they hardly suspect that a remarkable and ancient society is thriving under the clouds beneath them. If the Faroese have been quietly successful, the Greenlanders, an Inuit people whose 1979 inauguration of home rule is partly modelled on the Faroes, have burst upon the international scene as a new country with verve and cultural self-confidence.

When Danish-sponsored missionaries found not Catholic Vikings but heathen Inuit occupying Greenland alone in the 18th century, trade and Danish administration followed. But in Greenland the Danes were ahead of their times, as well as generous and philosophically minded. Their policies were sometimes inappropriate, but they were certainly well meant. Essentially they wanted to maintain the traditional seal hunting culture of Inuit and protect the region from the evils of European urban or industrial influence. The Danish personnel of church, state or trading post took local wives, so a new class grew up used to European homes and not always enthusiastic about the hard life of sealing as a fulltime way of life. This 'métis' community has played an important leadership role in Greenland politics and continues to do so. With the considerable miscegenation of the post-war era when floods of Danish workers rebuilt the country, it is fair enough to say that Greenlanders are a new nationality (as some do say). Today the Inuit roots and way of life thrive in the sleek lines and high design of the 'Danish modern' style.

The Greenland exposure to American material culture in World War II created new demands, as did the fact that the country got along quite well without Denmark at the time. The speed and scale of the building of Greenland as a new society - concentrating the population, apartment block housing on rocky arctic coasts, Danish modern *everything* - left most of the local people startled and disoriented. Social problems multiplied and some remain critical. It became clear to the Danes that powerlessness of the local people had become the root ill. There had been some power at the municipal level since the 19th century, and two competing doctrines now emerged - the idea of building up local township authority or adopting national home rule. The latter triumphed, although the municipal authorities led the opposition to home rule.

The home rule plan which went into force in May 1979 has seen powers roughly equivalent to Australian States or Canadian Provinces transferred to the Inuit. But there is more power than that because the economy is centred on a public sector which includes the main economic organisations (which are also the main employers), and these bargain collectively with a national union structure. The fishing industry was to be the key, so towns were built up to become growth centres with a labour pool for the fisheries. In Greenland the Gordian knot of economic development was effectively cut by establishing, long ago, powerful central service, retail, production and engineering capacities. Danish experts held the top jobs and most technical jobs, but at the time of home rule some 85% of the employees were Greenlanders. There are also the other typical features of Nordic democracy - a very large public sector, strong national associations with quasi-official roles and complete welfare state.

Five special features of home rule deserve mention. The first is the creation of a special government ministry for the servicing and development of outports or out-stations. These are the repositories of Inuit culture and it was seen that they should be enabled to retain it, albeit with the benefits of modern conveniences and with better scope for local economic benefit provided. Also, such action would slow the migration to the towns which was the source of so many social problems. (The policy of concentrating population was a major target of home rule sentiment, although it had already done its worst.)

Another step has been the labour mobility law. The Inuit wished to control immigration. This was one reason they so vehemently opposed Denmark's membership in the European Community (EC), fearing an influx of skilled workers as had undone the Greenland society so recently. Like Quebec's French language law known as Bill 101, the point of the Greenlandic law was to encourage local labour and training, and to maintain the integrity of a small society. Greenland found itself at odds with Denmark and the EC, and the inside story of how the eventual compromise was achieved would no doubt be an interesting one.

A third matter is the EC withdrawal. Greenlanders had been outraged by oil exploration in the Davis Strait, their fishing grounds, and were very sceptical about EC policy in such matters as free movement of people and the superstructure of industrial society. They were also bitter about European fishing vessels working their waters, sometimes in sight of their shores, when their own fishing economy was precarious. With Danish help the Greenland politicians negotiated a very generous exit settlement with the EC in Brussels, but just when they were ready to celebrate the achievement they were met by grass roots furore and accusations of sell-out. This is a reminder that an indigenous people may bring new interests into old political forms. While the negotiations were going on, what is more, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference was supplying material to the Greenland media about the first plan to drill and ship oil in the Canadian arctic, the Bent Horn project. The project proponent already had been convicted in lurid language by Canadian courts for breaches of pollution laws, and now it would move oil down the Greenland side of the Davis Strait!

A fourth matter is the unique resource management régime applying to Greenland. Although an aboriginal claim to the whole country was rejected by the Danish prime minister, the final deal was one which went some way to satisfying the point. Both Denmark and Greenland have a veto on any resource policy or project, onshore or offshore. In effect, then, terms satisfactory to both sides must be negotiated. Those terms involve social and environment impacts, employment opportunities, or anything else. The committee which discusses these matters has an equal number of Danish and Greenlandic representatives, but since home rule the chairman has been the Greenland premier - an Inuit Lutheran pastor, among his other talents. In other words, Greenland has no need to feel itself a minority on sensitive development issues. To date the Inuit have rejected offshore oil exploration and onshore uranium mining.

The fifth specific matter concerns a project the committee *did* accept. An unglaciated peninsular area of East Greenland on which sits the community of Scoresby Sund (now Ittoqqortoormiit) is an oil prospect. The Greenland ministers (all of them Inuit) are painfully aware of their fiscal dependence on Copenhagen and wish to have more freedom. The environmentally sensitive Scoresby Sund region was at stake. There are several causes for concern: marine life in a polynya area through which loaded tankers would pass from the shore, into coastal seas the most dangerous on earth (and whose southerly ice flow helped wipe out Erik the Red's friends in 985 and is now thought to have completed the isolation of Greenland from Europe in the late Middle Ages), from an earthquake zone in which drilling was to occur. The outrage among environmentalists in Europe was so great that the development of a national park in the same area was ostentatiously rushed ahead. In accepting oil in principle over the heads of the local people, Greenland came of age. An Inuit government which flaunts its environmental agenda was treating one small remote community just as ruthlessly as the White Man is supposed to have treated Inuit generally. But *raison d'état* had prevailed. In a guilty hangover the Greenlanders made no further noise when, a mere year after the Bent Horn kerfuffle, the Canadian and NWT governments issued statements on a Bent Horn go-ahead. The Canadian statements and background papers never mentioned Greenland or international socio-environmental interests at all, in fact. Nevertheless, there is no reason



to doubt that, overall, Greenland will continue to be exceedingly environmentally conscious.

Greenland is a modern and well-organised country. It is perhaps the most spectacularly beautiful land on earth, and already attracts some cultural and environmental tourism. Inuit control the whole society, although Danes in managerial and technical posts are still evident, forming about half the population of the capital, Nuuk (formerly Godthaab). Home rule has meant new attention to not one language but two. Greenlandic (Inuktitut) is now fully official as is Danish, and in practice Greenlandic is enjoying a renaissance. But English is also being learned in earnest. After all, now that Greenlanders are a national presence on the international scene, Danish does not do them much good outside of Denmark. While many English-speaking people like to believe that only one language can be mastered, the reality in the north circumpolar world is comfortable multi-lingualism.

The North Atlantic world also includes Shetland. Another Viking-descended people, the Shetlanders are especially important as a case because they live within the UK and 'the Westminster tradition'. That 'tradition' seems to have become the last refuge (or siege mentality), often mis-stated, of many scoundrels who oppose institutional change in Australia and Canada today.

*It is quite erroneous to believe that sovereignty has a necessary connection with law to the extent that sovereignty involves uniformity of law. There are plenty of examples to the contrary. The United Kingdom as at present constituted is one example of a political unit without uniformity of law and even without right of appeal in criminal cases from one judicial system (the Scottish) to any British court. Equally, Britain took over French Canada without abrogating French law, and took over the Cape of Good Hope without abrogating Dutch law (Donaldson appendix in Nevis Institute 1978, 184-5).*

In Shetland, as in Iceland and the Faroes, we see that the concern of a people for environmental protection, renewable resource economy, social and cultural maintenance, resource management rights, regional autonomy and stronger self-government is every bit as strong as among non-European Aborigines or Inuit, Islanders or Dene. In response to the North Sea oil boom, Shetland was determined to isolate or quarantine development populations, to strengthen local planning powers and to control environmental impacts. A vigorous nationalist and autonomist movement may well achieve the goal of a home rule arrangement with London in time. Meanwhile, Lord Kilbrandon has looked at the options in an open and realistic way (Nevis Institute 1978). The resulting study is perhaps the finest piece of recent northern region political analysis available. It is clear, it looks at all the options, and combines clear grasp of 'real world' politics with open-minded readiness to embrace reform. Along the way it provides fine insights into the capacities and prospects of a distinct region.

All the examples we have discussed involve the related peoples of north-western Europe and their interaction with indigenous peoples. Some North Atlantic peoples are a fragment of the larger north-western European group, becoming an indigenous people from long habitation of previously uninhabited coasts and islands. There are others cases which could be cited. The USA has large Indian reserves in 'remote' rural areas. Most interesting, perhaps, is the recent development among the 26 'small peoples' (i.e., non-national entities, or tribal peoples) in the Soviet Union (Dahl 1990). Thanks to the international Inuit movement in particular, the Soviet north - its peoples and its friends within the USSR - has shown interest in the experience of the other circumpolar countries. An early fruit of this appears to be a now truly circumpolar movement of the people with the greatest stake in the protection of the arctic environment.

It is worth considering some of the common elements which are observable in Australian and Canadian northlands and in the other OECD regions surveyed. It must be stressed again that these do not pertain only to 'exotic' peoples like desert Aborigines or high arctic Inuit but to all the peoples, both European and non-European, indigenous to the northern regions of 'first world' countries. These are:

- disputes between regional peoples and the national governments which enjoy sovereignty over them in international law in respect of environmental protection, resource use and proprietary rights;
- conflicting regional-national economic development philosophies and strategies;
- less developed public services and political institutions than in the national state as a whole, or ones which leave cultural communities effectively denied political equality;
- demands by minority peoples for recognition of their social identities and cultures, including language;
- northerners' fears of being swamped in their homelands by transient labour or permanent settlers;
- demands for collective socio-political autonomy and for self-governing institutions whereby the collectivity may express its will;
- the search for a critical mass of powers which make self-government meaningful;
- access sought to resources including finances sufficient to enable these outback or northern autonomies to carry out the roles outlined above; and
- acceptance of the national state apparatus in which the region is formally located, and sometimes quite enthusiastic acceptance (as among many Nunavut Inuit *vis-à-vis* Canada).

This last point is worth emphasis. However much the Australian RSL and Royal Canadian Legion may, like Lear, insist on profuse expressions of commitment and love from good-humoured outback Cordelias (but who lack Cordelia's tie of blood), disruptive and angry separatism are not the major focus of movements in the areas we have discussed. Where separatism exists at all, it has been either anxiety about losing ties with a preferred national unit (in the case of Torres Strait Islanders, Quebec Inuit, and Shetlanders, *vis-à-vis* Australia, Canada and London respectively) or is a gentle drift moving no more quickly than change generally (Lapland, Faroes, Shetland and possibly Greenland). Any threat to national feeling and national unity stems more from the incompetence or inadequacy of national authorities faced with special northern problems; national failure to recognise and accommodate northern cultures, rights and self-government; and national unwillingness or inability to protect the integrity of socio-cultural groups in the face of dislocating and often devastating change. Not all the countries in question try to give away Torres Strait Islanders to a 'third world' country or allow the dropping of atomic bombs on Maralinga Aborigines. Indigenous policy viewed from the receiving end has not been of a quality or consistency anywhere to merit the irrationally high degree of acceptance national governments manage to enjoy in northern regions today.

