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## Inuit & Nunavut: Renewing the New World by Peter Jull<sup>1</sup>

### A Different Place

Nunavut is different from any other jurisdiction in Canada. The other provinces and territories came into being following the first trickle, or flood (as during a gold rush), of Europeans clamouring to set themselves up, free from authority. In Nunavut some 20,000 Inuit resident 'since time immemorial' have taken over one-fifth of the land area of Canada, and vast seas, inheriting a strange hybrid political economy which has never even been properly described.<sup>2</sup> The North has all been expensive, and some expensive mistakes made. On occasion a federal minister will step out of line, as in late 1987, and link Northern peoples' future to increased economic activity, but it is not 'the Canadian way' to make basic rights and freedoms a cash transaction. For Inuit, Nunavut is an astonishing achievement; for other Canadians, it is a monument to national idealism and goodwill.

Although the whole European experience in Canada has been a story of domesticating intense cold, distance, rock, and forest to a livable space, the Arctic has been seen as lying beyond such possibilities. Leif Eriksen took a look *c.* 1000 AD and dismissed the region as good for nothing before sailing south to 'Vineland'. Nunavut today has no roads except meagre local networks from houses to airstrip, houses to garbage dump, houses to cemetery. People have not poured in, and even resource projects rely on fly-in, fly-out work crews who live somewhere else. There is little conventional economy, and most money recycles the costs of administration and provision of services.

The modern era in Inuit policy and programs began with Canadian humiliation in the world at starvation deaths in Northern Quebec and the Keewatin before and after the war.<sup>3</sup> Nobody is going to let that happen again. Following World War II, federal officials involved with the North also wanted to avoid the sort of marginalisation of Indian peoples in Canada's provinces. They were determined to do things differently.

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<sup>2</sup> The facts lie buried in countless legislature papers of the NWT Legislative Assembly written over past decades.

<sup>3</sup> This story is thoroughly recounted in Tester FJ & Kulchyski P, 1994: *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939-63*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver.

Forbidding climate, frozen ground, and ice-filled seas helped them deter the sort of territorial assimilation common elsewhere in Canada – or in Australia where whites tried grazing cattle and sheep even in deserts and developed a confident *terra nullius* outlook.

Canadian idealism and romance about Inuit and the Arctic has included readiness to accept high costs. Canadians may like to have an Inuit carving or graphic in their home, but essentially they know nothing about this culture so different from their own. Whereas Danes took firm and difficult steps to re-organise and equip Greenland for an industrial economy based on a small number of towns, Canada brought the people into small villages and apparently expected matters to look after themselves once health and schooling were assured. Health care saved many lives and sparked a baby boom, while schooling made people want jobs which did not exist in the Arctic. There is no doubt that under- and un-employment are and will be the fundamental challenge of Nunavut for some time. Big resource projects, if and when they come, do not hire large numbers of unskilled local labour but rely on national and international pools of skilled personnel who move around the world following jobs.

Of course, countless ‘good ideas’ and grand initiatives have been tried in the Inuit North to promote genuine local employment and income. One of these has worked: the co-operative movement. A Liberal government in Ottawa rejected the idea as ‘communist’ so the Tories introduced the means to do it, c. 1960, impressed by earlier co-op success on the Canadian Prairies. The Co-ops are now the major employer in Nunavut, best known in the south for marketing Inuit art and crafts. They also run tourist camps, physical community services (water, sewage, garbage), the cleaning and care of buildings, local shops and supermarkets, and virtually anything else possible, as well as advancing tools and equipment on credit for local Inuit livelihoods. The Co-ops are owned and managed by Inuit, although often a manager with supposedly superior managerial and business knowledge is brought in. (This is not always seen as an insult because an outsider is immune to the suspicions of favouritism which would attend a member of one or other local clan.)

Meanwhile Inuit have been gaining a wide variety of office and management skills valuable for a wide range of activities. There is no question that Nunavut is and will be a primary hunter-gatherer life (not least because country food, or what Australians call ‘bush tucker’, is more affordable than store-bought food) welded onto an increasingly computer-driven service economy.

