Aboriginal Peoples and Political Change in the North Atlantic Area

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The plight of aboriginal or native peoples is of increasing interest to the world community, even if not yet the subject of enlightened action in many countries. The misfortunes of Latin American Indians in the face of ruthless industrialization and large-scale farming have, with the help of modern communications media, shocked the European peoples on both sides of the Atlantic. However, when strong clear voices in our own time and our own country tell us we are "racist" or that our present actions are as brutal as those of the past, we are apt to shake our heads at such "radicalism."

If we cannot accept the accusations of a Harry Daniels, President of Canada's national organization representing the Métis and non-status Indians, and hence the largest body of Canadian native people,1 or the analysis of northern development policies quietly put forward by a George Erasmus, President of the Dene Nation,2 the Indian and Métis organization in the Mackenzie Valley which has been the leading edge of the aboriginal fight against insensitive development interests, where do we turn? It may be useful to compare our experience with that of other countries faced with similar questions and to attempt to identify common difficulties. In this process, I believe, we will discover that far from being a local aberration or an adventure of restless youth, the voices we hear are authentic expressions of universal problems and ones, therefore, which may require different solutions than may be dictated by current political fashion or by our cultural prejudices.

The three countries to be discussed are Canada, Danish Greenland and Norway. These three circumpolar countries not only include a wide variety of experience, but immediately concern international relations experts studying the North Atlantic area. Indeed, it is the very fact that "the native movement" has begun to impinge on the considerations of strategic studies that makes serious discussion of the questions addressed here so important.3 But these three national situations are only part of the whole circumpolar experience; examples from northern Finland or Iceland, Shetland or Alaska would equally serve the purposes of the discussion.

Before examining the specific cases, it may be useful to describe a few of the most general characteristics of the political culture of the region under consideration. Three uniquely Canadian situations — northern Quebec, Nunavut and the national constitutional review process involving native people — will then be analysed. A tentative conclusion will follow an exploration of Greenland's home rule and Norway's rapidly evolving native rights movement.

General Characteristics

All of the areas under discussion are "northern." Just how difficult it is to define what that means in practical terms is suggested in Louis-Edmond Hamelin's Nördicitë Canadienne4 by his complex mixture of physical and cultural indices which determine degrees of "northerness" or "nordicity." At its simplest, we generally understand a northern community to include a small population, living in a harsh climate and inadequately linked to the societies, services and infrastructure of the state which exercises political control over it.

A second feature of our areas is that they all lie within Western liberal democracies. This has considerable significance, as the Canadian Inuit were quick to notice when defining the goals and format of the international organization (Inuit Circumpolar Conference) which they have jointly created with Alaska and Greenland Inuit.5 The possibilities for overt political expression and action are there, as presumably are opportunities for non-violent change. For this reason official appeals to "higher causes" (such as military security, territorial integrity, or the energy needs of the whole state) are inherently problematic and destabilizing insofar as they change the rules of the game and impose limitations prematurely on political processes in areas where — our third
point — political processes are underdeveloped and seeking expression.

The third point is the heart of our story, but it need not be discussed at length here. It is sufficient to point out that because of small populations, remote locations vis-à-vis national decision centres and, indirectly, unsettled land and resources regimes, these areas do not dispose of the full rights of political citizenship enjoyed by other inhabitants of the state. The reasons given are generally of two types: that small numbers and other administrative inconveniences do not warrant or permit the highest levels of political participation until some future time established perhaps by some future review; or, that the great wealth potential to be found in the regions where so few people live could not responsibly be shared or controlled by so few. This double bind is particularly familiar to the people of northern Canada.

Linked to the preceding is the obvious importance of land and resources, including marine and seabed resources. The two main features of this problem are jurisdictional and proprietary rights and conflicting resource uses. In the first case, there may be limited ownership of land, as in Finnmark county of northern Norway or in Greenland, and hence limited control by the people of the region. Or there may be a fundamental dispute, again in Greenland, but also in all other aboriginal areas, as to who should hold the powers over lands and resources and on what terms. Resource use conflicts often occur between resident communities dependent economically, and for social and cultural continuity, upon renewable resource activities (fishing or reindeer herding, sea mammal or land hunting), and interests which would, or could, damage this renewable resource base. Far from there being anything sentimental about these environmental battles, they are basic to economic and social self-interest. The impact of big money and inflation, influxes of outside transient workers and pollution all threaten the stability of the community, and for communities which have survived many hundreds or even thousands of years, the trade-offs for a ten-year mining project may be unexciting.