What this amounts to is a lack of constitutional definition in large areas of modern industrial countries. The accompanying socio-political problems in those areas result

from this lack of definition. While national officials may have working hypotheses of the political and constitutional order, these are rarely accepted fully, if at all, in northern regions, and aboriginal rights cases in court may at any time upset them entirely. The basic matters of property, other rights, political legitimacy, social identity, etc., are lacking or confused in these northlands, despite much assertiveness by northern politicians.

After Hitler's war many in Australia and Canada wanted to bring national norms to northern regions as the blessing they were assumed to be. The same thing has happened elsewhere in our world of northern regions. This failed in some important ways, and sometimes, as in North Australia, northern Canada and Greenland, produced the opposite effect of that intended: far from unifying and integrating the country it fuelled regional political dissent. Some activists even say it has been 'cultural genocide'. Today, political settlements are needed as the northern policy means of redressing grievances, healing ills and reconciling races and cultures.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE NORTHERN ECONOMY

The economies of northern regions are surprisingly alike. There is an uncertain natural resource sector which many settlers, in particular, hope will provide a rich future. As time passes they often come to see that this is more uncertain and generates fewer local benefits than expected. There is also a traditional economy based on renewable resources. Here we find large commercial fisheries and logging projects, or Australian pastoralism, as well as the fishing, hunting and gathering for local use by indigenous peoples. The imperatives of non-renewable and renewable resource economies often clash and cleave along racial lines. The rapidly growing tertiary economy of services, administration, tourism, etc., is dependent on the public sector directly and indirectly. It is this final sector which is the one most accessible to political and policy choice. However, ideology dies hard, and even in areas where state participation is overwhelming, as in the NWT in the 1960s and 1970s, senior politicians and officials responsible may continue to repeat the dogmas of free enterprise in their most innocent forms.

Economic expansion is the main concern of most northern settler politicians most of the time. Their economic hopes may have made them come north (although money alone is rarely enough to keep outsiders for very long); the relative lack of services and facilities in northern regions seems to cry out for new ventures; and they may have been attracted north by the relative lack of sophisticated economic regulation, and want to get on with it before constraints inevitably grow. The story of northern resources and the alternating hopes and disappointments these have caused has been the archetypal story of northern development for the white world in modern times. It has also led to a major political difficulty: the habit of national governments of insisting that such great wealth cannot all be given to the few locals, while also insisting that the locals cannot have full political rights or public services because they are too poor to justify the cost! This hypocrisy has fuelled the dissidence of indigenous peoples and other northerners alike.

The economy of northern regions is truly a political economy. It is driven largely by national and northern government spending, including public spending on indigenous social needs. Government austerity programs savage the north. Ironically, northern tub-thumping enterprise whites often benefit most from national governments of the opposite political stripe with their high regional and indigenous spending. As an economist recently pointed out, while such whites assume all academics and researchers are dreamy ideologues, despite their careful studies, it is those whites themselves who are the real romantics (Bruce Knapman, personal communication). Business lobbyists talk loudly about slashing public spending and getting rid of the burden of thousands of civil servants, but if a department threatens to cut ten jobs they are often the first to protest that this will injure the merchants and service sector and must not proceed.

National governments also include romantics. When Canadian authorities were pursuing a Mackenzie Valley pipeline in the mid-1970s, they likened the project to the building of the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway), Canada's famous national unity project of the 19th Century. Careful study showed that almost the only two ways in which such a pipeline would resemble the CPR were in its direct and indirect negative impacts on wildlife and indigenous people, and in probably overstraining Canada's financial capacities (e.g., Dosman 1975). It lacked two-way flows, it would create no permanent settlement or work along its route, it would 'open up' nothing, etc. The inquiry set up to study the project, a study which ultimately stopped it, became the turning-point in public

understanding of northern policy issues, and its report has become an international classic (Berger 1977). Until then the northern territories had been so exotic that only a few eccentrics and federal government departments got involved, but Judge Berger ushered in a new era of thinking. He and his hearings also ended once and for all the facile notion that resource development created lasting local economic growth, significant employment, and enhanced regional and community well-being.

Of course, the mining industry remain the most diehard romantics of all. The increasingly capital-intensive nature of their work and their remoteness from public opinion have worked against their political impact. In Canada and Alaska they are now showing a lead in good community-company, white-indigenous relations. In what was probably their last significant national public forum in Canada, in 1983, these bad old buccaneers, now almost endearing Pirates of Penzance, went out with one last flourish, calling themselves 'responsible' and 'unbiased' in their final statement while denouncing Territory governments as unnecessary and a drain on public revenue (CARC 1984, 341-4). With virtually nobody left but each other to talk tough with, they may soon qualify for folklore grants to hold their colourful get-togethers.

The lack of natural advantage and the high costs of northern frontiers are themselves a simple reminder that conventional economic activity is difficult. High yield products per unit transported like gold, uranium and diamonds - all on offer in North Australia - are the ones which work. Tourism has been enjoying a boom in North Australia and has a long way to go, but shattering events like the 1989 airline pilots' strike are reminders of that industry's vulnerability to external events. Nevertheless, the gusto with which the Queensland Travel and Tourism Corporation has set the pace, with something like the extraordinary powers associated with, say, Lord Beaverbrook's wartime production for Churchill, is worth study. However, the controversy which continues to dog the luxurious hotels in which the NT government has so heavily invested is a reminder that the working public's support of those perceived as the idle rich cannot be taken for granted. Other studies have questioned the employment structure and other impacts, including environmental ones, which accompany big tourism. While many Queenslanders and North Australians generally fear they may be looking through the fence at Japanese golfers playing courses which the locals cannot afford, northern Canadians are unlikely to attract more than a limited market.

The traditional economies of northern frontiers have been the renewable resource based livelihoods of the indigenous peoples. Until very recently these were largely ignored by governments. Now the Australian authority, Jon Altman, has founded and heads a Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) in the Australian National University, Canberra. A number of Canadians have also been leading their country in such work (see Freeman and Carbyn 1988). In his book with Ross on the hidden economy of Nunavut and the wider north, Usher, whose landmark work helped underpin the Berger Mackenzie Valley inquiry report, turns traditional thinking on its head (Ross & Usher 1986). Meanwhile, no end of traditional economists have continued to look at the north purely in terms of wage and industrial sectors, meaning that mining has seemed almost the only significant activity. The new economics of this type are badly needed in the north. Meanwhile, Greenland has been a case study in the social misery created by a determined industrialisation policy with its relocation of population, town developments, and provision of services to support an industrial fishery causing massive social problems and cultural loss for very mixed economic results.

This book is about social and political subjects, and to stray into the quagmire of northern economic development history would not be helpful. There have been countless initiatives and few successes. The apparent truth is that public sector driven spending is, and will long be, a most manageable and stable economic base. Even with successful resource industries coming and going, the dislocation and adjustment costs to

governments can be enormous, with too few benefits for already resident northerners. The truth is that any and all economic prospects which do not have adverse socio-environmental impacts will have to be encouraged. North Australia may be in a different phase than the northern hemisphere: the throwaway lines and promotions of governments in respect of offshore oil in the Torres Strait and Timor Gap would not have been possible in the northern hemisphere where even the most development-hungry regions contain strong and effective groups of sceptics and opponents.

In this context the more experimental approaches to employment and sustainable development may be important for indigenous people. Labour-intensive and flexi-time arrangements may be ideal for indigenous communities. Such experience as Canada's Pacific coast Salmonid Enhancement Program with its indigenous labour components is worth study. Canadian experience with big projects around which indigenous employment and training hopes have been built, on the other hand, have not met expectations - e.g., North Rankin Nickel and Nanisivik.

A project which helped advance northern economic cooperation and understanding has been 'Yukon 2000' (CARC 1988). Introduced by a new government in Whitehorse, it was an attempt to involve the whole community, including indigenous people, and to develop some shared ideas of what needed to be done. The Yukon had suffered terribly from the collapse of its mining sector and new answers were needed. At first the party political polarities seemed unbridgeable, but in time the grumbling business supporters of the defeated conservative government joined in. The whole process was probably as important for its healing of social cleavages and eliminating empty rhetoric as in advancing economic development, although that has benefited greatly. Public involvement and information feedback with the assistance of academic and other experts were the major procedures.

## CHAPTER 11

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

The relationship between indigenous peoples and the land has become oft-stated, even if not well understood. The type of knowledge that Torres Strait Islanders, Aborigines, Inuit and Sami maintain, and the language they require to do so, are largely inaccessible to outsiders. An important field for research should be this linguistic treasure house of environmental reportage and wisdom. Some authors like Henriksen (1973) and Brody (1987) have conveyed this symbiosis especially effectively. The Australian studies for the East Kimberley project are recapitulated in a single summary volume with an excellent chapter on land (Coombs *et al* 1989).

Now the world's governments have at last begun to speak in the same idiom. The World Conservation Strategy of 1980, its draft successor (IUCN 1990), as well as the Brundtland Commission report of 1987, have put the indigenous view forward as the ethic needed to save the world itself (Brundtland 1987). In a section significantly entitled 'Empowering Vulnerable Groups', Brundtland says:

*...[Some] communities - so-called indigenous or tribal peoples - remain isolated because of such factors as physical barriers to communication or marked differences in social and cultural practices. Such groups are found in North America, in Australia...*

*The isolation of many such people has meant the preservation of a traditional way of life in close harmony with the natural environment. Their very survival has depended on their ecological awareness and adaptation. ...*

*With the gradual advance of organized development into remote regions, these groups are becoming less isolated. Many live in areas rich in valuable natural resources that planners and "developers" want to exploit, and this exploitation disrupts the local environment so as to endanger traditional ways of life. The legal and institutional changes that accompany organized development add to such pressures.*

*Growing interaction with the larger world is increasing the vulnerability of these groups, since they are often left out of the process of economic development. Social discrimination, cultural barriers, and the exclusion of these people from national political processes makes these groups vulnerable and subject to exploitation. Many groups become dispossessed and marginalized, and their traditional practices disappear. They become the victims of what could be described as cultural extinction.*

*These communities are the repositories of vast accumulations of traditional knowledge and experience that links humanity with its ancient origins. Their disappearance is a loss for the larger society, which could learn a great deal from their traditional skills in sustainably managing very complex ecological systems. It is a terrible irony that as formal development reaches more deeply into rain forests, deserts, and other isolated environments, it tends to destroy the only cultures that have proved able to thrive in these environments (Brundtland 1987, 114-15).*

The question is what should be done about this. The report goes on:

*The starting point for a just and humane policy for such groups is the recognition and protection of their traditional rights to land and the other resources that sustain their way of life - rights they may define in terms that do not fit into standard legal systems. These groups' own institutions to regulate rights and obligations are crucial for maintaining the harmony with nature and the environmental awareness characteristic of the traditional way of life. [Action] must also give local communities a decisive voice in the decisions about resource use in their area (Brundtland 1987, 115-16).*

This material is especially significant because it calls for:

- indigenous cultural maintenance and autonomy;
- indigenous powers in respect of lands and resources; and
- a new ethic of maintaining little developed regions in that condition and this as a desirable global objective in itself.

This new ethic places Australia and Canada in a special position. They are among those few countries with large, little developed territories. They are under a particular obligation which, say, Holland or Singapore are not, to make a special contribution to the global future. The world, including many Australians and Canadians, has been firm in demands that Brazil manage its less developed Amazon region for the good of all. No doubt the same pressure would be on Australia if the extent of wonder drugs lurking in the eco-systems of the Daintree and Cape York forests and of Canada's arctic seas were known. A very specific demand by the world on Australia and Canada has now been made, and this will require specific policies which amount to a coherent approach. It would appear, for instance, that the various authorities which Inuit are establishing in Nunavut through their claims settlement provide at least the passive part of a policy. Before a recent annual G-7 summit, *The Economist* urged that just as there are seven industrial countries with a special role in respect of the world economy, the seven countries with the major remaining biological diversity, one of these being Australia, have a special role to protect these for the whole world. Meanwhile, indigenous peoples' lands are on average the most damaged in Australia, no doubt the reason they were allowed to have them in recent times (Coombs *et al*, 1990).