Although Inuit are rarely aware of it, much post-Depression and post-War Canadian idealism has gone into the Inuit North, and especially into Nunavut. Canada was devastated in the Depression, and then exhilarated by the large and honoured part it played in the War, not least in its Air Force, Atlantic and Arctic convoys, work for the Atomic Bomb, and service and death all over the world. At war’s end that sense of ‘can-do’ material optimism and national energy was directed northwards. Somehow or other the commitment to equality and ability to move men and materials would transform the

North. They did, but not in the ways expected.<sup>4</sup> However, the commitment and generosity of the country towards the Northern territories was clear. By and large that spirit of generosity has been maintained. (Tragically, the mid-North, i.e., the indigenous communities in the huge Northern areas of seven provinces from Atlantic to Pacific, did not benefit from this, and those regions remain the shame of Canada's society. Canadians have maintained a false dichotomy whereby the Northern territories are zones of idealism and innovation, while the provincial Northlands are left to the small mercies and 'trickle-down' of state or private development projects. The 60th parallel of North latitude has become a moral as well as political border.)

Although Inuit often complain, a community of 500 or 1000 people in Nunavut in recent decades has almost always had far better facilities and far more positive official attention than similarly sized communities elsewhere in Canada, except for road access.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, at times the attention has been suffocating, with fussing officials thinking up endless new ways to assimilate Inuit to the ways of suburban WASP Canadian society – how to arrange living-room furniture, how to dust it, etc. Some of the most passionate outbursts at community meetings with visiting officials have been Inuit pointing out that chopping up a seal in the middle of the living-room was a practical necessity, even if it upset squeamish homebodies sent from the south to govern them.

Such attention has brought hardship, too. The work of health teams taking away unilingual Inuit to alien hospitals far away, for years or forever, and other health insensitivity, is the most bitter of Nunavut memories. Another is the former practice of collecting children and removing them to boarding schools. There is delicious irony that the first bright generation of such children founded and led the Nunavut autonomy movement with their new learning. Culturally inappropriate teaching, especially the former denigration of the Inuit language, is also bitterly remembered.

Inuit are practical people, however, and few wish to deny the various benefits of active white administration in the North since the 1920s. The Mounties (Canada's federal police force) stopped the blood feuds and other killings, Inuit tell community meetings. The coming of family allowance and old age pension has made life much more bearable, many point out. People today live longer and more comfortably, another adds. However, as many voices say sadly, the old life was better in many ways – self-reliance, healthy family lives, none of the drink and drugs and community miseries brought by the villages and towns.

The modern history of Nunavut, especially, and of the rest of the Northern territories in varying degrees, has been a dialogue between the remote hunter-gatherer Inuit and a

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<sup>4</sup> A fascinating look at an older mindset is the book, JD Hamilton's *Arctic Revolution: Social Change in the Northwest Territories, 1935-1994*, Dundurn Press, Toronto, 1994. The author is awed by material change, and although a witness of the political and social changes following, entirely fails to 'see' them. The 'revolution' of his title is the coming of electrical appliances and kitchen sinks!

<sup>5</sup> Roads are controversial. Many people want them for lower costs of freight and, more questionably, to bring economic development. Many people fear them for effects on wildlife, e.g., migrating caribou, and influx of North American social problems.

powerful and wealthy federal government. The inclusion of Nunavut under the Yellowknife-based administration of the NWT from 1970-99 will be seen as a brief anomaly. In fairness, the NWT government in Yellowknife continued the welfare-state policies developed and administered by Ottawa, introducing many practical improvements. It is not true that Yellowknife has been uncaring. Nevertheless, the NWT government with its location far from Nunavut in the development-minded south-west, and with close ties to Alberta province, would seem to have a destiny very different from Nunavut. Nunavut would have to assert itself or be increasingly marginalised on a typical North American development frontier.

### **Sequence of Change**

**In the 1950s** the Northern territories began to be assimilated into Canada's material and social culture. From 1953 a federal Department, later named Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND, or INAC) was created. It spent generously in the North but the forced transition was painful for people, and tragic for many. Inuit ways were considered backward ways to be replaced.