Finally and perhaps obviously, these northern regions contain culturally and linguistically separate communities whose distinctiveness becomes both a rallying point and a cause of political development. This very distinctiveness becomes a major datum with its own set of demands. When all the factors mentioned are found in conjunction, as they are not only in the aboriginal areas under specific discussion here, but in all the other small societies of the circumpolar world, including the European peoples of the North Atlantic area, one might expect that special political circumstances would obtain.

Northern Quebec

In northern Quebec fifteen Inuit villages account for a rapidly expanding population of 5,200. The families from these villages have used and occupied about one third of Quebec since ancient times, and their ancestors much of the north shore of the St. Lawrence in early historic times. It is estimated that about eighty per cent of the food needs of these people still derive from traditional sources, and indeed traditional hunting and fishing activities are the main occupations of the people. Quebec Inuit are a minority within a minority; not only an aboriginal minority within a predominantly European society, they also, by historical accident, speak English as a second language after their native Inuktitut and are hence classed as part of the Anglophone minority — with all its political signification — by the Quebec Francophone majority. Nevertheless, in their villages and in their overall territory, the Inuit constitute the overwhelming majority of the population. The “two solitudes” of Inuit and Francophone Quebec could not be more clear, separated as they are by many hundreds of miles of boreal forest and tundra.

The relations between Quebec Inuit and Francophone Quebecers are a worthy subject for study. The history of suspicion and tension is more complex, although not more unpleasant, than the usual run of dismal native-white relations in Canada. In the 1930s, when the Quebec government of the day rejected bills for payment of Inuit famine relief and took the case to the Supreme Court of Canada, the resulting decision
(the so-called Eskimo Reference of 1939) specified that Inuit were Indians within the constitutional meaning and hence a special responsibility of the federal government. It is this very particular status, shared by other native peoples in Canada, that has offended Quebec nationalist sentiment in recent years. Unique perhaps among its constitutional positions, Quebec spokesmen argue that legalisms like the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and related legislation should not be taken literally but as tokens of a new era of trust between native peoples and the provincial government? Quebec officials, meanwhile, find themselves continually faced with Anglophone advisers to the Inuit, often former federal officials, and are suspicious of their presumed federalist sympathies. In short, the nationalism of a Francophone Quebec vis-à-vis a predominantly Anglophone Canada is the special context which complicates the situation of Quebec Inuit and must be understood. But the other features are more universal.

When the Bourassa government was elected in 1970 it linked the province's destiny to the vast hydro-electric potential lying in the many wild rivers which fell off all sides of the great Quebec peninsula. In a chronically difficult economic and employment situation, the vision of new wealth and an engine for Quebec economic growth beckoned. Plans to begin development in the James Bay region were pushed ahead for the largest-ever hydro-electric project in the world. The views of native people and the impact of these plans on their lives were little known and not thought important. But a successful court injunction won by the Inuit and the Cree temporarily stopped the project. As a result, Quebec was prepared to negotiate a comprehensive agreement to free not only the areas around the project from further legal action but to establish clearly the title of Quebec to the whole of its territory (other than Labrador, still disputed by Quebec). The result in 1975 was the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

Although the Agreement was widely criticized by other native groups across Canada, and especially by those who hoped to negotiate their own agreements with government later, the Inuit and the Cree obtained under its terms cash compensation, elective regional government and school board structures, lands reserved under various regimes, development agencies, as well as continuing opportunities to participate in environmental decisions relating to the hydro-electric or other developments in the region. These arrangements are, in all cases, utterly separate, Cree from Inuit, although the Inuit often speak of their regional government structures as being "non-ethnic."

The Agreement spawned two primary agencies — the Kativik Regional Government and the Makivik Corporation. The latter is an economic development corporation and trustee of the cash compensation owed to all the Inuit of Northern Quebec. It is also the central political and social representative body for the Inuit. (The Makivik principals were the members of the Northern Quebec Inuit Association who had negotiated the Agreement.) Since the signing of the Agreement, much of the activity in northern Quebec has been initiated by the financially independent Makivik Corporation whose elected leaders have become the dominant Inuit politicians in northern Quebec. These dynamic leaders have emphasized economic development over ideology with the result that the political climate of the region is characterized by strong personalities working for practical community interests.