In Australia even more than in Canada, public discussion of the environment is often related to the political 'numbers' and talk of how many green votes there are 'out there'. This view fails to comprehend the issue, i.e., a new knowledge as revolutionary as Copernican astronomy. Different people will feel more or less strongly about the issues they know best. The level of this public knowledge is steadily increasing. But many lazy journalists and vehement businessmen choose to think there is a finite group of evildoers who can be outmanoeuvred. This is equivalent to the proposition that by shooting the math teachers we could make 2 and 2 stop adding up to 4. Australia's most respected political 'numbers man', then environment minister Senator Graham Richardson, may have given the best view of changing environmental politics yet heard in a speech in February 1990 (Richardson 1990, 13-16) to the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration. Among many other thought-provoking things he said that:

*...what is happening in our world, not just in Australia, is that those issues are gripping the minds of ordinary people, and when we look in ten years time, look back especially at the last five years and the growth of these issues in that period, by the next decade that growth of the last five years*



*will look like nothing. The world will be ready to accept that we will have to change the way we have lived - if you like, the way we have raped and pillaged our earth - if we are to survive on it.*

*That will be the great challenge that faces public administration: all others pale into insignificance.*

The 2nd draft of *Caring for the World: A Strategy for Sustainability* (IUCN 1990), the successor to the World Conservation Strategy and to the Brundtland Report, was a main agenda item for the world assembly of IUCN in Perth, Western Australia, in late 1990. There are some very specific recommendations, numbered as 'Actions', in Chapter 4, the chapter on indigenous peoples, e.g.,

- 4.1 *Ensure that communities and individuals have access to natural resources and security of tenure.*
- 4.2 *Support community systems of property rights and resource management.*
- 4.3 *Provide communities and individuals with access to financial resources and incentives for sustainable practices.*
- 4.6 *Enhance community capacities to organize and participate in decisions.*
- 4.7 *Enhance community capacities to influence development priorities, policies and projects.*
- 4.11 *Provide communities with the opportunity to prepare local strategies for conservation or sustainable development. (IUCN 1990, 31-7).*

These elements of a sustainable future are also basic elements of the politics of northern development. For indigenous peoples the world of environment and development and the world of political rights are one, despite the discrete specialties which European practice has devised. There is no political settlement in northern regions possible without taking into account the fundamentals of access to resources, traditional livelihoods and protection of productive habitat.

Australia's Commission for the Future tackles the issue head-on in its recent work on sustainable development (Zarsky 1990, 19-20), commenting:

*Indigenous peoples in northern Canada and Scandinavia are developing new forms of political sovereignty to increase their control over the land. The idea is that native people as a whole would form a political entity with a status between a nation and a state or province. They would enjoy powers of internal self-rule and disposition of land, water and mineral resources. Aboriginal leaders are exploring the potential for such a concept in Australia.*

*Whatever form it takes, increased control over land use is clearly on the Aboriginal agenda and forms a central precept of sustainable development. Governments could help by providing funding to restore degraded land, as well as access to information, technology and research which help Aboriginals to enhance land productivity and their stewardship role.*

A promising approach to resolution of these matters, in addition to the Nunavut-type claims settlement elements, may be regional sustainable development or 'conservation' strategies. These would involve national governments; State, Province or Territory governments; and indigenous peoples jointly. Some pioneering work has already been done in Canada by the Yukon and NWT governments together with three federal departments (Environment; Fisheries and Oceans; Indian and Northern Affairs) and with the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. That work may provide some useful hints for the future. Governments working through indigenous peoples in this way would be managing territory more closely than before, and with the real experts - indigenous people - providing the skills.

A new policy put forward jointly by Canada's federal and provincial ministers with responsibility for wildlife is also promising: the entire document is shot through with the twin themes of indigenous people co-managing wildlife and habitat with government, and the importance of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge in policy-making (WMC 1990).

A valuable and detailed book on Canadian ideas and experience was published in 1990 but seems to exist in no Australian library (Smith 1990). The people who contributed to it are centrally involved in the international work, including IUCN, of elaborating sustainable development in theory and practice. A particularly interesting chapter discusses Canada's Arctic Marine Conservation Strategy (Snider 1990). The development of this strategy is relevant to North Australia and to its islands and coasts. The Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines, as well as governments, may wish to explore this model in order to fulfil the promise of initiatives like the Torres Strait Baseline Study. Despite the significant national and international progress made on indigenous peoples' coastal interests in North America, especially in the Inuit regions of Canada, Greenland and Alaska, the latest Australian parliamentary report quite ignores indigenous interests even though these were mentioned to it during hearings (House of Representatives 1991b). In Canada the indigenous peoples' conservation strategies and land claims settlements are cornerstones of wider national policies and strategies for sustainable development. One of the hazards of sustainable development is that in this most global of matters the xenophobia and insularity to which all nations are subject to some degree will choke off promise. It is more than a little ironic that the most remote, isolated and under-educated group in Canada, the Inuit, have been the practical leaders in that country's environmental internationalism. However, this is a useful reminder that refining our scientific and technological answers to global problems may be less important than a different attitude towards our planet.

In northern regions the very lack of industrial development becomes an asset in the age of sustainable development. Here, wealthy countries like Australia and Canada can establish new programs with a population to whom 'sustainable development' is a continuation of indigenous tradition. There are fewer fixed interests and less capital plant demanding old industrial habits. Until national governments reinforce the sustainable tradition, however, indigenous people will be under pressure to accept the northern settler view of development, an often 'quick and dirty' approach to short-term gain, as the only version of the White Man's 'progress' they have seen. In recent decades the Soviets have apparently been driven to re-emphasise indigenous traditions in some regions of Siberia because only those peoples have a reliable protein source, i.e., reindeer (W. Slipchenko, personal communication). The time has come for Australia and Canada to consider such an about-face in northern development thinking.

## CHAPTER 12

### NORTHERN STUDIES AND RESEARCH

Studies and research play an especially important part in northern regions. The reasons are

- conditions unfamiliar to national majorities require new engineering, biological, social, medical and other expertise to be developed for successful northern survival and development;
- the range of alternative sources of information and analysis available is much smaller than in larger population and urban areas in the south;
- there is a near monopoly of information and information dissemination by governments (which are usually development-minded) and big business, while ordinary residents and especially indigenous northerners have few means to hear alternatives; and
- the conditions of good government in a liberal democracy are often quite lacking because the permanent core of indigenous and other residents have least access to the analysis and information necessary to making informed political choices and to engaging in political activity.

In the polarised social and political climate which is typical of northern frontiers, access to knowledge and power associated with knowledge can turn the getting and sharing of knowledge into a battle. In former times indigenous peoples felt themselves victimised by researchers and occasionally do now, although the situation has improved greatly in most northern regions.

Other problems of communication remain, however, between research and scholarly communities on the one hand and northern peoples on the other. For instance, the many rapid changes in northern and indigenous policy of the 1960s through 1980s often saw indigenous groups hoping for assistance from scholarly communities. Those communities sometimes seemed, e.g., to Inuit, too wrapped up in their theories to accept that change was occurring. Theory can be very conservative, but also a loose enough fit that a scholar can stuff new realities into it comfortably enough. While Inuit in their communities were experiencing so much change as to bowl them over, they were being assured by experts that nothing was happening. It has sometimes been an academic habit, for instance, to dismiss political and constitutional development as deceptive indirect rule by the same old southern whites. This kind of eyewash has not impressed indigenous leaders with the usefulness of universities. A particular difficulty arose for Greenland Inuit. The intellectual party, IA, convinced themselves that home rule was just a deception, Danish indirect rule, a capitalist plot, etc., and so they missed the boat until other realities dawned on them. Most real of all were cabinet seats offered, and since then they have been able to devote their great brains and energy to the betterment of their society. In Australia and Canada where almost all reform is incremental, in the spirit of the British common law tradition, scholars are especially unlikely to perceive their theories suffering hit and run accidents. And yet change is occurring constantly for northern peoples and would benefit from the applied experience of social scientists.

A new understanding must be reached by researchers and academics with northern peoples. One Canadian who has given seminars over some years at the University of

Tromsø on northern political development has often been surprised to see that no political scientists attend, although the seminar is in their building, but a great many social anthropologists do. There is certainly a need for more work on the boundaries between political studies and anthropology. Some of the Nordic anthropologists in particular are moving that way, as well as scholars like Weaver and Brantenberg working between Canada, Australia and Norway. A new and practical look at the problem is the Preface in a new book by Canada's leading northern-oriented political scientists. They recount poignantly the difficulties of matching the conventions of political study with the real northern territories, and the distance modern scholars have yet to travel in this regard (Dacks 1990, vii-xii).

Scholarly discussion of social, economic, legal and political issues is carried out in all Australian states and Canadian provinces. This is an important source of new thinking and improvement, of use to officials and politicians even more than to others. But territorial leaders are often uneasy about anything which does not reflect the party line, despite their near-monopoly of information power. This is one of the most conspicuous ways in which northern authorities can display immaturity. Indigenous organisations are often no less hyper-sensitive, and can create problems for themselves by being seen to fear the open processes of liberal democracy. (That is, when pursuing more self-government, it helps to show that the habits of liberal democratic government such as openness are already learned.)

Research and teaching in history and political development as well as in the cross-cultural and social problems of the north in Australia and Canada are insufficient. There are some encouraging signs of progress, however. Special teaching programs for indigenous young (and older persons returning for further education) have had success in both the Northern Territory and Northwest Territories, and in the NT there are impressive Aboriginal-run institutions. The society and the past of the north are different enough that special course materials must be developed for all parts of the education system. For instance, land claims settlements and the recent politics of northern frontiers are not *ad hoc* events; they are the foundations of a new and lasting constitutional and political order. We may call the study materials required 'northern civics', for lack of another term. In Canada two Inuit series, a journalism course and the annual land claims sponsored program, have had dramatic success where many others have failed. In the NT the Institute of Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs and Batchelor College are pioneering successes.

Sharing information by institutions is urgent, and active sharing at that - not passive hoping that someone may wander into a seminar in a far corner of town at an inconvenient hour. One such series in Darwin had begun to average one and a half visitors, apart from the on-site staff, and has been moved downtown where the average attendance by outsiders is 50. Use of suitable media, and accessible format and style, are important.

It may be amusing in retrospect to think how the NWT information unit was launched, from a tiny office deep in library stacks in 1967. The first two staff members were determined to put out only fair and balanced news of the happenings in the NWT Council, among other good works. Conflict of interest was built in. When one of the two innocently phoned an election officer for election night returns for his information package, she exploded at him in his other capacity as overall elections coordinator for 'interfering'. A more serious approach followed a mere year later when a politically trustworthy team of failed political candidates was assembled to run the service. Its later efflorescence has been remarkable and largely beneficial, albeit within a larger information world where the national broadcaster, CBC, and a varied and often distinguished local press provide more overall balance.