**In the 1960s** the Territories acquired the outward institutions of Canadian society and national culture, e.g., a quasi-provincial Northwest Territories administration in a new Northern capital, Yellowknife. Assimilation accelerated. Through the 1960s indigenous people from seasonal camps were resettled in central villages where health could be monitored and full public services provided. This transformed the indigenous North. As the 1960s drew to a close the 'frontier energy' search began in earnest. Indigenous peoples realised that the White Man would now blow up or grind down or bulldoze or dig up the land itself. This was done with little or no regard to the habitats of the caribou, sea mammals, or other species which remained the main indigenous food and livelihood. All Northern land remained in federal Crown ownership, with private alienation only in a few towns, but the resource development arm of DIAND was seen as a law unto itself, expected to win all big battles and divorced in all but theory from the welfare-state Northern Administration and emerging NWT government.

**In the 1970s** the great collision between Northern indigenous and non-indigenous political agendas took place – and between indigenous Northern and non-indigenous southern agendas. Nunavut was somewhat insulated from the worst of it because the Inuit were the overwhelming majority in their homeland, but the Dene, Métis, and Inuvialuit got the full force of it. Two events changed Canada's moral climate: the 1973 *Calder* decision of the Supreme Court of Canada recognised that native title rights could exist in Canada and the Berger inquiry on Northern development analysed the indigenous-white, indigenous-development conflicts in terms the public and policy-makers could understand. Berger's report nicely captured opposing forces in its title, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*.<sup>6</sup> Another decisive event, in 1979, was election of a new NWT Legislative Assembly in which older frontier whites were replaced by

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<sup>6</sup> Berger T, 1977. *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland: the Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry*, Minister of Supply and Services, Ottawa.

indigenous politicians, and by younger whites prepared to work with indigenous peoples. They met at once to repudiate the anti-aboriginal rights policies and constitutional positions of their predecessors and to prepare a new era of recognised collective indigenous rights pertaining to traditional territory and environments.

**In the 1980s** an accommodation of peoples and economic philosophies began to be reached as land claims, environment strategies, cooperative government policy and program development, and national and Northern constitutional forums re-negotiated and re-wrote indigenous-white relations.

Now, **in the 1990s**, the task is to move from fundamental change and old disputes to make a new Inuit society within the frameworks acquired in recent decades, and to modify those frameworks. The great danger is that the White Man's system is a Trojan horse full of ways and means by which Nunavut Inuit will assimilate themselves to North American frontier capitalism. The great hope is that Inuit will keep ahead of despair and inertia, overcoming all obstacles as they have done for several decades, to create a new world for themselves.

### **Nunavut's Four Realities**

Nunavut has existed simultaneously in four very different contexts, i.e., as:

1. A land of isolated villages with local problems
2. An exotic and unique region
3. An indigenous member of Canada's federation
4. An international hinterland

Many delays and mistakes have occurred, and important opportunities been missed, because of the failure to recognise this. These may be discussed singly.

**1. A land of isolated villages with local problems.** To most Inuit, Nunavut is all about solving social, economic, and environmental problems afflicting their community and its near hinterland. The means are primarily (a) by taking control of the region's budget and of development, resource management, education, social welfare, and other policies, and (b) by representing Inuit in relations with the Canadian government and other major interests, whether government or industry. This, of course, was and remains the primary motive of the people and leaders of Nunavut. However, sometimes they received unexpected help, or faced unforeseen difficulties, because of the other three contexts.

At the high policy level, this homely indigenous North only episodically has been a serious focus in Ottawa. 'Northern policy' has dealt primarily with great resource projects (or fantasies about such). It has also involved securing Canadian sovereignty, scientific research, and military issues (such as the Distant Early Warning line of radar bases). Then there has been a range of speculative matters ranging from futuristic transport technologies to geo-political and strategic scenarios. This 'high policy' North

has tended too often to leave out the people who live there. On the other hand, since the 1950s the federal government, both directly and through the NWT government, has directed notable sums and much imagination quietly to Northern peoples by means of the most complete 'welfare state' commitment anywhere in North America. (All the while successive federal ministers and heads of Northern government have trumpeted a classic North American free enterprise ideology to the southern public, despite the rather different reality in the North.)