Meanwhile, the Kativik Regional Government, with few funds and denied the powers or resources for which the Inuit had traded away aboriginal rights, is the vehicle which is supposed to deliver most of the housing, water, sewage and health services. Since early 1980 an argument, which shows no signs of resolution, has divided the Inuit, Quebec and federal governments over the question of actual levels of service. In March 1981, a House of Commons standing committee reviewing Inuit and Cree grievances in this area took extraordinary all-party action to obtain direct federal assistance for the Inuit and to bring greater pressure to bear on Quebec. For its part, Quebec argues that most of the issues of concern are strictly internal matters. Because this federal-provincial stalemate has persisted in one form or another since 1963, Inuit community services are
often alarmingly poor and certainly far below the standards established in the Northwest Territories.

The Inuit failed to obtain rights to resource taxation or any formula financing which might assist their revenue picture through development in the region. With only business licenses and other such inauspicious possibilities for revenue, the Inuit fear that they may have a difficult financial future. To date they have been unable to generate serious talks with Quebec about revenue sharing. The cash compensation, which gives an illusion of wealth, cannot be used for capital requirements. The interest from the compensation fund provides the operating budget for Makivik and its subsidiary companies which, in turn, are intended to create jobs, training and more wealth in the Inuit north. These many difficulties have maintained a small but persistent dissident movement centred in two communities and in the association of Cooperatives. The dissidents seek to delay any agreements with governments and look to a day when their children can bargain more effectively, an approach dismissed by Makivik partisans as unrealistic.

Two points are worth emphasizing in conclusion. During the testimony of March 26, 1981, before the House standing committee in Ottawa, both Inuit and Cree leaders continued to stress that they regarded the Agreement itself as sound; they did not, however, believe that it was being implemented in good faith. Whereas they had clearly understood that normal government programs would be available as before — a view supported by the Hon. Warren Allmand, the man who, as Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs at the time, had piloted the Agreement legislation through Parliament — their experience indicated that they were often left on their own with only their compensation funds. To quote Makivik vice-president Mark R. Gordon, one of the negotiators of the Agreement,

...in the negotiation of the James Bay Agreement we had to negotiate for many of the programs and normal services that are available to other Canadians under the normal laws of application. We were supposed to get those programs in the first place, but we had to negotiate for those essential services. We had to trade them off for aboriginal rights. Sure, we could have got a hell of a lot more in land but we had to fight to be able to get basic municipal services. Even those have not been implemented today.

Nunavut

If the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement bears a strong resemblance to the Alaska land claims settlement, Nunavut is strictly a made-in-Canada model. In fact, the scrupulous adherence to Canadian political norms was a conscious attempt by Inuit leaders to ensure greater credibility for their political aspirations than had been allowed those of other native groups meeting public hostility or incomprehension with their talk of nationhood, sovereignty and self-determination.

Nunavut, meaning “our land” in Inuktitut and therefore a most potent concept for the Inuit, would divide the Northwest Territories along the tree-line (which also separates the Indians [Dene] from the Inuit). The principal official opposition to the idea seems to be based on the belief that drawing such a boundary line would create an “ethnic jurisdiction,” something said to be repugnant to Canadian norms — although of course the southern provinces are no more mono-ethnic with large Anglo-Celtic or French-descended majorities than would be Nunavut with its non-Inuit minority (whose rights would be guaranteed under the Inuit proposal). The other argument, that a divided NWT would not be administratively practical or economical, loses force when it is recalled that both the Conservative and Liberal governments of the early 1960s had proposed precisely this division on the grounds of such efficiency. Nevertheless, nobody in the Inuit movement believes that the realization of Nunavut will be easy.

The first and perhaps most important step in the creation of Nunavut would be the division of the NWT. Inuit politicians are working vigorously to that end and have the sympathetic report of an NWT Legislative Assembly committee set up to study the matter last year, plus a unanimous Assembly vote favouring a referendum.
on the concept to support them. The federal Cabinet which has given no positive indications on the question despite receiving periodic representations from Inuit groups, is planning to discuss the subject sometime in 1981.