Unfortunately scholars are as frail as any other persons. They may argue for their particular institution's exclusive 'market' for research or demand that they be allowed to absorb other institutions. Such arguments are rarely sound and are the sort which the discredited *régimes* of Eastern Europe favoured. The real issue is usually control, rather than the stated 'wasteful duplication'. There are five important elements of northern research policy:

- the existence of independent sources of advice is an indispensable element of political and constitutional development;
- northern studies and research centres or universities should not merely be local outposts of homogenising academic disciplines but must develop northern regional studies *in situ* as well;
- the development of 'northern civics' is urgent as a means to prepare the plethora of public servants, community leaders and communicators needed to make indigenous self-government and social development a reality;
- for the foreseeable future an emphasis on comparative northern experience among 'first world' countries as part of social and political study is highly desirable, including work within northern studies networks; and
- northern research and university centres must take extra steps to take research, interpretation and discussion of social, economic, political and other issues to the whole community regardless of skin colour or degrees of literacy.

## CHAPTER 13

### CULTURE AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

The maintaining of culture is one of the fundamental objects of indigenous society. The value of self-government in achieving this is obvious. Indeed, for people like indigenous northerners who have seen how powerful governments can be in changing the world around them, they may be particularly hopeful that their own governments will solve their problems. This is no idle hope. Governments which speak the daily language of the people, as in Greenland, can and do make important changes which make indigenous ways the social norm.

The emergence of Greenland in the last two decades has been an inspiration to anyone who has witnessed it. Nothing has been more exciting than the development of language policies, a national library, a national museum, the theatre and graphic arts, and most accessible of all, a profuse and vital pop music culture. There are even young well-travelled seamstresses who can turn the ancient parka into a striking Paris (or Copenhagen) *chic* new form of costume.

A caution is also in order, however. Modern governments and other European-descended organisational forms introduced into indigenous regions can be Trojan horses bringing invisible change. The Inuit-sponsored study of the workings of post-land claims settlement Alaska (i.e., all Alaska - Aleut, Tlinkit and Dene as well as Inuit) finds this issue central for the survival and future of indigenous peoples (Berger 1985).

Governments may represent and respond to indigenous people, and be made up of them. But governments are a category of things, big homely beasts which seek out their own. They start behaving like each other, and their transformation from creative popular movements to stiff legal and accounting entities is more or less predictable. Anyone dropping in to a United Nations reception in New York will not see much cultural display but rather a lot of dark suits and frozen little smiles. Canadian Inuit have complained that the visiting Greenland premier is very eager to meet with federal and provincial ministers but not with his Inuit brothers. Self-government is the desirable aim of all indigenous people everywhere, but they should have no illusions about its ability to replace their own socially and artistically organic growth. Indigenous peoples who are desperate for the refreshment of society should not assume that bureaux full of clerks and managers will provide the answers. However, they can at least direct funds to activities and groups which do have the verve to act.

A common problem of new governments, as of indigenous organisations in both Australia and Canada already, is that there are such high expectations of their performance. Yet their executive and staff may be so busy learning the ropes that they have little energy left for creative flights of fancy. The most important precaution may be in devising management structures and executive training which permit real control of new bodies to be in indigenous hands to the greatest extent possible (Jull 1986, 61-75). The style of structures which has emerged, e.g., in Northern Quebec, has been very effective at regularly 'burning out' executive members. Yet there has been more continuity in Inuit and white management personnel in Makivik, and more of a symbiotic relationship in which the white staff are moulded to Inuit ways and the Inuit leaders feel at home among white political and business leaders, than elsewhere. Makivik has been a success, but the strain on both Inuit and whites has been sometimes intolerable. New management systems may be possible in reducing such problems before they risk alienating the executives from their clients back home.

In indigenous societies where there may be relatively few people with work skills and executive experience, it is particularly dangerous to load all the responsibility onto a few leaders who cannot help but sag under the load. The cultural agenda of indigenous peoples not only requires indigenous policy content, but the ability of indigenous persons to manage the agenda from within their own cultural tradition as much as within their own region.

## CHAPTER 14

### SOVEREIGNTY, SELF-DETERMINATION, SELF-GOVERNMENT, SELF-MANAGEMENT

The use of four terms - sovereignty, self-determination, self-government and self-management - has bedevilled indigenous peoples' progress. Sometimes they have introduced these terms into political discourse themselves, and sometimes - as in Australia - they have been introduced by governments in ways which promise more than they deliver.

*Sovereignty* is most commonly used as an attribute of fully independent states which are members of the United Nations. Also, in federal political systems like those of Australia and Canada, *sovereignty* is a quality of two levels of government, each immune to a large degree from direction or interference by the other. National governments are most unlikely to favour full sovereignty - i.e., national independence - for any of the parts of the national territory, although Canada now faces this prospect. On the other hand, a limited sovereignty such as that of a third order of government within the national territory and national constitution - or a quasi-State, quasi-Province like the Nunavut Territory - is not problematic in principle.

*Self-determination* refers to the right of a culture, society or region to decide for itself whether its future will be as an independent sovereign entity in the world, or whether, like Nunavut, its people accept association with or integration in an existing national constitutional order. Most national governments are reluctant to recognise such a fundamental right to choose for any of their internal minorities or territories, although the world today has no few examples of such re-organisation being attempted, e.g., USSR, Canada, Yugoslavia. Even if governments say they allow it in principle, as in the long-standing Soviet constitution, the practice may be otherwise. The Canadian government has said for years that it favours creation of Nunavut, although it did not carry out the minimal actions necessary to give such a policy effect, thereby casting doubt on official sincerity. Australia had a secession movement in Western Australia. Meanwhile, the frequent use of the term *self-determination* in Australia in relation to policy for indigenous peoples is most unfortunate and misleading because it appears to mean something like *self-management* as defined below.

*Self-government* is the capacity of a people or region to manage a sufficient number of affairs important to it by means of its own or other relatively assured financial resources and to make significant decisions relating to its cultural, socio-economic and natural environments. This may be a limited power enjoyed within the larger sovereignty of a nation-state or it may be an attribute of a sovereign state. In relation to indigenous people, however, it is only useful as a term when understood to mean something short of a right to self-determination and something considerably more than a right to give advice to agencies which deliver services locally.

*Self-management* is a delegated function whereby a group or some type of formal authority carries out tasks with funds and program design determined by others outside the group or region. A welfare office on indigenous land may be staffed by local people and may hand out the cheques and carry out other welfare functions within the guidelines of a higher administrative authority.

Of course, these compartments are not totally watertight. Cassidy and Bish (1989) describe Canada's Indian governments as mixtures of self-management, a little autonomy,



etc., but all transformed into *de facto* if not *de jure* 'Indian government' by the responsiveness of local indigenous government authorities to local needs. In this case the indigenisation of the government is a result of the sheer cohesion of a unique social and cultural community. Such pragmatism of Indian leaders is well-directed. By proving their ability to manage their own affairs they will attract more powers, and by domesticating the administration of the White Man through their own control, they virtually assure that, politically, the White Man will not be able easily to retrieve what has become a part of the local scene. On the other hand, this is not to say that local officials will not turn grey or lose sleep over the uncertainties of program funds and flexibly interpreted local procedures until power and funding are genuinely devolved.

*Self-government* seems a particularly useful term - or at least that has been the case in Canada. It is both accurate as a description, and it does not provoke the nervous reactions which 'sovereignty' and 'self-determination' often do with their colloquial taint of secession or armed liberation movements. A political development adviser to the Northern Land Council in Darwin has usefully observed that 'in recent times, more and more indigenous peoples around the world are coming to the conclusion that the essence of aboriginal self-determination is aboriginal self-government' (Shaun Williams, personal communication). *Self-government* is used throughout this paper because it means exactly what is under discussion - no more and no less.

## CHAPTER 15

### PROCESSES FOR POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

The importance of process in achieving political settlements is often overlooked. Governments and indigenous groups should think much more about it. The indigenous side may see that far from being an arbitrary hurdle thrown up by the White Man, processes can be productive for all concerned. They are probably more productive now, when everyone is new at the game of such indigenous constitutional negotiations, than they will become in ten years. That is, amateurs are now learning by doing, but when professional offices administering aboriginal government codes are firmly set up, 'doing it by the book' may replace the creative interchange of today.

A corollary of this novelty is that mistakes will be made. Canada's long-running northern land claims negotiations should be written up for their educational value, despite their stop-start quality and many ructions along the way. They have 'socialised' both government and indigenous groups into a new kind of inter-governmental relationship. They have taught governments much about the actual needs and aspirations of indigenous people, and they have taught indigenous leaders much about the club of government which they are now joining through their quasi-governmental land claims entities and self-government structures.

The inter-governmental relations styles of senior governments need no elaboration. But the addition of an exotic factor - that is, of indigenous cultures for whom those government styles are largely unknown - changes the process entirely. The initiative in achieving political settlements usually lies with the indigenous people, and it may be useful to look at several common approaches they take in these situations.

First is the *Sun and Moon Model*. In this model the group in question insists that it must have wide powers over many vast things. Often this is a tactic which assumes that demands will be cut back in negotiations, so an ambit claim is made. Unfortunately such approaches frighten both public and governments and are usually counter-productive. They may bring the indigenous group a loss of credibility. For instance, unless they have considerable experience managing their own affairs already, they will be simply regarded as foolish to claim wide new powers. If they refuse to bargain until some large pre-conditions are met, suspicious governments will sense that they may be making impossible demands because they lack the self-confidence to articulate and negotiate realistic ones. This model is not a very good one for change.

Second is the *List Model*. Here a group finds a list of powers based on existing governing systems. Much on the list may be irrelevant to the people in question. Some locals may not want to abandon hope of their own navy, even though what they really need is some local housing. This, like the Sun and Moon Model, often tempts unprepared groups into unrealistic demands and leads nowhere.

Third is the *Lasso Model*. In this case an élite group of indigenous leaders and advisers works out a technical approach to solving problems, and then goes out to slip it over the heads of the community. The problem with the Lasso Model is that the community, like a frightened reindeer, may get its neck broken or at least badly bruised in the process, and will be left with a most unpleasant feeling about the whole business. But one thing is clear.

*The value of any workable constitution or self-government arrangement lies in its acceptance and authorship by the people whom it is to govern.*

Otherwise dissident factions may arise and undermine the leadership's political credibility with government at the very moment when it is needed most. One should not need to point out that the European revolutions since 1989 have seen élites swept aside in favour of maximum public involvement in the creation of new political forms.

Fourth is the *Vegetable Model*. This is named after Andrew Marvell's 17th Century poem 'To his coy mistress', in which the poet pledges that his 'vegetable Love shall grow Vaster than Empires, and more slow' (Gardner 1972, 251). This model is gradual and organic. It builds on strengths and experience. Building thus, it is unlimited in scope. Many indigenous people fear that unless they get a large bundle of powers at once, they will get nothing. That fear is well placed, given their bad experience with the White Man in times past. However, Australians and Canadians as heirs to the British constitutional tradition are much more comfortable with steady change accompanying growing experience. The Canadian constitutional conferences on aboriginal self-government broke down over this point, the indigenous peoples seeking large commitments 'up front'. The successful Indian governments in Canada have been built up slowly and pragmatically as Cassidy and Bish have pointed out so clearly (1989). There is no practical limit to what indigenous governments can achieve over time, if it happens gradually.

To make another, rather different point, the acquired and internationally supported status of Inuit, Indians and Métis in Canada today is vastly different than was the case 25 years ago. In little more than a generation the constitutional climate and acceptance of indigenous autonomy and self-government have totally changed. Any re-organised Canada or Quebec which tries to brush aside indigenous geo-political rights and identities will find life in the community of nations very uncomfortable.