**2. An exotic and unique region.** The Inuit culture with its icons or stereotypes of snow igloo, fur parkas, and patient hunters of the sea ice, and the treeless land, icebergs, polar bears, and long winter dark of the Arctic, have fascinated Canadian and everyone else for a long time. The Arctic and Inuit are frequent subjects of TV items or documentaries all around the world. Reinforcing this idea that Canada is trustee of a very special part of the world is the fact that the Northwest Territories (and Arctic Quebec until the 1960s) have been under federal administration, a natural focus therefore of federal science, resources policy, and politico-administrative innovation. Inuit have sometimes complained that they feel like they are in a zoo, being studied and preserved rather than allowed to live their lives and follow their aspirations. On the other hand, a visit to the Northern regions of the seven provinces with Northern hinterlands reminds us how much better have been general conditions, not to mention the far greater social and political opportunities, in the Territories.<sup>7</sup> Many voices in Ottawa over the years have argued that the North should remain a federal preserve for scientific study and enlightened administration, but neither indigenous nor non-indigenous Northerners have taken kindly to the idea. Ultimately it was the federal government's own policies in society and resource development which caused a political backlash and fuelled the indigenous rights movement which transformed the North.

**3. An indigenous member of Canada's federation.** The political recognition of a large portion of Canada, presumed rich in minerals, oil, and gas, but inhabited by sceptical 'outsiders' to the European culture, language, industrial economy, and 'normal' aspirations of the OECD 'first world', has been both exciting to many and troubling to some. Nor is it surprising that Nunavut is being watched with interest by other countries, e.g., Australia.<sup>8</sup> Nunavut Inuit leaders had to accept various demands and concerns of the national government not applicable to small self-governing entities such as Indian first nations on a small land base. For instance, Ottawa wanted to avoid having a single Inuit territory uniting all Inuit in the North and stretching from Inuit Greenland to Alaska's

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<sup>7</sup> A report of October 1998 appears to contest this northern advantage in socio-economic conditions. The author is trying to find answers and has suggested a number of possible anomalies in the study methodology.

<sup>8</sup> The populist xenophobe, Pauline Hanson, leader of the One Nation party, attacked Nunavut (and the author of this article) in Australia's Parliament, 1-10-97 & 2-6-98, in her usual strident terms. It has also been attacked in Australia by at least two Northern Territory premiers and a former national chief justice. None of these critics has any real understanding of what Nunavut is or why it has come into being. Those indigenous Australians who read Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen's speech to the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, July 24, 1998, recommending to the rest of the world such indigenous self-government as in Greenland (or Nunavut, he could have added), took heart.

Inuit North Slope, in effect.<sup>9</sup> As always when Canadians act neurotic in such matters, the unstated fear is that Francophone or Anglophone regions in Canada's central and eastern provinces might seize on such a precedent to demand re-drawing of boundaries to accommodate ethno-nationalist ambitions or anxieties. Ottawa simply refused, privately and clearly, but never in public statements, to include the Western Arctic Inuit, the Inuvialuit. This was one of the two biggest problems in creating Nunavut: Inuit were reluctant to reject their Inuvialuit kin as long as the latter said they wanted to join, but Inuvialuit leaders were more interested in leverage to get a better offer to stay in the Western NWT than eager to become a minority region in Nunavut.<sup>10</sup> (The other big problem was also a boundary issue, i.e., the western and southern political and land claims boundaries, now both the same, of Nunavut with the Dene.)