Although Nunavut has been proposed by the Inuit since 1974, the present detailed proposal was approved by the Annual General Meeting of the Inuit Tapirisat at Igloolik, NWT, in September 1979. As with the James Bay Agreement and Indian treaties of the past, it was resource development which mobilized the Inuit to start organizing their political concerns around the concept of Nunavut. Beginning in the Mackenzie Delta region, the search for oil, gas, uranium and other minerals, the damage done by exploration crews to ecologically sensitive landscapes, and the threats to the marine life on which most Inuit rely for their food and livelihood, could not be ignored. When appeals directed through the normal channels of government bureaucracy failed to yield an adequate response to their concerns, the Inuit began to develop a sophisticated political platform.

The Nunavut proposal integrates the settlement of Inuit land claims with political structures. Rather than divide the northern lands into different categories of ownership and administration, the Inuit would turn to the kind of multiple use planning favoured by modern environmentalists and encouraged by the Inuit values of collective ownership and sharing. Despite similar land use management schemes in provinces like British Columbia, Inuit spokesmen are finding that they must explain their proposal in considerable detail.

The proposal for a self-governing Nunavut territory along lines previously advocated by federal government northern affairs officials would seem unexceptional. However, the misunderstanding which has surrounded the proposal to date has led many observers in Canadian native groups to see its fate as a test of Canadian sincerity in the amelioration of the conditions of aboriginal peoples.

The Canadian Constitution

Constitutional reform has exercised Canadian governments for many years. But when the present phase opened in June 1978, with the publication of Prime Minister Trudeau’s white paper, A Time for Action, and Bill C-60, the federal government repaired some of the damage done by its earlier, offensive proclamations about “two founding peoples,” a notion which had incensed native Canadians for years. Now Ottawa stated as one of its cardinal principles that:

The renewal of the Federation must fully respect the legitimate rights of the native peoples, recognize their rightful place in the Canadian mosaic as the first inhabitants of the country, and give them the means of enjoying full equality of opportunity.13

More important, however, was a sentence which appeared in the Explanatory Document, a small booklet accompanying Bill C-60:

An elaboration of rights particular to the native peoples could, of course, be added to the Charter [of Rights] if at the close of ongoing discussions between governments and the native peoples, agreement is reached that this should be done.

These words went largely unnoticed, and indeed the daily press and broadcast media virtually ignored the native constitutional dimension until Indian chiefs visited London a year later in the hope of presenting their constitutional views to the Queen. Nevertheless, native newspapers and radio programs across the country actively stimulated discussion and debate on the question.

Native leaders had long been aware that many of the problems they were trying to negotiate with governments were tied to constitutional problems. The first Inuit Circumpolar Conference in June 1977 passed a resolution supporting Canadian Inuit involvement in any process of constitutional reform. The Indian leadership learned from lengthy discussions of a new Indian Act that a more fundamental recognition of their status was needed if their cultural and other objectives were to be met. The Métis and non-status Indians suffered the worst privations of any group precisely because of the federal dis-
creation which refused to acknowledge them as Indians within the constitutional meaning of that term, even if many tens of thousands of them lived every day of their lives with the culture and burdens of Canadian aboriginal peoples.

Following the June 1978 opening of constitutional talks, the national native leaders began to press for direct meetings with government leaders. In autumn 1978, the federal government failed to win provincial support for a hearing of native presentations at the First Ministers' Conference of October 30-November 1, but native observers were allowed to circulate position papers. At that meeting more than half the heads of government noted the presence of the native leaders, and one, Premier Davis of Ontario, said they should be involved in constitutional revision. After a winter of lobbying by the native groups and an increased federal political awareness of native views, resulting from a recruitment drive by the Liberals to attract native candidates for the impending general election, Prime Minister Trudeau pushed for the inclusion of native issues on the constitutional working agenda when the First Ministers reconvened in February 1979. Along with Premier Davis, the Prime Minister urged his colleagues to meet directly with native leaders for a thorough discussion of native constitutional concerns. When the final session of the conference was televised, Premier Davis brought this agreement from the closed session to light and there the native constitutional hopes rested for some time.

