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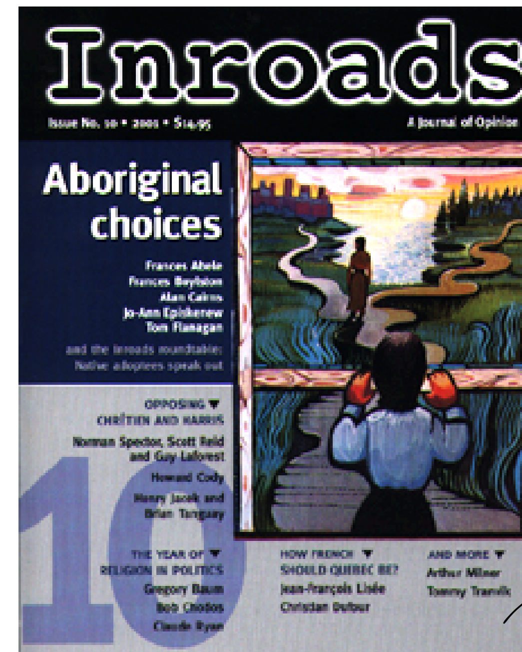

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JOURNAL Inroads 10

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Small nations and democracy's prospects

Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Greenland

IN SOME MIDDLE-SIZE, PROSPEROUS countries, the long postwar boom set the scene for progress in redressing historical injustices perpetrated against indigenous peoples. In Australia, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand and Norway, comparable movements emerged to reverse oppressive policies, transform jurisprudence, and take part in an extended dialogue with fellow citizens about new political arrangements.

As globalization advances, how may this progress be sustained?

THE FATE OF THE WORLD'S "INDIGENOUS PEOPLES," SMALL NATIONS EMBEDDED in larger states, has varied enormously, depending upon the location of their homelands and the nature of the nation-state that encompassed them.[1] Their fate and their prospects in the most favourable settings – in the relatively wealthy liberal democracies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark and Norway – have much to teach us. In these countries, especially in the period since the Second World War, there has been an enormous reconsideration of history, some settling of very old accounts, and a determined search for new political arrangements based on negotiation and consent.[2]

These countries are among a small group sharing a set of historically unusual conditions. All have small populations and economies. At most they are middle powers, enmeshed in the wars of larger powers but without much independent capacity to influence world affairs. They are not tempted by military solutions. All have developed welfare states (of varying degrees of adequacy) and a political culture that supports key elements of the welfare state with a public doctrine of inclusiveness. The rule of law is entrenched. In these fortunate circumstances, indigenous peoples have made significant progress.

The ways in which the small nations of indigenous peoples have deliberated over and struggled for their property rights and other elements necessary for their historical survival, and the changes to political practices and institutions that this has produced, give an insight into what is possible. Without claiming to do justice to the specific histories of the countries discussed, I attempt to identify the basis of what has been achieved. Such a consideration is timely, as the system of relationships of nation-states to each other and to their citizenry is being transformed.

Favourable times

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada, Greenlandic Inuit in Denmark, Maori in New Zealand and Sami in Norway are all examples of indigenous peoples who constitute small minorities within their respective countries. Through political organization, the formation of alliances, and various kinds of largely peaceful political activism, they have halted and sometimes reversed the policies and jurisprudence that had been applied to them, have won recognition of their land rights, and have begun to reconstruct self-government in various forms.

To understand why and how this has happened, it is helpful to review the major events of the second half of the 20th century. These events at once drew many formerly isolated indigenous peoples into closer relations with the world economy and international political system, *and* created the conditions under which they could respond effectively. To put it in the most general terms, the indigenous peoples' movements of the last 50 years are the product of their confrontation with the welfare capitalist state and the frontier emissaries of international capitalism.

The Second World War ended forever the isolation of many small nations all over the world. The war itself brought them into contact with military personnel and material, and opened their lands through the construction of the airstrips, roads and pipelines required by the war effort. Peoples who were not geographically isolated were drawn into the war itself. After the war, the expanding welfare states brought more disruptions. New housing changed living patterns and reshaped economic activity; centralized services improved education and health standards while transforming family life. The expanding welfare states reflected both the relative strength of the working classes of the fortunate countries after the war and general fears of a new great depression. And they gave rise to expectations of expanded and universal citizenship entitlements.