Negotiating times are trying times. The early days of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, 1977 through 1980, saw national Inuit groups nervous about the appearance of radicalism while they were engaged in difficult constitutional discussions like Greenland home rule and Inuit recognition in Canada's Constitution. It is also important that indigenous organisations not only be fiscally rigorous and administratively professional, but be seen to be so. Overworked and hassled indigenous offices may have little time for the niceties, but unfortunately such things will, in the eyes of the White Man, be indicators of the group's readiness for the responsibilities of self-government.

The role of experts and white advisers is often controversial. Most governments would rather talk with an ingenuous local person than a mean city lawyer working for the local people. Governments often claim that 'the real' aboriginal or indigenous people feel differently about X or Y. This is grotesque. No government minister or high official would consider making major property or financial deals for his future without expert professional advice. However, they seem to think that persons who often have minimal education should bargain their own and future generations' assets and options without anyone to help them grasp the government's intent, a government backed up by virtually unlimited expertise to help it maximise its powers and minimise its costs. Of course some northern whites would like to be able to take advantage of limited expertise in indigenous communities, but it is up to national governments to ensure that it does not happen.

The long processes of politico-constitutional negotiation have another positive side which indigenous people should consider. When Australia or Canada make changes in their constitutional order, it really does mean something. In some Latin American countries, on the other hand, new constitutions come and go so quickly that anyone who based

plans on the current one would be foolish. A danger of the defeated Meech Lake constitutional reform in Canada, although not the main one discussed by critics, was that the commitment to annual constitutional conferences would see the Provinces trying to regain annually whatever they felt they had lost in the Supreme Court during the preceding 12 months. A steady one-way shift in constitutional authority would be the outcome.

The most interesting indigenous constitutional negotiation may have been that which created Greenland's home rule government. Once the Folketing in Copenhagen had accepted that a search for home rule was desirable, a point scored with the help of prominent Greenland membership in the governing coalition caucus, a special body was set up. This included seven Danish MPs representing all main parties from Communists to Conservatives, and seven elected Greenlanders (i.e., Inuit), being the two MPs from Greenland and five members of the Greenland (advisory) council. The chairman was a Danish law professor. This format virtually ensured the achievement of a politically realistic and acceptable outcome in both Denmark and Greenland. Some leading authorities close to that process have said privately that they would have preferred a root-and-branch inquiry like the Berger inquiries in Alaska and northern Canada rather than a political 'fix'. Their point is that much existing political culture, in which the Greenlanders could not be expected to be as savvy as the Danes in a Danish system, was simply taken into the new Greenland without discussion.

This committee of 15 was ably assisted by expert staff and produced a detailed outline for the new government. A referendum on a grim day of Greenlandic winter weather saw home rule passed by 2-1, despite a strong 'anti' campaign by municipal governments which had been very strong and relatively unscrutinised *vis-à-vis* faraway Copenhagen, the anti-alcohol lobby (with a blunt approach, namely that 'A country that is drunk all the time can't govern itself!'), and the radical Left who saw autonomy as a deception and just another form of Danish indirect rule. Most of those people have since come around to embrace Home Rule. A new verve and confidence have accompanied the emergence of Greenland among opinion- and decision-makers. A new generation of problems now has to be solved, but most Danish critics agree that home rule is not only the correct approach but that the Inuit should be assisted to succeed rather than criticised for spilt milk.

The process of negotiation saw many differences in view arise in the Greenland case. The social democrat-led Danish government had no interest in the Inuit claims advanced for aboriginal title, and the outcome was a classic political one. The home rule legislation affirms the indivisibility of the realm and also affirms that the Greenlanders have 'some special rights' in respect of land and resources. Some issues were very difficult and although there had not been a party structure within Greenland for Greenland politics, the Greenlandic team in the negotiations split into the parts which have become the stable parties of Greenland politics. This party system has become a major element of Inuit life in the country now and a force for political stability and coherence.

Two areas in which Greenland's home rule had immediate impact are worth noting. One was that despite the many years of good work by the Danes in promoting and developing the Inuit language, now for the first time it really became the leading language of the country in Greenlandic hands. Also, the departmental structure proposed by the negotiation outcome was changed to create a special ministry for small out-stations with a mandate to better their conditions and explore economic opportunities for them. This was both a move to slow urbanisation, already the source of many social ills, and a push to maintain the cultural strength of traditional Inuit lifestyles as a resource for the whole country. Both these variations remind us that however generously motivated, the cultural imperatives in view of even the most worldly indigenous people may differ from those of sympathetic outsiders.

The Nunavut and Northern Quebec approaches have been discussed earlier. They have been the first 'popular constitution-making' in Canadian history - that is, constitution-making 'by the people', the people affected, rather than by indigenous or outside *élites*. Occasionally there were criticisms made by observers during the Nunavut process. Some of these were naive, as if seal hunters and women who had been mothering since their teens should be raising the same concerns as heard at a Harvard seminar on constitutional law - and should be marked accordingly! More to the point, the entire adult population of Nunavut (except in the largest and smallest two communities, interestingly, where turnout was less total) took an interest and raised matters of importance. Those matters were digested by the Nunavut Constitutional Forum and dealt with in the second edition of *Building Nunavut* (NCF 1985).

Negotiation processes to date, whether for 'land claims' or self-government subjects, have proven more effective than either government or indigenous sides might have guessed at the outset. Government teams faced with indigenous demands and values are usually partially amused and largely bemused. As time goes on, however, they come to understand that indigenous viewpoints are not capricious or frivolous, but fundamental to a way of life of which few whites have any real knowledge. For their part, the indigenous teams come to learn *why* various aspects of the White Man's governing systems are as they are - to prevent abuses, etc. In all cases the two sides complete their talks with much richer understanding of practical needs, and the result is much better policy and practice on both sides. The difficulty is that often the officials are rotating through jobs very quickly, or are different from the program delivery officials, so that this painfully acquired political expertise is lost, and with it the government's 'corporate memory' and sensitivity. The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement has been the perfect case study of this phenomenon in its effects for Crees and Inuit alike.

It will be a difficult choice for indigenous people faced with joining a White Man's club or developing something uniquely their own. The advantages are clear: the latter way may be more congenial at local level, although most indigenous groups today have experience of committee and representational formats, while the former may be a more sure way to siphon powers and funds from senior governments. In Australia there is good work now begun on how to make decision-making and the White Man's systems link up for effective local governance and service delivery. In Australia, too, the concept of resource boards which provide consultant and other services to indigenous entities is widely touted (Turner 1986; Queensland Parliamentary Committee 1991), and the Tangentyere Council at Alice Springs is a striking example of the value and effectiveness of such a format. In Canada the experience to date has been that governments have not always had the capacity, ground rules, imagination or administrative mandates needed to service new and anomalous indigenous self-government forms. No doubt this will improve with experience.

It may seem inconceivable to indigenous Australians but there can be such a thing as too much constitutional success. However, something of the sort has happened in Canada in recent times. That is, sometimes governments have been willing to reform and to sit down and work out the details of change. Some indigenous groups may not be ready. They know what they want, but are not sure how to achieve it. They may lack the skilled advisers or the self-confidence to put themselves in a position where, as in the notorious Indian Treaties of the 19th Century, they sign away their future and their grand-children to a régime and process they hardly can visualise.

For the White Man, things constitutional - whether on the national scale or developing local/regional government - are a narrow specialty, one of the more obscure areas of law. For indigenous peoples, however, constitutional issues represent the entire range of needs flowing from the basic fact that their self-governing and autonomous societies have lost

all power over their collective future and over many parts of their personal lives. The practical point here is that the White Man's idea of a suitable agenda for constitutional discussion may be very different from that of indigenous people. Furthermore, the process by which an indigenous community reshape themselves from marginal victims to confident persons in charge of their future is one of group psychology: it may not conform to the time, shape or pace of busy government officials wishing to negotiate a quick fix. For that reason, processes should be well considered by all sides before they are entered into.

Public relations is a critical accompaniment of the achievement of self-government. The national public and government generally do not actively seek these outcomes unless pushed. Local public and public authorities may actively oppose them. In Canada and Alaska it has been shown that only effective lobbying in national capitals and with national publics maintains attention and keeps northern needs in the news and on the minds of politicians and officials. In Lapland the lack of a Sami political lobby in Oslo has meant that Sami issues receive almost no attention except occasional feature stories about language or museums. Meanwhile, the Sami flail away against Norwegian redneck opinion in the northern counties. (The new Norwegian Sami parliament makes for a new situation, provided that its executive maintain the profile and urgency of their needs.) Unless indigenous groups have an effective presence at the levels of government where their fate will be decided, they will find it very difficult to maintain the attention of government on their ills.

Equally, international lobbying can be useful in some cases (see Chapter 19). The Inuit could have ten pages in the *Montreal Gazette* extolling their side in a row with Quebec City and that City would only yawn; an inch of comment on the back page of *Le Monde* of Paris, however, would have the Quebec government at full frenetic stretch.

[The author has cut this chapter back from a much longer text. It deserves a full-length monograph of its own.]

## CHAPTER 16

### IMPLEMENTING POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

Practical implementation of negotiated agreements has been a subject often neglected by indigenous peoples. The truth is that implementation, supposedly secondary to the fine principles and purposes agreed by political leaders, may determine the future as much as any master agreement. A poor agreement can often be made to work well by intelligent administration; a fine agreement can be made absolutely useless by inappropriate follow-up in the details.

The first task is to follow any necessary legislation through its stages and make sure that parliaments or legislatures do not undermine agreements made. Often the negotiation of suitable legislative outcomes is time consuming and exhausting.

An implementation timetable and plan should be part of any serious agreement. Negotiators should have clear general principles and more detailed guidelines for matters of particular importance or in areas where they may have particular expertise.

An indigenous people's implementation team should include experienced former public servants (or serving ones on loan where these are acceptable to the indigenous side). Despite the high costs of expert staff, the astute organisation will know that there are many capable individuals, newly retired, who may be ready to serve and work flat out for purely nominal costs or expenses. Sometimes Inuit organisations have exhausted their funds in Ottawa without taking into account the dozens of dedicated former 'northern hands' they have known and trusted, persons who live in the city and environs.

## CHAPTER 17

### NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE NORTH

The northern regions of 'first world' countries are all unlike. However, the major determinants of political and constitutional outcomes appear to be common to all. Those determinants, like earthquake fault lines running across the land, will always be the zone of cleavage, shock and destruction when anything happens - inherent weaknesses and dangers in the landscape. Many other elements of 'northern policy' may be employed by governments, and usually are. But no amount of new bridges or air terminals, museums or thematic halls of fame, welfare state generosity or support for indigenous cultural activity, will induce political settlements. In fact, they may often do no more than fuel indigenous demands for those settlements.

The two essential elements of any workable northern policy are:

- creation and maintenance of institutions for indigenous autonomy and self-government, with a land and resource base, and with adequate revenues for carrying out central tasks, all of this safe from erosion by majorities in legislatures dominated by white northerners (i.e., through constitutional or federal legislation as in Canada); and
- new policies for new times, building on national experience rather than repeating it, e.g., learning from the past in regard to human rights, environmental protection, scientific imperatives, development strategies, etc.

One may go further. If those elements are dealt with, the remaining problems will become much easier. For instance, Inuit would not have spent so much time and energy in environmental and development hearings if they had had a political entity which was part of the Canadian governing system through which they could have resolved such matters well short of public confrontation. Nunavut would have spared the national and NWT governments years of grief.

In Australia there are some who think that the time may not be ripe for change (e.g., Bennett 1989). This view seems based on an assumption that the White Man is the only political actor. However, the tides and time of minority accession to majority status within ancient homelands wait for no political scientist. These are internal developments of the people in question.