Following a general election which saw the defeat of the Trudeau government and the reaffirmation of the February agreement by the Clark government on June 29, 1979, native leaders sought to clarify the extent of their involvement in constitutional work. They feared that although they would be allowed to discuss some topics deemed suitable by government officials, they would lose by default on their major concerns because of ongoing federal initiatives in areas where conflicts of concern to natives had not yet been resolved. For example, despite the failure to settle native political rights, Ottawa was continuing discussions about the extension of new institutional arrangements to the Yukon government. Ottawa was also exploring with certain provinces a possible redefinition of jurisdiction over offshore resources, even while these were subject to native claims accepted for negotiation by the federal government. That native people had a legitimate cause for concern was amply demonstrated by federal abandonment of the painfully negotiated Inuit land claims agreement-in-principle in the Mackenzie River Delta area. The federal compromise, which was sustained when the Trudeau Liberals returned to power in February 1980, stated that native people would be able to discuss constitutional matters with "direct legal impact" on them through a special agenda item, "Canada's Native Peoples and the Constitution." Unlike other agenda items, this would be a forum rather than a subject heading.

The prospects were challenging. Constitutional conferences were notoriously unproductive despite intensive preparation and the continuity of the federal-provincial "club." What would happen with new and inexperienced actors, entirely new subject matter like aboriginal rights, for which no definitions existed, and with no agreed vocabulary or even shared legal concepts between native and government sides? At the first meeting of federal and provincial ministers and the national native leaders, Conservative constitutional minister, the Hon. Bill Jarvis, clearly delineated the problem and gave some advice:

I have no doubt that many of the achievements from this process will be in the form of intangible benefits or "spin-offs". As much as we may eventually want to find new words for the Constitution, we are here as well to take account of the broad relationship of governments and native peoples and seek to improve it....Work has to be done together. Everyone knows that we are not dealing with subjects where someone can walk into a room and deliver a position and expect people to agree and go home. All of us, and I stress the word all, are going to need to explore each other's concerns and vocabularies. One of the reasons we will need to do this is because
there exists no generally accepted language or experience for some of the work we must undertake. Such a process requires a commitment to meetings, however informal, to discussions, and to patience....The challenge for all of us is that here we may have to come to terms with perceptions of history, society, even law, which are new to many of us. It is clear that our past practices have not adequately permitted this, and I need hardly refer to some depressing social statistics to illustrate this point... Canadians are coming to realize that the problems of alienation are not simple but often rooted in long periods of unresolved grievances and thwarted aspirations. All governments have experienced the costs of failing to solve these difficulties; what we must do now is show that our Canadian federalism provides opportunity for all peoples to fulfill themselves. Our legal and political systems have always been flexible enough to accommodate such diversity. Our only guarantees of success, however, are open minds, understanding and goodwill.\textsuperscript{15}

Following the Trudeau government’s return to power, new priorities emerged. In the winter election campaign and in preparation for the Quebec referendum in May, Trudeau avoided the constitutional issue. But when Parliament opened in mid-April he returned to it with vigour. On April 29, 1980, he asked for the help of national native leaders to defeat the Parti Québécois option and suggested that the native constitutional talks open with such subjects as aboriginal rights, treaty rights, native self-government within Canada, native political representation (e.g. in Parliament) and federal and provincial responsibilities in providing services to native peoples.\textsuperscript{16} The importance of this suggestion lay not only in the substance of the items, but in the fact that a native agenda which cut across the usual categories familiar to participants in constitutional talks had apparently been accepted.

However, after the federalist victory in the Quebec referendum, the Prime Minister moved quickly with his own plans. An intensive summer of constitutional work was scheduled, to be capped with a First Ministers’ Conference in September to discuss a package of items on which Ottawa believed there to be a reasonable hope of achieving federal-provincial consensus. In this high-speed move to demonstrate Canadian responsiveness to demands for constitutional change, there was no room for the native people and their difficult questions. In August the native people did have a half-day hearing with the constitutional ministers to discuss the summer agenda items, but little was achieved except the reminder that native people had a wide range of constitutional interests.