A complementary political consequence was public distaste for ethnic antagonism and prejudice in all its forms, a general revulsion against the hideous ethnic crimes of the Second World War. The formation of the United Nations and the international entrenchment of human rights and rights of self-determination are one manifestation of this revulsion. The civil rights movement in the United States as well as many liberation movements and revolutions in imperial colonies drew strength and inspiration from the same impulse.

It is hard to establish direct linkages among them, but there is much to suggest that these international movements also encouraged indigenous peoples' political mobilization – and tended to erode the legitimacy of state-imposed barriers. For example, in Canada a 1927 amendment to the Indian Act had made fundraising for the purpose of political representation illegal for status Indians. This clause was removed in 1953, and with it an important obstacle to political self-organization. What had been an acceptable policy response to political mobilization in the 1920s was no longer legitimate in the 1950s. As part of the same trend, status Indians in Canada gained the federal franchise in 1960. Aborigines in Australia won the franchise in 1962, part of a much broader improvement in their political position.

If the expansion of citizenship rights that attended the expansion of the welfare state and the postwar 'de-legitimization' of ethnic discrimination created a more favourable basis for indigenous peoples' political movements, another less positive aspect of the postwar period also proved significant. The overheated postwar economies brought continued pressure for development of new sources of minerals and energy, which were frequently found in the homelands of the indigenous peoples of Canada, Australia, Norway and Greenland. With the welfare state re-organizing their lives on one hand, and resource development projects threatening their livelihoods on the other, indigenous peoples began to organize. They did so in the context of the more favourable postwar environment due to a state that was more activist and had adequate financial resources, and to a wide commitment to the extension of full citizen rights to all.

Achievements of the late 20th century

By the 1970s, indigenous peoples had formed political organizations for the purpose of fighting for their rights. The particular historical legacy and circumstances of each country entailed that each follow a distinct political process. Yet, in retrospect, we see a remarkable convergence with respect to fundamental goals and even political strategy. Before turning to that convergence, I very briefly review the circumstances of indigenous peoples in each of the countries under consideration here. Such summaries are inevitably misleading since they gloss over the most important complexities – and the conundrums and battles yet to be faced.

Australia

Two indigenous peoples live in Australia, together comprising over 2 per cent of the Australian population. Aborigines, the larger and better known group, have lived in Australia for more than 40,000 years, a mobile people bound to specific territories. Today Aborigines make their living in both rural and urban areas. The other, less numerous, group are the Torres Strait Islanders, a Melanesian people originally from the islands between Australia and Papua New Guinea, but now living in large numbers on the Australian mainland. These two peoples have not only separate and ancient histories, but also quite different experiences with European settlement. While the Aborigines were violently and vigorously oppressed by early settlers, the Torres Strait Islanders, for reasons having to do with the strategic location of their homelands, experienced a more gradual and relatively more peaceful contact process (Beckett 1985).

By a process somewhat similar to that, by which in 1939 Inuit were determined to be, for legal purposes, "Indians" in Canada, Torres Strait Islanders were effectively reclassified as Aboriginal in 1907, when they were made subject to the authority of the newly appointed Protector of Aborigines and to laws being developed to regulate Aboriginal life.

Both Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were subject to the authority of the state governments in Australia until 1967, when a constitutional referendum and subsequent amendment created Commonwealth government responsibilities. This change was a key response to political activism by Australian indigenous peoples and their allies in the period after the Second World War, when returning veterans began to fight for equal opportunities and civil rights. The Commonwealth government introduced social welfare programs and equalized employment opportunities; as well it created advisory bodies, commissions (such as the 1973-74 Aboriginal Land Rights Commission) and other mechanisms for consultation and political advocacy.

A milestone in Australian relations with indigenous peoples was the 1992 Mabo decision, which recognized the continuity of indigenous land title within Australian law. The Mabo decision has profound constitutional and political implications which are still being worked out (Webber 2000).

Canada

The indigenous peoples of Canada are much more heterogeneous than those of the other countries under discussion here. Together, First Nations, Métis and Inuit comprise perhaps 4 per cent of the Canadian population. These include, depending upon how the counting is done, between 40 and 60 First Nations (presently organized in over 600 Band Councils on reserves); Métis living in every province and two territories; Inuit living in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern Quebec and Labrador; and "non-status" Aboriginal peoples, many living in cities.[3]

A signal event for Canadian indigenous peoples was the publication in 1969 of the White Paper on Indian Policy. The White Paper was relevant to "status Indians" only. Declaring both the historic treaties and past injustices irrelevant, it envisioned full formal equality for Indians and their ultimate assimilation in the greater Canadian society. The White Paper prompted a Canada-wide mobilization against its denial of treaty rights. The descendents of those indigenous peoples who had signed treaties had been struggling for decades to have the treaties respected, while, in the cases where treaties had not been negotiated, the goal was to institute negotiations. Inuit and Métis organizations joined what became a wider struggle for Aboriginal rights through public protests and legal challenges.