Inuit anticipated fears about white minority status in Nunavut. The Nunavut Constitutional Forum ostentatiously undertook a study on how best to entrench minority rights in the Nunavut governing system. Nevertheless, Canada's national daily newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, fretted over comments in *Building Nunavut* about managing transient work forces to contain social impacts in the way other Northern regions on resource frontiers do, e.g., Greenland, Iceland, Shetland, the Faroes, and Norway. Also, resource issues were a central issue for government and public, i.e., would Inuit shut down all development? The Nunavut claims settlement provides mechanisms for Inuit roles and benefits from such development. In any case, Canadians have accepted a different social order 'North of 60'.

However, the main worries were constitutional and political. Would a new member of the Canadian federation upset constitutional amendment mechanics, be a stalking-horse for federal agendas among the provinces, and bring exotic and subversive ideas into Canadian political culture? Because Nunavut is not becoming a province, much of this worry is irrelevant. Governing arrangements affecting others are not formally changed, except that the Western NWT has been encouraged by creation of Nunavut to review its own constitutional framework, a process now occurring. Moreover, the performance of Inuit leaders in the national constitutional reform process beginning in 1978 has shown Canada's political élite and the general public (thanks to televised conferences and interviews) that Inuit are good and smart people with much to offer the rest of us. For their part, Nunavut leaders continually stress that through Nunavut they are trying to join Canada as equals, not separate from it.

**4. An international hinterland.** Years before Nunavut's political status became clear, Inuit there and in Labrador, Quebec, and the Western NWT had brought their regions and politics into a new international relationship with Inuit in Alaska and Greenland, other Northern indigenous peoples, and the international community. The Arctic Peoples

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<sup>9</sup> Although the Yukon north slope separates NWT and Alaska, NWT Inuvialuit, i.e., Western Inuit, have special rights in that part of the Yukon.

<sup>10</sup> Although some observers have been outraged at this 'division' of Inuvialuit and Inuit, the reality is that they were never really joined, culturally or administratively. There is no question that some Inuvialuit, especially in more traditional communities, liked the idea of Nunavut. However, this whole issue has been something of an illusion, and one sometimes cynically manipulated. It deserves a study of its own.

Conference in Copenhagen, 1973, was a major event in this process, bringing Inuit and Northern Canada's Indian peoples together with Greenlanders and Sami.<sup>11</sup> Although Canadian politicians and others have said for years that 'Canada is an Arctic country', it meant almost nothing. Then, from the 1950s the federal government made a new commitment to the region, especially the Inuit areas. But beginning with the 1973 conference and then the founding of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) in Barrow, Alaska, in 1977, Inuit redefined Canada as a whole and the Arctic in particular. Now the Arctic was no longer a poor deprived place into which the material culture, ideas, and kindness of Canada must be poured from south to north to 'civilise' the unfortunate natives; rather, it was a different world, one where culture, economy, language, and political solidarity flowed east-west, a world about which Canadians and their government knew almost nothing. It was a place of old knowledge and ancient traditions, much older than the European presence in Canada, and yet it was being recognised and re-organised now as a place which had something special to communicate to the world at large, even though Canadians had long shown they were not prepared to listen. It caught Canadians by surprise and made them feel a little foolish. After all, an important psychological aspect of the Arctic Peoples Conference for those involved had been the satisfaction of finding persons with whom to share failures and successes in the struggle to maintain culture and regain control – the struggles against the power and smugness of a Canadian society which had only thought the North useful as a pile of minerals or hidden storage tank of oil and gas to be taken away to make Southern Canada wealthy. The federal Northern administration had a more social and indigenous-centred program from the 1950s onward, but it was known only to a few people. Besides, even that vision was based on an assumption that minerals, oil, and gas were the necessary underpinning of future 'progress' in the North.