North Australia is easy for the White Man at present, although many politicians believe otherwise. Indigenous peoples are divided by cultural and linguistic background, political leadership is still young, and few levers of power have been used by indigenous people. As every month goes by, however, change is occurring among Aborigines in town and in schools, and in the practice of politics and of effective citizenship - i.e., obtaining one's social and economic due as citizens. That change will see the indigenous political movements strengthening steadily over time. There will be Ups and Downs, but the general trend will be constant. Information and education will take their toll on northern whites as well, with the sons and daughters of some of today's stalwart northern head-kickers seeing that a north at peace means a north shared equitably between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures. Meanwhile, the only question is whether white Australians are willing to let the situation decline further towards confrontation, or whether they would prefer credit sooner for a little foresight and generosity. The Northern Territory public may tire of head-kicking politics as they eventually did in the



Northwest Territories and Yukon and elect persons willing to work within the north to find political accommodation. A departing former NT premier said recently as his parting word that the NT could not progress constitutionally or economically until the White Man accepted the Aborigines and worked with them. This statement or the fact that its author made it seemed so remarkable that it took up the front page of the Darwin newspaper ('Tuxy calls it a day', *Sunday Territorian*, February 10, 1991).

Only national government sponsorship of northern political settlements can accomplish the needed tasks, however. In no country of all those under discussion has it been possible to bridge the political gap between settlers and indigenous people in the north without national government action. In practice this has meant

- special national legislation and programs for indigenous northerners, to give them the minimum rights and recognition denied them by other northerners, and
- a national role in brokering, umpiring and sometimes knocking heads together to achieve workable political accommodations between northern settler and indigenous groups.

*Both* of these elements have been used by *all* the 'first world' countries with northern regions, and the USSR has begun to do the same in respect of its 26 northern peoples. The cry in some parts of the Australian and Canadian north for simple hegemony by the White Man is a recipe for confrontation. Water does not run uphill, even Down Under, and Australians will find to their regret that the same 'laws of nature' apply here as in the northern hemisphere. Although there are politicians in all political parties who understand this, leadership rather than consensus will be required 'in the national interest' to solve the problem. As Canadians have often shown in polls, they may not understand the Ins and Outs of indigenous policy but they are firmly of the view that it is up to the federal government to find and implement solutions.

The problem of political status of northern regions has another dimension that is well discussed by Robertson *et al* (1988). First, in the chapter on 'Economic Development' Robertson makes a point which would significantly alter the southern policy-maker's view of the north (1988, 21).

*Unless new economic prospects emerge, it seems likely that Canada will have to accept the probability that a reasonable standard of living in such extreme northern areas will, for most people, involve continuing and high subsidies of various kinds.*

*There would be nothing new about high and continuing subsidy. It has been accepted by implication in the extent of a variety of government programmes developed over the last 30 years to meet arctic realities. What could be new is the perception that this is not a transitional or unexpected situation. It is simply a fact of life if a growing resident native population is to continue to live in what is today considered to be a decent manner in some of the harshest and most difficult conditions on earth.*

*Acceptance of that arctic reality could make it possible to devise methods of support and assistance that would contribute to, rather than undermine, the sense of self-reliance and independence that is vitally important for people in meeting the challenges of the Far North.*

Later he turns to the question of linking constitutional progress to arbitrary southern standards and expectations.

*[There] are great risks in relying on conventional economic development to provide a self-sustaining economy with a high level of employment for the growing population of native people. The traditional hunting life on the land and sea will be important for many native people, but more as a supplement to other sources of income than as a reliable means of full support. The traditional Canadian vision of the North as a treasure house of riches has not been demonstrated. That vision has, to some degree, diverted attention from arrangements that are consistent with the circumstances and the prospects of the North,*

*There is no reason why the problems associated with development of a sustainable, high-level economy should stand in the way of full self-government (Robertson 1988, 51-3).*

Low population figures and relative lack of economic maturity in the north are often used casually by southerners as reasons to reject political progress. It must be remembered that in Canada in 1870 the new Province of Manitoba had 10,000 people and was well and truly isolated from the rest of Canadian society in communications and transport terms. None of the northern regions of Australia or Canada today are so sparsely settled or so isolated from information and current affairs. Norway and Canada pay considerable costs to maintain appropriate levels of amenities and well-being for northern populations on their sometimes sensitive northern frontiers. Australians may wish to consider this more explicitly in their own northern policies, including their security policy.

## CHAPTER 18

### NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONS

Both Australia and Canada are engaged in constitutional review processes which are of special interest to northern territories and to indigenous peoples. At the Constitutional Centenary Conference 1991, celebrating 100 years since the conference which began the march to federation of the Australian colonies, an item was agreed by those present to be of great importance to indigenous peoples.

10. *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the Australian Constitutional System*
  - (1) *There should be a process of reconciliation between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia and the wider Australian community, aiming to achieve some agreed outcomes by the Centenary of the Constitution.*
  - (2) *This process of reconciliation should, among other things, seek to identify what rights the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have, and should have, as the indigenous peoples of Australia, and how best to secure those rights, including through constitutional changes.*
  - (3) *As part of the reconciliation process, the Constitution should recognize the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the indigenous peoples of Australia (CCC 1991).*

In the public final session of the conference, on April 5, 1991 in Sydney, Prime Minister Bob Hawke highlighted this item above all others and said that until these matters had been resolved Australia would not be a mature or just society. During the conference many participants spoke of the new and positive tone in indigenous-white dialogue at the conference (which included Torres Strait Island and NT Aboriginal representatives, among others). One columnist usually suspicious of recognition of indigenous people wrote glowingly of the new possibilities for reconciliation ('Light breaks through a black and white fog', by Padraic McGuinness, *The Australian*, April 5, 1991). Unfortunately, however, the Chief Minister of the NT read a list of complaints to the conference at its final session, and those present were restless at this 'sour note' and 'lack of a sense of occasion', as some put it. A resident NT political scientist has also raised doubts ('Constitutional amendments not necessary', by Alistair Heatley, *NT News*, April 11, 1991).

The Prime Minister's Department in Canberra had its top people in the conference and they made positive contributions to the discussion of indigenous peoples. It seems quite possible that if the NT tone does not change from one of traditional grievance to one of positive nation-building, its concerns will be simply ignored. Indigenous people, however, are likely to remain central, so one may see the situation where 'the north' gets represented by its indigenous peoples. That remarkable outcome has had recent equivalents in Norway where the Sami Parliament is the *de facto* regional northern body actively debating northern policy and development problems, and in Canada where the fact that Inuit, Dene and Métis were discussing constitutional change with Ottawa and the Provinces forced Ottawa to include the Yukon and Northwest Territories governments at the constitutional table (albeit only for the duration!). The Torres Strait Islanders and

Aborigines would seem to have an historic opportunity now to appeal over the heads of local opponents and join in the national outward-looking politics of a renewed federalism. Indeed, one speaker in the private sessions spoke strongly about the need for Australia to repair its image in Asian countries as racist and hostile to non-white immigrants and to indigenous peoples in the interests of future economic and political relations in this part of the world.

In Canada the constitutional process which began in 1978 and ended in the 1982 Constitutional amendments opened the door to indigenous peoples (Jull 1981). A spin-off was that items negotiated by Inuit in January 1981 included a commitment to hold conferences between indigenous leaders and the Prime Minister and Premiers. There were other substantive amendments in that package, including the recognition of 'existing aboriginal rights', a clause which has been authoritatively interpreted by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Sparrow* in June 1990. The Canadian constitutional process encountered difficulties and ended in some disappointment in March 1987 (Jull 1987). However, the exercise was by no means wasted, and it is assumed to be only a matter of time before it resumes. The main indigenous objective in the latter years of the process, an amendment on indigenous rights to self-government and related revenue needs, was already proceeding quietly in a variety of other negotiations, from Nunavut to tiny Indian bands (Franks 1987; Cassidy and Bish 1989).

In Canada a debate was widespread on whether a top-down approach to indigenous self-government (i.e., a constitutional provision enabling specific solutions in specific cases) or a bottom-up approach (recognising specific local outcomes already achieved as a *de facto* or *de jure* order of government) was best. Obviously the British constitutional tradition which still dominates Australian and Canadian practice is most suitably engaged in the latter mode. Inuit, for instance, need no help from the national Constitution to establish their Nunavut government or their northern Quebec government.

It seems clear that the Australian constitutional process now changes the context in which northern political settlements may take place. Processes like the work of the NT Legislative Assembly constitutional committee may have expanded agendas and new assumptions to digest. Change could be very dramatic, in fact, and indigenous groups must be sure to make the most of an opportunity which comes only once in a century, albeit this time it may run for a full decade until the centenary of federation occurs in 2001.

Australia's economic fears and troubles are not less challenging than Canada's national unity. The expansive and outward-looking mood of Australian constitutional renewal at this time appears to differ markedly from the morbid introversion of Canadian fears for the constitutional future. Despite the relatively under-developed public grasp of indigenous peoples issues in Australia, the Australian constitutional mood is surely much the more promising with which to work. The Australian Prime Minister's establishment of the new 'reconciliation process' with indigenous peoples in his own Department, like Prime Ministers Trudeau, Clark and Mulroney locating the Canadian one in the Privy Council Office/Federal-Provincial Relations Office, is an important symbol, as well as a guarantee of continuing political will. The several national parties in Canada have been actively supportive of positive change for indigenous peoples, and at least some Australian 'insiders' think that a return to bi-partisanship in indigenous affairs may be achievable.

The amazingly international focus and tone of the Constitutional Centenary Conference in Sydney is a promising one, and should help Australians keep their eyes on positive world standards in indigenous affairs, the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 19

### INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

The international dimensions of northern regionalism are of growing importance. In large part this results from the high quality of communications and computer technology today. The treatment of minorities and the state of the environment are now everybody's business, and the global political order is trying to catch up. Humble working people in all cities in all countries today are often more aware of these important shifts in world agendas than the governments who claim to represent them.

There are problems of governmental credibility even in the 'first world' liberal democracies today. To many people today there seems a lack of vertical integration, with *élites* and governments on top responding more to the traditional imperatives of power and big business than to their voters. In Eastern Europe we have seen how political credibility and representativity are necessary elements of economic, social and political reform, and how leaderships who have lost them cannot obtain further sacrifices from people, even for generally desired reform.

In northern regions the phenomenon of political change is now taking a new form. The revolt of northern voters in the 1989 Norwegian election was startling, but at least it was conventional in the sense of showing that parliamentary democracy could be made to 'work'. Often the epicentre of northern anger and activism lies within the indigenous community, people for whom conventional means of the White Man have been either too alien or too closed to meaningful indigenous input. The settlers, on the other hand, know how to make the best use of the conventional institutions available. The first elected Inuit member of the NWT Council brought no end of helpful matters to sessions, but because he was not fluent in the medieval forms of parliamentary process, many items were simply ignored because not presented in the conventional format. Indigenous peoples, despite their own problems of poverty, powerlessness or environmental pollution, have begun reaching out across regions and oceans. They have found that while they may not seem to get the attention of the decision-makers in their own countries, they can talk about their development problems with others like themselves, knowing that they are being understood.

The Inuit Circumpolar Conference is a case in point. In 1977 the North Slope Inuit of Alaska called together Inuit from Greenland, Canada and other parts of Alaska. They founded the ICC with the opening remarks of the Alaskan chairman in their ears. He called for strong regional authorities to defend the arctic environment from degradation, especially the seas now being explored by the oil majors, and for 'home rule' (i.e., regional self-government) across the arctic. These new governments would be within the boundaries of the existing national states and would have the maximum possible levers to protect their cultural and environmental futures.