On October 2, 1980, after the collapse of the September First Ministers’ Conference, Prime Minister Trudeau proceeded with his unilateral federal constitutional “patriation package.” Native groups, alarmed once again at being left out of a process in which they had been promised a part, became especially worried by the proposal of new constitutional amending procedures which could make provincial opposition to native hopes a sure obstacle to constitutionally entrenched rights. One of the axioms of Indian and Inuit political opinion in Canada is a fear of the provinces, as explained by the Inuit in a paid advertisement which appeared in the London \textit{Times} during the constitutional lobbying:

The British Government placed administrative and jurisdictional responsibility for native concerns with the Federal Government, rather than the Provincial Governments, when our constitution was written in 1867. Provinces in Canada have power over lands, resources and local matters. While the Federal Government certainly does not have an activist record in employing its powers on behalf of native peoples, the Federal responsibility has been the closest thing native Canadians have had to any guarantee of rights.\textsuperscript{17}

After an intensive lobbying effort in which the federal government slowly gave way before
the demands of various minority, civil rights and other interest groups through the winter of 1980-81, the Trudeau government, joined by both federal Opposition parties, supported critical amendments to the patriation scheme. Most dramatic was the simple clause: "The aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognised and affirmed." 18 In addition, other provisions effectively "constitutionalized" the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which native people often call their "Magna Carta," guaranteed protection from the non-discrimination provisions of the charter of rights and also the political commitment to include an item on the agenda for discussion with native leaders at First Ministers’ conferences in the next two years.

Despite the dramatic changes won by Indians and Inuit, and indeed by other Canadians who for the first time had been able to participate significantly in a constitutional process, the native intervention was only a prelude to the promised direct negotiations on matters such as those listed by the Prime Minister on April 29. At the time of writing there was no certainty that the federal package with its native amendments would pass into law, although clearly a most important political precedent had been established. The quality of the native interest is a fundamental one, and was described by the Inuit in the following terms for members of the parliamentary constitutional committee:

There is nothing so fundamental to a people or a state as the Constitution which determines the nature of political and social relationships by which those peoples choose to live with each other. At the same time, a Constitution is a basic statement of the values and traditions of the peoples within a state.

The present Canadian Constitution has often been criticised for being more of an "administrative" document than a clear statement of national will. Inuit believe, as do other native groups, that as native people we can make special contributions to this fundamental statement of Canadianness. We think that this is the spirit with which governments have tried to approach the essential redefinitions in the Constitution over recent years. In this light it would be a severe mistake to leave out of consideration the first peoples of the lands now making up the Canadian state and to ignore the importance of clarifying their historical, legal and cultural place as aboriginal peoples. The past failure to set these matters clearly in the constitutional framework has resulted in the unsatisfactory social conditions and political and economic opportunities which are acknowledged by all parties in Parliament. 19

Greenland 20

The question of home rule in Greenland is particularly worthy of Canadian interest because it involves a Canadian population, the Inuit, and because it has occurred in a state politically similar to Canada. The northern territories constitute one third of all Canada, a country rich in resources. But Greenland is many times larger than European Denmark and contains almost all the non-renewable resources that the state can claim. The amicable nature of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship is also impressive.

With the German occupation of Denmark during World War II, the consequent detachment of Greenland from the norms of colonial government, plus the breaking of Denmark's quarantine policy by the American occupation of Greenland, the colony began to press for greater local autonomy and improved material conditions. In the post-war era the Danes were almost over-enthusiastic in their efforts to respond to the latter, in the process causing a cultural and political shock which is still evident. They failed to understand the plea for greater autonomy at first; indeed, the very shape and size of the vast Inuit island seemed to demand a highly centralized, European direction if all the needs of a modernized infrastructure and its attendant services were to be met. The population of small coastal settlements was relocated to large, alienating "growth centres" where life revolved around a sophisticated

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fishing industry. The well-paid Danish work force which was reshaping the world around them was so oblivious to Greenlandic preferences that Danish-Greenlandic relations became severely strained.

After 1970 a younger generation of nationalist, well educated Greenlanders began to demand serious political changes. Their efforts led to the creation of a study committee of Greenland politicians who, in turn, recommended the creation of a home rule commission to be composed of an equal number of elected indigenous leaders and Danish Members of Parliament. This commission went on to produce a study, draft legislation and detailed administrative proposals. A referendum held in January 1979 endorsed the home rule plan which was put into effect in May of the same year.