Ottawa had meant well but had its nose rubbed in the new realities. While Canadian government officials argued about whether they dare speak to anyone in Greenland lest it offend the Danes – and decided that, No, they must not – Inuit Canadians (and Alaskans) were matter-of-factly going back and forth, cooperating happily with Greenland ministers, officials, and organisations, *and*, doing so in their own language, as were Alaskan Inuit. Not content with that, these young upstarts insisted on setting up their own international organisation, the ICC. Now the North was no longer just for middle-aged chaps to talk about in blazers with a sherry or scotch glass in hand on a military fly-around or conference, talk which would sometimes include gentle head-shaking about those strange and recalcitrant 'Eskimos'. Now, instead, the North was something disputed passionately by young Northern residents unlikely to enjoy club manners or abstract policy – and in a language the 'experts' couldn't even speak. (Worse was to come. Soon these young people were putting on suits and replacing the old-timers in these meetings sponsored by governments, although there are still fly-arounds for ambassadors and others, presumably still ill-informed by southern officials recycling old prejudices.)

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<sup>11</sup> See Kleivan I, 1992: 'The Arctic Peoples' Conference in Copenhagen, November 22-25, 1973', *Études Inuit Studies*, Vol. 16 (1-2), 1992, 227-236. Also, Jull P, 1998. "First world" indigenous internationalism after twenty-five years', *Indigenous Law Bulletin* (Australia), Vol 4, No 9 (February 1998), 8-11.



## **Practical Lessons for Others**

The Nunavut experience has countless lessons for others, but a few are worth mentioning. Most important of all was that Inuit created the Nunavut concept and fought for it, themselves. It had no Canadian precedents, no neat boundaries of surrounding ocean or lines on any map, and flew in the face of many Canadian ideas and ideals. Through determination over many years, and despite many major setbacks, they won their goal.

The winning style was to avoid extreme or confrontational rhetoric which frightened a country already haunted by the Quebec independence movement and fearful of any ethno-national movement. The racial violence of US cities and violent decolonisation in parts of the 'third world' were to be avoided. Even so the Inuit leaders had to explain their good intentions over and over. The fact that the Nunavut claims and self-government process has occurred over 22 years, to date, has meant constant briefing of new governments or new ministers, winning new members of parliamentary committees, educating new journalists, etc. (Nunavut should have proceeded at least 10 years ago. The only benefit of extra time has been that more Inuit have gone through school and are ready to take up the work of running Nunavut. All the same, education and training to provide Inuit administrators and other personnel will remain urgent priorities for many years to come.)

Avoiding certain types of controversy was important. National uproar had landed on the heads of Dene in 1975 with their Dene Nation and Dene Declaration, only months before the Inuit launched their Nunavut package of proposals. Positive measures were also needed. The most important of these was an active presence on the national scene. This was no small task for a region far from Canada's media and population centres. However, by insistently putting forward Nunavut views to public bodies and inquiries, as the Nunavut Constitutional Forum and other Inuit bodies did, Canadians came to recognise Nunavut as a moral community, a political community, a regional entity, long before it was that in a formal or legal sense. By making thoughtful presentations to public bodies and in public forums, constantly demonstrating that Inuit were careful and knowledgeable about their territory while also respectful and mindful of important Canadian values and political culture, Inuit dispelled a hidden white fear. That was the unstated anxiety among many European-descended Canadians that 'primitive' or 'backward' or 'nomadic' people might be unreliable or run amok if empowered. Few Canadians realised that Inuit in Nunavut knew more about government, and were more over-governed, than other Canadians.

Indeed, that fact posed problems. Older Inuit had become so alienated from government by its disruption of their lives that talk of a new and closer one did not always cause dancing in the snow. On the one hand they understood all too well the power of government to do things, but they worried that unless more Inuit youth were trained to take the new jobs, there would be problems. In every community the question put to the

Nunavut Constitutional Forum on its 1983 tour was the same: Where are the Inuit who will staff the new government? And where are the training programs to prepare them?