The ICC assemblies are not like conferences of the White Man. They continue, rather, an indigenous tradition of summer gatherings of Inuit where serious talk and sharing of experience as well as the sharing of foods, trade and even 'mixing up the gene pool a bit', as one Inuit leader put it, are all part of the week-long gathering. ICC draws the world press to these assemblies so that the southern public get a rare glimpse of the preoccupations of the world's Inuit. There are art exhibits, displays of traditional skills and every evening there are cultural performances. The hundreds of observers and friends of ICC have their own meetings and take advantage of having all the key actors in the arctic available for a walk in the midnight sun or a meal of traditional Inuit foods. In

1989 the Soviet Inuit took part for the first time, something long sought by the rest of the Inuit. One hopes that this bit of arctic *glasnost* will not be lost.

At the 1989 ICC assembly in Sisimiut (formerly Holsteinsborg), Greenland, the success of the Inuit was evident. The young men and women who had founded ICC with little more than ideals, were now older, wiser, even greyer. In one extraordinary session leading representatives of the circumpolar governments - Kremlin and Chukotka Autonomous Region, Washington and Alaska governor's office, Ottawa's northern affairs minister and the NWT premier, Quebec national assembly (parliament) members, Greenland premier and Copenhagen representative - gave an account of how they were implementing ICC resolutions and goals of earlier conferences. For their part, the Inuit delegates might write a tactful resolution on one matter and leave out another subject altogether - no longer protesters outside, they were now insiders with a share of power. Self-government, environmental *régimes* and development agencies were now their fields of action. A few years ago national governments were bemused and even worried by pan-Inuit solidarity but what has emerged seems to have worked out well for everyone. The arctic is no longer a blank on the map but a place where busy indigenous people are filling new white-collar and old 'expert' posts. A high level of activity and of interaction with national and international systems has replaced what the White Man saw as terrible isolation. Inuit have unquestionably taken over the political agenda. Where they are not in full and direct control, they have won the *de facto* right to be consulted on all initiatives. Their own savvy in the arts of political lobbying - only recently acquired, and through experience, not formal education - do the rest.

The Inuit have also been in the forefront of a truly circumpolar spirit. While Canadian politicians and officials have long enjoyed the *cliché* that Canada is a northern or an arctic country, the term never meant much until a parliamentary report in 1986 on international relations called for serious arctic policy (Simard and Hockin 1986). Basing itself on a number of briefs submitted by the Inuit, the committee called for northern policies which faced social and economic realities rather than hypothetical military, transportation and geo-political futures. This report precipitated new work which reached fruition in a special report of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, a report which has been accepted by all political parties and principal interests as a guideline for northern development (Robertson *et al* 1988).

Where governments locked into the Cold War have been slow to take their fingers off the trigger, arctic peoples with shared needs for daily food and livelihoods have found themselves natural allies. It was only on July 24, 1990, that American airborne military control centres which had been in the air non-stop since February 1961 quietly landed, while the Soviets ceased their submarine patrols off the US coasts and their Bear bomber probes to Canada's arctic border ('Defence Notes', *Peace and Security*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Autumn 1990, p. 17.). Governments prodded by indigenous peoples are now exploring new multilateral forums for cooperation in the arctic, not least because some governments including Greenland and the NWT do not like seeing themselves outflanked or criticised on political issues by sections of their public speaking abroad.

Inuit are typically pragmatic. They are more interested in sane and successful development and are happy to work with the new governmental forums. What they will not accept is being excluded. Until Nunavut and other satisfactory forms of self-government are achieved, national governments and northern governments will find themselves freely and publicly criticised at home and abroad by people who know a great deal more about northern realities than diplomats among suits and sherry glasses. The international arena among northern governments has simply become a new battleground for the legitimacy of governing authority in the north.

The major work of Inuit international cooperation at the moment is on arctic environmental protection. As the most immediate users of arctic productivity they are uniquely suited to lead a circumpolar campaign. When the Helsinki process brought together the heads of North American and European governments in Copenhagen in 1990, the Inuit and other indigenous peoples were meeting each other and the press close by to press for recognition of the Brundtland Report's view of indigenous environmental and resource rights. The world environmental future and indigenous future cannot be separated, and indigenous peoples are determined that they will not be.

Australian indigenous internationalism has not yet developed fully. Indeed, some northern and outback Australian indigenous groups have tended to see foreign conferencing and public relations as needless joy-rides - as do their white neighbours view travelling white politicians. This may be partly a problem of the lack of feedback they have received from such travellers. Well focussed and properly prepared international work by Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines living in the north could be both cost-effective and provide benefits which could not be gained by any domestic political activity. Unfocussed and symbolic activity, as has been undertaken by some Canadian indigenous groups - though never by Inuit - can be both expensive and counter-productive.

Two other significant areas of international attention must be mentioned briefly. Given the remarkable comparability among the northern regions of the 'first world', focussed studies of public administration, aboriginal rights, resource and environment regulation, etc., are very useful. Some governments such as Canada and the NWT have important circumpolar sections and activities. It would be advantageous if the Canadians and other northern hemisphere researchers took a greater interest in North Australia. It would also assist progress in northern and indigenous policy in Australia to link up with northern hemisphere work. Some steps in this direction are being taken by the North Australia Research Unit of the Australian National University. Australians have a significant advantage: because the northern hemisphere work seems to have made much recent headway, Australians can benefit from northern hemisphere mistakes without repeating their failures. It would be especially useful to have a study network on politics, public administration and cross-cultural relations in 'first world' northern regions, with regular major conferences. There is a distinctive regionalism involved which benefits from such attention. Canadian Inuit led the resistance to their ICC joining the World Council of Indigenous Peoples because they saw clearly that their concerns could not possibly receive much attention in light of the urgent matters of genocide in Latin America. They would still need cooperation for their own development problems and they chose not to diffuse their energies and funds too widely.

The final area of international interest is most important, and sometimes most uncomfortable for national governments. This is the pressure of international opinion and publicity on matters of domestic indigenous rights or environmental abuse. One of the problems of federal unions such as Australia and Canada is that while the national government takes the international blame, it may be sub-national governments immune to national dictates which have the power to resolve these matters. But these matters are global business and how national governments arrange things to solve them is their own problem. As Australian foreign minister Evans told the United Nations in Australia's latest policy statement to that body,

*We frankly acknowledge that Australia's own past is not without blemish in regard to human rights, in particular concerning the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, we have progressed along the path of rectifying those injustices, we welcome international scrutiny of our efforts, and are prepared to engage in dialogue with any interested country at any time on such issues. We take*

*the view that the question of conformity to international human rights standards is not each country's own internal business, but the world's business (Evans 1990, 12-13).*

Rome is not built in a day. Within a few weeks of that statement in late 1990 the Torres Strait Islanders were struggling to gain entry to the world assembly in Australia of the United Nations' IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and National Resources). They only succeeded at the last minute and with difficulty. Outside some sessions there were demonstrations by Aborigines who had no representative inside.

The world human rights movement is centred in Western Europe. Two phenomena there ensure that indigenous people and their self-government will be increasingly prominent issues world-wide. First, 1992 sees Spain leading the world celebration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' first voyage to the New World. The Olympics and the largest-ever world Expo will help focus attention. Spain quickly backtracked from its initial 'discovery' theme to one of 'encounter' between Europe and the Americas, i.e., the Indian and Inuit Americas. Already books are coming out, conferences of scholars and others are being organised and one may be sure that Australia and Canada will be soon swept up in discussion of the European treatment of indigenous peoples world-wide.

The other phenomenon is that a re-united Europe, where human rights and economic hopes have recently triumphed over authoritarian governments, will now accelerate the pace of its human rights Helsinki process. That process will soon see all European countries (including the USSR), the USA and Canada committing themselves to stronger guarantees for minorities, especially territorially-based minorities, and to much tougher ground rules for the monitoring of each other's minority policies and practice.

In Australia, particularly, there has been much recent public scepticism about policy towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Even supposedly progressive academics have written pessimistic studies 'proving' that progress is not really feasible. The internal development of indigenous peoples is not a mystery, and in fact is quite predictable. If sensible accommodations are not made by majorities they can expect eventual violence directed against themselves. Of course, the violence of minorities is mostly directed inwards, among themselves. They are the real victims. The Oka incident in Canada in 1990 and sympathy actions across the country stopped a discreet tiptoeing away from indigenous issues by the national government. Those issues had become very prominent, intimating a *de facto* 'third order of government' down the road. It is unfortunate that lives are lost for public and political attention to be gained for indigenous hardships.

The rest of the 'first world' has been moving towards active acceptance of autonomy and self-government for indigenous peoples. Australian policy will be criticised increasingly to the extent that it does not adopt those goals. Some officials may have enjoyed the obfuscation value of terms like 'self-determination' used loosely, but what time this sleight-of-hand may have bought is fast running out. The indigenous self-management reform which is ATSIIC - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission - is most interesting but it will only be as effective as its pace towards those goals.



## CHAPTER 20

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. The politics of northern frontiers display both recurring features and common patterns. An awareness of this higher-level order may enable governments, indigenous northerners and non-indigenous settlers to escape the painful trial and error of so much policy in northern regions. The same basic problems and conflicts are found in northern and outback Australia, northern Canada, Alaska, Greenland, the Faroes, Shetland, the Lapland areas of Norway, Sweden and Finland (and even the Soviet north). All have something to learn from the experience of the others.
2. While national governments in Australia, Canada and Norway spend large sums on military maintenance of northern borders, within those borders lie northern regions whose civil order is uncertain and actively disputed. Instead we find constitutional arrangements fluid; political institutions undeveloped, or unaccepted by significant regions or groups of people; 'rights' to land, freshwater, marine areas and resources deeply disputed; figurative and literal jurisdictional boundaries contested; fundamental conflict on economic development philosophies; profound ethno-political cleavages; and the determination of indigenous peoples to establish their own public authorities outside of settler-dominated institutions. With Australia and Canada seeking constitutional renewal in the coming months and years, the socio-political and constitutional needs of the north are especially important. Northern authorities often lack the basic loyalty and respect of large numbers of the people nominally under their jurisdiction. However, dissident northern peoples have generally sought improved institutions within the nation-state rather than outside it. It is in the interests of national government to respond actively and positively to this moderate program.
3. Northern politics today are shaped by ethno-political conflict. Any issues in the region from the military to museums, resource use to rare birds, are apt to become hostages of these politics. Indigenous peoples set the northern political agenda by negative sanction as much as by positive direction. Indigenous dissidence may have been socio-economic at first, but once conflict is seen to be between cultural communities, tackling initial grievances alone will not suffice.
4. Any northern policy must begin with *political settlements* between north and south, and between indigenous and non-indigenous society. Typically the settlers see the future in terms of national incorporation on southern models (e.g., as a State or Province), while the indigenous people want new models which will recognise their historical rights and usages, and enable them to survive as collective self-governing entities. In their conflicts the settlers invoke the political traditions of the majority society of the nation-state while the indigenous peoples appeal to evolving standards of minority and aboriginal rights internationally, and to the democratic morality of the southern public.
5. No northern political settlement, and little cross-cultural reconciliation of any kind, has been achieved in any OECD country without an active national government role. The locals will not 'work it out'. The first task of national governments in the north is to sponsor or broker political settlements which accommodate the needs of indigenous peoples. If indigenous people do not trust the settler population, they will refuse accommodation with northern settlers and

will accept only guaranteed and visibly protected arrangements with national governments. While governments may not wish to impose policies on northern authorities, especially if these are *de facto* or *de jure* sovereign governments, inaction will invite more social strife for which national authorities will be held accountable in the world.