The Greenlanders, a largely mixed-blood Inuit people who speak an Inuktutit dialect easily understood by many Canadian Inuit, number about 40,000 people, with another 10,000 Europeans in their midst. In an area so geographically distinct and so far removed from Denmark, Danes have harboured few illusions about “melting pot” politics, showing little reluctance to recognize the Greenlanders as unique. The Faroe Islands of the North Atlantic, settled originally by Vikings, had already obtained home rule from Denmark and so constituted a precedent. Denmark reserved some powers — defense, currency, foreign policy — and, through the home rule commission, negotiated a phased transfer of others, including the financing of their administration. Most economic, social, cultural and environmental matters are coming under Greenlandic control subject to general conditions similar to the universality and portability clauses written into Canada’s federal-provincial shared-cost programmes. Greenlandic Inuktutit is the main language but public officials must also be able to work in Danish; both languages are taught in the schools.

Despite Denmark’s retention of control over foreign policy matters, Greenland will vote in early 1982 to consider withdrawal from the European Economic Community, a move now largely favoured and one promised support by the Danish government notwithstanding the novel implications for international law. Perhaps even more novel is the compromise on non-renewable resource policy and administration. Denied aboriginal title or other ownership, but acknowledged to “have certain fundamental rights,” the Greenlanders share a double veto on policy and projects with Denmark. A joint Danish-Greenlandic committee, working with the resources administration, is designed to achieve compromises which will avoid exercise of the veto.

Home rule is not constitutionally entrenched, although it is well understood by Danish convention that having been achieved by negotiation, any amendments would also require negotiation. And even before home rule, Danish bills and regulations affecting Greenland were submitted to the elected Greenland assembly for advice. Greenland Premier, Jonathan Motzfeldt, reports that the opposition to and even fear of home rule among some Greenlanders has now evaporated in a mood of optimism and dynamism. His government’s priorities, apart from completing the complex administrative transfers, including the takeover of a large state-owned commercial and transportation complex, the Royal Greenland Trade Department, are economic development and diversification, coupled with strict protection of the Arctic environment.

Some Canadian academics and advisers in native groups have greeted Greenland home rule with scepticism and view it as “indirect rule,” but their qualms are not shared by even the most radical Greenland leaders who had earlier opposed its establishment on similar grounds. Greenlanders prefer the reality of self-government and national development to the delays of abstract political speculation. As leading Greenland minister and a chief architect of home rule, Lars-Emil Johansen, acknowledges:

The independent, Greenlandic society does not simply spring into existence from one day to the next and it cannot be introduced merely by memoranda in a commission. The only way in which it can exist is through a development of the people, and Home Rule is a step
in this direction, a possibility for further growth.22

Norway23

In Norway the types of situations discussed above seem to have been telescoped in time. Moreover, the emergent native rights situation has sparked fundamental controversy perhaps greater than has yet occurred in Canada or in Denmark. A European population long used to taking for granted northern territory has suddenly found itself challenged and its political and constitutional norms questioned. The Norwegian public has not responded to this unfamiliar situation with any more understanding than one would expect of other majorities.

Of the estimated 50,000 Sami (Lapps) living in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and the USSR, half are found in Norway. This population, not physically distinct from other Scandinavians, is best known for its reindeer herding economy, an activity which involves only about ten per cent of Sami families today. However, the reindeer herders have played a vital role in promoting cultural continuity and providing leadership in recent times. The program of the main Sami political groups includes familiar themes such as respect for aboriginal land and resource rights, protection of language and culture and collective political identity. But as the most prominent Sami reindeer association leader, Ole Henrik Magga, stated recently, the Sami are not questioning Norway’s territorial integrity or national unity.

Controversy over construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Alta River, one of the last great Norwegian salmon rivers cutting through unspoiled areas of the Sami reindeer heartland, has solidified the native rights movement. Joining a large environmentalist outcry against a project relatively insignificant in terms of meeting energy needs, the Sami have taken their struggle into the south where police action against their peaceful protest in the parliamentary park in Oslo two years ago shocked the Norwegian public and temporarily delayed action on the dam project. Civil disobedience and mass arrests in 1981 have again focussed the conflict. Government leaders and others, meanwhile, have insisted on the formal propriety of the official decisions taken, in spite of embarrassing court findings about the poor or distorted information employed to justify them. In practice, the government has used various postponements and “further studies” to defuse tension while continuing to deny the existence of a native rights issue in the Alta case.