By the mid-1970s Canadian policy had been reversed, with federal procedures put in place to review treaty violations and to negotiate treaties where none existed. Federal funding was extended to the representative organizations and in very short order indigenous peoples created a Canada-wide network of provincial and territorial organizations. Canadian government efforts to patriate the constitutional amending power drew indigenous peoples into the constitutional negotiations, an effort that successfully led to the constitutional entrenchment in 1982 of "existing Aboriginal and treaty rights" of Métis, Indians and Inuit.

By the late 1990s, Inuit in all jurisdictions except Labrador had successfully concluded negotiations of modern treaties (known as comprehensive land claims) and in each jurisdiction were working on reform of regional governing institutions. Of these, the best known case is the new territory of Nunavut, where Inuit will form a large majority for the foreseeable future. Several First Nations, which had not been party to treaties, successfully negotiated treaties, while others commenced to seek compensation for treaty violations. Métis and First Nations people who do not have status under the Indian Act have made less political progress, in part because of practical difficulties attending self-government for largely urban and widely separated communities; but they have firmly established a place at the table for themselves.

A complementary political consequence was public distaste for ethnic antagonism and prejudice in all its forms, a general revulsion against the hideous ethnic crimes of the Second World War.

The Canadian situation remains complicated. In the mid-1990s, Canada-Aboriginal relations in all aspects were reviewed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, whose five volume report is a comprehensive reconsideration of Canadian history upon which are based recommendations for the fundamental restructuring of Canadian federalism.

New Zealand

Maori make up about 15 per cent of the population of New Zealand.[4] All Maori are united by history, language, culture and political circumstance, though of course specific conditions vary. Many Maori are urban dwellers; others are rural. Iwi, or tribes, are the original and still important political unit. Maori opinions vary about the degree of integration into New Zealand political institutions that is desirable – from those favouring full integration to those seeking parallel structures.

All Maori are parties to the treaty of Waitangi, a fundamental constitutional document of New Zealand negotiated in 1840 between representatives of the British Crown on behalf of settlers, and the resident Maori authorities. Disputed and, on occasion, ignored for decades by the state and in some court decisions, the treaty was revived in 1975 after a period of peaceful Maori activism. In the same year, a statute established the Waitangi Tribunal to hear complaints about violations of the treaty.

The overheated postwar economies brought continued pressure for development of new sources of minerals and energy, which were frequently found in the homelands of indigenous peoples.

The years since revitalization of the treaty and establishment of the tribunal brought a deep transformation in the political position of Maori. This has been due to many factors: the tribunal's findings, internal debate and development among Maori, dialogue with other New Zealanders, changes in Pakeha (non-Moari) ideas about their history, and general changes in New Zealand political life. The magnitude of the change can be seen in two pivotal events of the early 1990s. First, in a policy reversal similar to that in Canada concerning modern treaties, the New Zealand Parliament passed the Te Ture Whenua Maori Act [1993], reversing decades of treaty violations which had led to the loss of most of the Maori land. The Act does not reverse past land alienations, but it makes it much harder to alienate Maori land now while establishing a land use regime more in keeping with Maori traditions. The second important event was the 1993 Electoral Reform Act, which introduced a form of proportional representation and enhanced Maori representation. Before 1993, Maori Parliamentary representation was effectively limited to the four guaranteed in 1867. Proportional representation led to election of a total of 15 Maori members in a Parliament of 120: six on the Maori roll; nine Maori entering as list members, and one elected on the general list. This gave Maori representatives the effective balance of power after the 1994 election.

In the postwar period, Maori progressed from being a marginalized people with a relatively weak political presence to becoming full participants in discussions about New Zealand's future, with a position of relatively entrenched legal and political power. The future of New Zealand appears certain to embody some form of biculturalism based upon Maori and Pakeha traditions.