6. Political accommodation may require ingenuity and flexibility, but it poses no threat to national unity. To ignore ethno-political cleavage, however, is to invite deepening social and political problems - and eventual unrest. Political settlements contribute to northern stability and development, in the experience of northern NATO countries and their neighbours. Accommodation may also have a positive influence on national political culture, social attitudes and constitutional convention. The 'native movement' in Canada has had a greater impact on Canadian history and culture than it has yet had on native history or culture.
7. Territorially-based indigenous minorities are a category of people with very different rights than immigrant communities. Their moral and historical claims are increasingly being translated into international standards which Australia, Canada and other 'first world' countries must recognise and affirm - e.g., Article 27 of the 1966 International Convention on Civil and Political Rights as elaborated by Norway's Sami Rights Committee report of 1984 and chapter 4 of the Brundtland Report. There are several indications that these standards will become more demanding in the next few years.
8. The aspirations of indigenous ethno-political movements are knowable and finite. Sometimes indigenous rhetoric may frighten governments, but a cool appraisal and translation of terms into a plan of official actions often reveals reasonableness. Once demands are understood by governments they can be dealt with. Some governments find it hard to see that matters like access to natural resources and rights to determine ethnic membership are the fundamental matters they truly are. To be successful, political settlements must be 'package deals' which tackle the generality of problems.
9. Political settlements must accommodate cultural and historical uniqueness as much as equal constitutional opportunity within nation-states; secure to indigenous peoples resources (including land, water and marine rights), or compensation in lieu, to restore an economic base; provide for decision-making through indigenous entities, e.g., regional self-government; and assure to all northern people equitable access to high-quality public services and facilities as in settled southern regions.
10. The northern responsibilities of national governments today are primarily constitutional, although there is also a continuing need to assist locally with services to marginalised indigenous peoples. Central agencies, most appropriately departments of prime ministers rather than welfare-types or development ministries, should play the lead role.
11. National programs and policies which merely extend southern systems and standards into northern areas are often experienced by indigenous peoples as assimilation or even 'cultural genocide'. There is a difference between social equity and uniformity.
12. In the English-speaking north (Australia, Canada and USA), although not in the Nordic north, there is appalling disparity in public services and living conditions between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Norway's equalisation of

- services and facilities among municipal and regional districts is worth study in Australia and Canada.
13. Processes for negotiating political settlements may be frustrating for indigenous peoples, but they can also be productive.
  14. Australia, Canada and Norway have shown a strong lead in promoting ecologically 'sustainable development' in the world. Their own large northlands are ideal places to demonstrate their own commitment to this ethic, in cooperation with indigenous peoples.
  15. Government funding will continue to be a major determinant of northern economic conditions, but economic dependency should not be a bar to political and constitutional development within nation-states.
  16. Northern studies, analysis and information dissemination within the north are a necessary accompaniment of northern development and socio-political maturity.
  17. Indigenous peoples must consider carefully the character of self-government systems they adopt. Governments quickly become like other governments. Inappropriate management systems can be Trojan horses undermining the structure of indigenous societies.
  18. Early action by Australia and Queensland to provide the Torres Strait Islanders with a comprehensive political settlement and by the Canadian government to establish the Nunavut Territory are important for national and international credibility. Australian protection of Northern Territory Aborigines and Quebec accommodation of Inuit will be seen abroad as vital tests of the character of Australian and Quebec governments.
  19. International cooperation and comparative study by governments and academics are needed to explore solutions to recurring problems in northern regions. For indigenous peoples international work is no less important to obtain ideas from similar peoples with similar problems, and to keep the international community informed about government-indigenous relations so that moral pressure may be maintained on national governments to live up to indigenous peoples' obligations to indigenous minorities.
  20. In northern regions we may now be seeing new types of society coming into being, especially among indigenous peoples. They combine old cultural ways with new technologies and choices; they do not conform to simplistic white demands that they be either folklorically traditional or utterly assimilated. Their emphasis on environmental protection, sustainable development and socio-cultural resurgence, as well as their lack of industrial age baggage, make them good candidates for the new world order. Instead of viewing them as unfortunate relics, governments and publics should support them as a wave of the future. Most public policies have tried to 'solve' northern indigenous problems in terms of conventional employment and other strategies, or to reward only those initiatives which tend towards indigenous peoples' assimilation to majority norms. Instead we should be investing in their vision and opportunities for the future.

## CHAPTER 21

### EPILOGUE

Developed (OECD) countries have long treated their northlands as if these were difficult and wayward children requiring a mix of patience and direction, and not yet ready for real responsibility. They have been embarrassing family problems, best hidden from strangers. This view is quite wrong. The weakness of national policy in the north has been a failure to appreciate that northern politics belong to another category than the mainstream political science of the nation-state in question. The north is not a last bit to be assimilated to complete nationhood; it is, instead, a different sort of challenge, and one which belongs as much to an international political phenomenon of cross-cultural relations and ethno-politics as to the habitual channels of national history.

Indeed, the politics of northern frontiers are so predictable that they can be reduced to a board game. We will call it 'Northern Development'. Throws of the dice land us on different squares. The object is to reach a social and political consensus on a new constitution for a northern region (or territory, or State, or Province). If we land on square 17, the economic development minister drinks (or eats) a glass of water (or plate of reindeer meat or fresh-picked berries) to show that alleged pollution by arsenic (or cyanide, or PCBs, or cesium 137) is harmless. On square 41 we must return to Square One to hear a land claims appeal in a higher court. On square 47 the national prime minister (or premier of State or Province) in Ottawa (or Oslo, Brisbane, Quebec City or Copenhagen) insists that there can be no discussion of separate indigenous status or institutions, adding that, 'of course', consideration of local circumstances and unique cultural traditions must be reflected in any administrative and political changes, these to be looked at by the government on a case by case basis. One might call the study of this predictability and recurrence, with apologies to the late Northrop Frye, Victoria College, University of Toronto, an *archetypal criticism* of the politics of northern regions.

Both Australia and Canada are facing the future with unease about their domestic constitutional and inter-governmental arrangements. They often see northern regions as marginal and needing only future consideration and problem resolution, but in fact these northern places are part of a new world order. As a few Canadian national figures like Gordon Robertson have seen, the resolution of these northern constitutional matters, and the equitable accommodation of difference races and cultures, lifestyles and livelihoods, customary and statutory rights, are important elements of national renewal. In the north new things can be made to happen, unlike the tried and true and sometimes rather stale southern population centres. The challenges of northern living in extreme climates with limited amenities may not be for everyone, but everyone can join in the vision and building of new societies by their participation in the national political order. Northerners need the informed support of southerners today as much as they ever did.

While Australians and Canadians are trying to re-patch their southern centred society and its legal and constitutional framework, they have little patience with northern pleas for attention. That is too bad. In the north a new type of world is being created - untidy and uncertain, to be sure, just like the migrations historical and prehistorical which saw the Aborigines, Inuit and Torres Strait Islanders, as well as the Norse, Canadians and Australians arrive in their current locations. While policy-makers tend to know the north through the prism of negative social statistics, there are other points of access, best found in company with the northerners themselves. Inspired by his first stay of any length in a Nunavut community in the 1960s, a young Canadian poet saw the Inuit as 'the first survivors in a newer world'.

## APPENDIX

**Following are some desirable northern studies and research areas for Australia and Canada to explore.**

1. Norway's strikingly successful equalisation in the provision of services and facilities to even the most remote townships of the country.
2. The role of local administration and local self-government (two different things) in North Norway and Greenland in meeting the needs of indigenous peoples.
3. Norway's Sami parliament in action: a possible model for national representation of indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada?
4. The comparative experience, positive and negative, of Inuit cooperation among Greenland, Canada, USA and USSR, and Sami cooperation among Norway, Sweden, Finland and the USSR.
5. Soviet experience in the organisation of indigenous livelihoods in northern and tribal regions.
6. Soviet experience in retention of indigenous culture and languages among the 26 'small peoples' of the Russian republic.
7. Recent and proposed local and regional government experience of indigenous peoples in Alaska under both State and Federal frameworks.
8. Education and training policies and programs of the North Slope Borough in Alaska.
9. The Inuit experience before and after the Nunavut land claims settlement of the various bodies and powers negotiated through that settlement in respect of environment, land and water use, marine areas, development impacts, etc.
10. The experience of the Environmental Quality Commission of Northern Quebec as a case study in environmental and aboriginal rights protection.
11. The operation of the Greenland non-renewable resource administration since Home Rule.
12. The response of military authorities to the aspirations and interests of indigenous peoples in northern regions, and the relations between indigenous peoples and the military.
13. The relationship between national policy, northern development, 'sustainable development' and indigenous peoples interests in North Norway.
14. Indigenous peoples, coastal resources and marine rights in northern regions.
15. Trans-boundary accommodations in letter and in fact of indigenous peoples and their interests, e.g., Canada-Alaska, Canada-USA human movements; Canada-Greenland Inuit hunting rights; Torres Strait indigenous peoples fishing, hunting and human travel rights.
16. International cooperation and political action by indigenous peoples of 'first world' countries and their achievements.

17. The value of 'regional conservation strategies' and sustainable development projects generally for indigenous peoples' in northern regions, and how to devise these to be most effective.
18. The risks and benefits of indigenous political coalition with or assimilation to existing political parties in their countries.
19. The value, real and potential, in 'first world' indigenous peoples extending foreign aid, on their own or on behalf of national governments, to indigenous peoples in other lands.
20. The experience of the Environmental Quality Commission in Northern Quebec.
21. Ethno-politics, research and scholarship in northern regions, and their relationship to the procedures of political science and anthropology.
22. The history of national northern policy in Norway in the 20th Century.
23. Studies modelled on Lord Kilbrandon's Shetland study for other northern regions.
24. The relationship between indigenous organisations and the legislature since 1978 in the Northern Territory and 1979 in the Northwest Territories.
25. Histories of northern regions with a particular focus on cross-cultural relations and social process.
26. The evolution of northern development mythology, national policy and public perceptions in Australia and Canada.
27. A history of Faroese home rule and nationalism since World War II.
28. Production of model plans for political settlements in selected regions of North Australia and northern Canada including resource rights, economic development, environmental protection, in conjunction with representative northern peoples' groups.
29. Cultural policy in Greenland since home rule.
30. Comparative studies of North Australian and northern Canadian indigenous land claims bodies - their agendas, powers, problems and overall experience.
31. Indigenous peoples and mining companies in northern regions of the north circumpolar world and the relevance of that experience to Australia.
32. The cultural renewal of identity through literature and the arts in outback and northern Australia, north Norway and northern Canada.
33. Traditional environmental knowledge in indigenous languages and the role of language in environmental management.
34. The similarities and differences between indigenous minority policy in 'first world' and 'third world' countries, and why they are different.
35. Feasibility study for an international northern regions comparative studies council involving indigenous peoples, research and consultant bodies, and northern and national governments.

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This book looks into the current problems and historical development of outback and northern Australia and the north in Canada and reaches some clear conclusions about the inadequacy of current government policies. It also shows that while Australia and Canada treat the north as unique and peculiar, these regions are part of a wider experience of European civilisation reaching into remote hinterlands - in Alaska, Scandinavia, Greenland and the North Atlantic islands like Shetland, Faroes and Iceland. But there is a message of hope, and a set of guidelines for resolving some of our oldest national embarrassments. The author speculates in conclusion that a new approach to 'northern development', whether in Queensland or the Top End, in arctic Canada or Alaska, could set our Western countries on course to cope more intelligently with the emerging world order of which these northlands are already part.