In the autumn of 1980, the Norwegian government established a committee to study Sami cultural and educational needs. At the same time another committee with wide representation was created to look at land and water rights, possible Sami political structures and constitutional questions. This latter committee may not only take the heat off an embattled government facing a difficult re-election bid in 1981, but may be distant enough from the passions which have been provoked by the Alta case, and which spill out in countless letters to the newspapers, that reasoned accommodations will become possible. Norwegian anthropologist Helge Kleivan has said that until Norway accepts the fact of two peoples living together within the Norwegian state there can be no real resolution of outstanding problems. Meanwhile, many Norwegians continue to deny that the Sami are an aboriginal people or that past Norwegian support for aboriginal rights in United Nations forums is relevant to their own situation.

Conclusions

It would be irresponsible to draw too many conclusions on the basis of the limited study which has been given circumpolar political development to date. Meanwhile, northern peoples are rushing ahead with their own programs for change, experimenting, discussing and trying to resolve problems which, as has been suggested, may be visited upon them by the source, shape and size of external pressure for resource development.

At the very least, one may suggest that the relationship between land and resource rights (or lack of them) and outside proposals for development in northern societies, aboriginal or European, is such that government ministers and their advisers should think carefully before announcing that regional interests affected by them will not

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be considered in the context of political development. Northern societies with their strong sense of territoriality and cultural continuity may not be amenable to the general political assurances which are the norm in the more southerly, populous and powerful portions of circumpolar states.

Premier Jonathan Motzfeldt of Greenland recently said that Inuit of whatever country must regard themselves as the "soldiers and police" of the Arctic environment if the peoples of the northern parts of the world are to survive. While not opposing development per se, he saw the question as one of the type of development. If developers and southern governments would understand the origins and legitimacy of such northern views, much of the political ferment in the circumpolar world could be more positively directed at solutions to the many interrelated problems in the area.

Notes
2. On April 30, 1980, at the First Nations Constitutional Conference in Ottawa, George Erasmus delivered a talk on northern development at a panel chaired by the Hon. Marc Lalonde. This was taped by CBC Northern Service and is perhaps the classic exposition of northern development problems in Canada.
3. E.g., the terms of reference of the University of Calgary's new northern studies program marrying strategic studies with northern and native political studies.
6. The author has inevitably drawn on his experience as an employee of Makivik Corporation. All the material presented is found in the various briefs submitted by Makivik (and available on request) to Quebec and federal governments, the most recent and therefore up-to-date being the comprehensive "Brief to the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development, House of Commons: Position of the Inuit of Quebec with respect to the Implementation of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, March 20, 1981." The proceedings of that Committee for March 26, 1981 also contain much useful material. The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement is published in French and in English by the Editeur Officiel du Quebec.
7. A view put forward regularly by Quebec government officials in meetings with Makivik, especially by the head of SAGMAI, the Quebec government secretariat in the Executive Council Office responsible for native affairs.
10. The two best and most complete sources are the detailed Nunavut proposal itself, Political Development in Nunavut (Ottawa: Information Services, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, 1979); and an interview with the chief Nunavut negotiator, Thomas Saliuk, in an unattributed article, "The Nunavut Concept" in Arjungangimat, Winter 1981 (Inuit Cultural Institute, Eskimo Point, NWT).
12. The most complete documentary summary of the native constitutional work is an unpublished paper by the author, widely circulated among native groups and Canadian governments, "Canada's Native Peoples and the Constitutional Reform Process: a brief background paper," July 18, 1980. Published articles which summarize events are the author's "Canada's Native Peoples and the Constitution" in IWGIA Newsletter, No. 24, April 1980 (published in Copenhagen), and Simon Melaines, "Inuit win historic recognition of aboriginal rights" in Inuit Today, Vol. 9, April 1981.
14. Letter from the Hon. William Jarvis to Noel Starblanket, President of the National Indian Brotherhood, copied to other native leaders and published as a press release on July 30, 1979.
16. In the two succeeding days, the Hon. Marc Lalonde and the Hon. John Munro elaborated on this statement in the name of the Prime Minister during sessions of the First Nations Constitutional Conference in Ottawa to ensure that the commitment did not go unnoticed.
22. Cited in Gulløv, "'Home Rule.'"
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