LA BEAU SHA SHOO: "Well you know dis Ole Arcand he was one hell of a fiddle player. Boy he can play anyting an he makes up hees own songs too. He always have a good story about how he got dah song." Painting by Sherry Farrell Racette, from *Stories of the Road Allowance People* translated by Maria Campbell.

Greenland and Denmark

Inuit (known as Greenlanders) have lived in Greenland for at least 4,000 years. Icelanders settled in the southern part of the island over 1,000 years ago, but their society did not thrive. Norse colonization was more successful in the 18th century, and in 1814, with the post-Napoleonic wars reorganization of Scandinavia, Greenland became a Danish colony. Colonial administration was relatively benign; outside access to Greenland was controlled by Danes, as were the school system, economic development and trade. Within this framework, Greenlandic teachers were trained, and local government institutions established. The colony served the European market for seal and whale oil, its economic circumstances reflecting the demand for these commodities.

As in so many places, the Second World War put an end to isolation. In 1953 the Danish constitution was amended to abolish Greenland's colonial status: this meant equal political status, and an end to the distinction between Greenlanders [Inuit] and Danes in the administration of justice. Greenlanders elected members to a Provincial Council as well as to the Danish Parliament. More and more Greenlandic young people gained access to post-secondary education. The economy was rapidly re-organized and opened, and the social welfare system extended. In a heavily state-led process, the fishery was industrialized; Inuit were induced to move into larger settlements, and public infrastructure was expanded. This in turn created the need for a more centralized and extensive administration.

As a natural consequence, Greenlandic political objectives increasingly emphasized gaining control of the powerful state apparatus. The primary instruments were the socialist Siumut party and other political party organizations. In 1979, Greenlanders gained Home Rule (limited self-government within Denmark). Since then, Greenlanders have come to dominate the legislative branch of government, and, more gradually, to take up positions in the bureaucracy and institutions of higher education.

Norway

Sami live in the northern regions of what is now Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. Various claims have been made to their territory over the centuries, as the Scandinavian countries settled their boundaries. In the early years, Sami were recognized as having owners' rights to their traditional lands: under various arrangements they collected rents from migrants and paid taxes to sovereigns. Norway, part of Denmark until 1815 and sharing a crown with Sweden until 1905, gradually took control of Sami lands based on a new official doctrine of land ownership for the Sami territories. Under this doctrine, the Sami had no land rights because they were nomadic pastoralists, and the state in fact owned the lands upon which they roamed. Both the assertion that the Sami were rootless nomads, and the claim that they were solely pastoralists, were false. Nevertheless, an Act passed in 1902 reserved the right of private ownership of land to "Norwegian citizens and persons who could speak, read and write Norwegian language and use it in everyday life."[5]

This discriminatory legislation, eerily similar to the Indian Act in Canada, was not abolished until 1965, when a new act made Sami eligible for land ownership, though it did not return the lands appropriated under the old law.

Sami have long seen themselves as a self-governing people. While maintaining this stance, they also chose to participate in Norwegian politics. Sami advisory bodies at the regional and national level in Norway were formed in 1953 and 1964, and there were important initiatives in Nordic pan-Sami cooperation as well. In 1968, Sami merged previously existing regional organizations and formed a modern type of national political association to represent their interests and communicate their views.

An important test of Sami political strength came in the conflict that broke out in 1979 over a dam on the Alta River in their territories. Ultimately the dam was constructed, but out of the conflict came a Sami Parliament with important, if ultimately consultative, powers. No longer an economically disadvantaged group in social democratic Norway, Sami are currently engaged in deciding just what degree of distinctiveness and political separation suits their contemporary needs.

IN SUM, THE EXPERIENCES OF INDIGenous peoples in the five countries under consideration share an important feature. Strong indigenous peoples' movements emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. Peaceful protest and legal contestation in each country led to changes in jurisprudence, in law, in policy and in the political balance of power. The 1970s and 1980s were decades of contestation and debate, with developments in each country following a roughly parallel path. By the 1990s, each had produced a new doctrine of Aboriginal rights, a process of economic integration (on some-

what better terms than might have been the case) and various experiments with integrative political institutions.

Peaceful revolutions

In Australia, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand and Norway, indigenous peoples' movements in the postwar period have had three main objectives.

1. Acknowledgement of past injustices

Pretty well all nation-states have something to apologize for. In the case of Australian, Canadian, Danish, New Zealander and Norwegian relations with their indigenous peoples, the wrongs have to do with unlawful expropriation of land and threats to ethnic survival or cultural continuity. In all five cases, the state directed these oppressive actions, though in all of them it is easy to see mixed motivations. Individuals working through the state sought to use it, on the one hand, to protect, to extend equal rights to, and to fully integrate indigenous people, and, on the other, to separate them from the land and resources and from cherished cultural practices. In each case, they failed to base their actions on the fact that indigenous people were members of self-governing societies with full rights.

A prime political objective of indigenous peoples' organizations has been the retrieval of frequently suppressed memories of oppression, appropriation and misdeeds through and with an official acknowledgement of the wrongs that were done combined with a formal apology and some form of compensation. What is remarkable about the cases under consideration here is not that the wronged group remembers and seeks redress, but that significant numbers in the dominant group wish to acknowledge the injustices and to work on recuperation and reparation.

2. Recognition of their original occupancy and property rights

For most Aboriginal peoples, the political coming-to-terms with the encroaching majority culture has entailed consolidation of local groups with localized identities into one 'people' or 'nation.' Often the consolidation led to assertions of sovereignty or to the effective assertion of property rights expressed in terms that could be understood by the majority culture.

Thus, for most of their history, Canadian Inuit living across the Arctic spoke dialects of a single language, but individuals' primary identification was with their own local group of 30 to 60 members. In response to incursions by the Canadian state, a Canada-wide Inuit organization (the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada) was forged in the 1970s out of political struggles for economic and political rights – building upon rather than replacing previous local identifications.

No longer an economically disadvantaged group in social democratic Norway, Sami are currently engaged in deciding what degree of distinctiveness and political separation suits their needs.

Quite similar paths of development were followed by First Nations and Métis in Canada, Sami in Scandinavia, Maori in New Zealand, Inuit in Greenland and Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia. Common to all was a period of political organization and mobilization, a growing consciousness of collective interest and identity, the establishment of institutions to serve common interests (often in alliance with non-indigenous fellow citizens), and, then, increasingly focused and effective efforts to implement specific measures designed to protect the collectivity and the material basis for its survival. Often this has meant the development of a national consciousness, in the modern sense of that term, and assertion of indigenous nationhood in the form of – among other things – an assertion of equal legitimacy and power in opposition to the majority peoples dominating the nation states. As part of the struggle for such legitimacy, indigenous peoples have sought recognition in the international community of their status as "peoples" and "nations."

3. New political arrangements

The political mobilization of indigenous peoples in the five countries has also affected their institutional relationship with the nation-state and with their fellow citizens. Most indigenous nations consider themselves citizens of the nation-states within which they find themselves. (There are some exceptions, such as the Mohawks in North America who see themselves as sovereign neighbours of Canada and the United States.) Generally, the reform proposals take a consensual rather than coercive approach to the establishment of conditions essential to collective cultural survival. Plans for internal governance seek to build upon traditions, but incorporate institutions of government typical of capitalist liberal democracy. Formerly stateless people feel the need for a state, and through the state to control use of the land and resources upon which they depend.

Compared to the four other countries, Canada is a veritable hothouse of experimentation. There are Indian reserves, ethnically exclusive governments with jurisdiction over small land bases, and 'public government' models such as Nunavut and Nunavik (Arctic Quebec) in which the indigenous people benefit from their demographic majority position to dominate institutions of government open to all. There are also various hybrid models adapted to local conditions (such as the new governing institutions established by the Nisga'a in British Columbia and First Nations in the Yukon).

Development in New Zealand has been more straightforward. Maori have combined extra-parliamentary activism with participation in advisory councils and commissions and an expanded role in the national legislature to bring about fundamental change in both the public debate and the constitutional framework.

Greenlandic Inuit have had Home Rule, a substantial degree of political independence from the Danish government, since 1979. Though they continue to wrestle with the implications of their inherited state institutions and economic dependence, Inuit dominate the political process. Something similar characterizes Sami in Norway who have achieved a measure of recognition and some political purchase with establishment of the Sami Parliament.

In none of the cases are matters fully settled. Many problems remain and some may not be resolved. But in every country, indigenous nations have through peaceful means inscribed their progress on the state institutions to which they are subject.

DAH TEEF: "'Someting hees not right' Margaret he say to Geebow. 'Hees not like dat man to leave when he knowed I got raisen pie.'" Painting by Sherry Farrell Racette, from *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, translated by Maria Campbell.

The changes in the status of Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark and Norway during the last 30 years have been truly remarkable. Those countries have been transformed, and each is experimenting with institutional means to accommodate the indigenous nations within them. In the fortunate middle powers, the indigenous movements were able to bring about an enormous shift in the reigning ideas and the balance of power. Not long ago the assumption that indigenous nations were doomed to disappear into the general population was virtually unchallenged. Furthermore, complete assimilation of indigenous peoples into the greater society was held to be a good thing, and was often a basic feature of government policy. The movements of the 1950s and 1960s put paid to these views, and with varying inflections, each country reversed this position entirely, accepting that survival of the indigenous societies was both likely and desirable.

What next?

[I]ndigenous settlements in Northern Australia…are facing the same mining intrusions into their lifestyle, sometimes by the same companies, as in the Sami North of Scandinavia; the Dene-Inuit lands on Nunavut's western border; and the mountain country at the head of the Fly River in Papua New Guinea. (Brantenberg in Dahl, Hicks and Jull 2000, 206).

[C]apitalism has spread not by erasing national boundaries but by reproducing its national organizations, creating an increasing number of national economies and nation-states (Wood forthcoming).

The postwar experience of Australia, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, and Norway suggests that at least those relatively prosperous states that are not imperial centres or military hegemons can move toward peaceful reform in a generally democratic direction. Of course, by no means are all the battles over, even domestically. In many places property rights have not been thoroughly established; new political arrangements remain controversial. As well, even where change is fully launched, there remain important issues of implementation. In Canada, for example, despite a period of rich political experimentation, poverty among indigenous peoples is far greater than in the general population and does not appear to be diminishing. In Norway both Sami and other Norwegians still struggle with questions of difference and common citizenship.

All of the countries I have been discussing face the consequence of the differentiation and nationalism that have attended political mobilization: once oppression has been identified and reversed, and better institutions put in place, on what basis can indigenous and non-indigenous citizens build a common political commitment and identity? And how will it be maintained over many generations? Clearly, there is no end to this process of development in sight. The overwhelming challenge is to nurture and protect the capacity for democratic innovation.

This challenge is being addressed not in the favourable circumstances of the long postwar boom, but rather amidst the deep transformations of global economic and political relations now underway. These changes – which are given the opaque label globalization – are as profound and as hard to discern as were other epochal changes; but they set the limits and shape our understanding of political possibilities. Among the many aspects of globalization, two stand out: 1) the restructuring of nation-state institutions and the attendant reconfiguration of citizenship in response to the shift of power to even larger multinational corporations, and 2) the expansion of productive capacity, and the consequent global environmental crisis.

How is democracy to be advanced in our new circumstances? A great deal may be said about how it is threatened elsewhere in the world. Fortunately, here, as in other middle powers where, during the long postwar boom, indigenous peoples' movements confronted capitalist welfare states, progress has been made and may even be sustained. ■

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Notes

1. I thank Jack Hicks, Peter Jull, Rianne Mahon, Thierry Rodon, and Ellen Meiksins Wood for very helpful discussions and comments, and George Kinloch, most warmly, for constructive critique and many insights.
2. Indigenous peoples are 'national minorities' in Will Kymlicka's sense of "groups that formed complete and functioning societies in their historic homeland before being incorporated into a larger state. The incorporation…has typically been involuntary, due to colonization, conquest or the ceding of territory from one imperial power to another, but may also arise voluntarily as a result of federation." Indigenous peoples are distinguished from other national minorities in that typically they were excluded from the global process of state formation until very recently, retaining a "premodern" way of life until well into this century (Kymlicka 2000, p. 221).
3. Canadian legislation has created artificial categories of indigenous peoples which now have political and practical importance. "Status Indians" are registered under the Indian Act and are eligible for certain rights and benefits. They are the descendents of treaty signatories, or of people whose status as Indians was recognized as a matter of administrative discretion. "Non-status Indians" are not registered under the Indian Act, and are ineligible for the attendant benefits. They may be descendants of people who did not sign a treaty, or who lost their status through marriage or "enfranchisement." In the past, Indians who wished to exercise the federal franchise were required to relinquish their status as Indians.
4. Most of the information in this section is based upon Durie (1998).
5. The quotation, much of the information in this section, and inspiration for the general analysis is drawn from Brantenberg (1991, p. 93) and other works by the same author.

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