The choice of name, Nunavut, a common Inuit term meaning ‘our land’, was helpful at home. Inuit would call the region that – in lower-case, as it were – no matter what names and lines the White Man put on the map. Obviously Nunavut benefited from the lack of strong opposition within the region, although there was some opposition. For a while in 1985 that opposition exerted itself and derailed the whole project after the federal government publicly set a timetable for creating Nunavut.<sup>12</sup> However, a more usual fear was that we would fail to mobilise enough people to vote in the several referenda which senior governments demanded; after all, if Inuit felt no threat, why bother voting? In each case the communities were reminded that it was important that they show support, actively, to maintain momentum, and in each case they responded with very high turn-outs and extremely high Yes votes. Ultimately the solidarity of Nunavut Inuit behind the land claims and self-government agenda was the most important factor. One might write a book on how that was achieved. In the 1920s Knud Rasmussen found isolated traditional camps in a world of their own across Nunavut, but by the 1970s there was a Nunavut region and political community despite scattered and isolated settlements. Today there are already reports of unseemly squabbles between communities and among Nunavut’s regions for material advantages, and while inevitable in any political system, Inuit leaders will now have to manage and control such conflict which is no longer directed at faraway whites. They will also have to strengthen and assert an overriding Nunavut interest to win some very large battles within and outside Nunavut.

One can only say that in the countless daily efforts to create Nunavut there was a spirit of Inuit practicality and willingness to solve problems rather than rushing to the media to shout and show outrage every time something was difficult or displeasing. Yes, there were huge issues of principle to be overcome – the decision-making role for Nunavut land and sea co-management bodies, Nunavut self-government as *sine qua non* for Inuit to sign any claims settlement, the decoupling of Nunavut and Western NWT destinies (from those who wanted to hold up Nunavut till the Western NWT agreed on its own constitution), the inclusion of marine areas and marine management in Nunavut ‘land’ claims, etc. Inuit were determined to win such basic disputes with Ottawa and they did. But their endless daily patience and conviction in what they were doing, and their usual avoidance of attacks on Ottawa helped the negotiating climate immensely.

Finally, the many practical individuals representing government departments, persons who will rarely be remembered but whose hard work and frequent idealism and initiative helped the great, clumsy, and not-always-very-bright behemoth of Canada’s federal government move towards final settlement... they are as much part of this story as Inuit leaders and their teams. If Nunavut and the North had been held hostage to simplistic ‘principles’ and the ignorance of bombastic white political leaders, e.g., as in Australia today, things might have been very different. The unhelpful uproar in 1998 among some white politicians over the Nisga’a settlement in British Columbia illustrates the problem.

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<sup>12</sup> See Jull P, 1985: ‘Dividing the North’, *Policy Options*, Vol 6, No 4, May 1985, 10-13.

Inuit and their white allies have helped to change Canada's conventions for the better, benefiting all other indigenous groups seeking self-government.

### **A World Community of Indigenous Hinterlands**

Nunavut is one of many regions around the world where indigenous people are struggling to re-establish their culture, self-government, livelihoods, and territorial rights. Some of these places, like Nunavut and the Inuit regions of Alaska, the Inuvialuit region (NWT), Nunavik (Arctic Quebec), Labrador, and Greenland; the Torres Strait Islands, Tiwi islands (Bathurst and Melville, north of Darwin), the Pitjantjatjara Lands, Kimberley, Arnhem Land, Cape York Peninsula, all in Australia; Cook Islands, Niue, and others, have officially recognised governments or government authorities, e.g., Torres Strait Regional Authority and Island Coordinating Council in the same building on Thursday Island, Queensland. Some, as in Northern Scandinavia, are moral and cultural communities working through a variety of ethnic or regional bodies – e.g., the Sami Parliaments are official regional bodies, *in effect*. In many other places indigenous peoples do not yet have more than the will to succeed, or have only informal meetings of various bodies within a region. In Alice Springs, Australia, the major indigenous organisations meet formally or informally to coordinate political positions and share information so that although there is no regional body *in theory*, there is a strong Central Australia indigenous political community *in practice*. Of course, in such cases hostile governments may do their utmost to create divisions among indigenous people.

Although these various indigenous territories often use international support or ideas from elsewhere to begin their work, their leaders forget such contacts as they struggle with powerful governments at home. This is unfortunate because the 'political studies' they need are in few universities or books – rather, they are found in the experience of other peoples too busy to write things down or too secretive to share their ideas. It is most desirable that Nunavut and other indigenous peoples share ideas and experience with each other to improve their opportunities and outcomes at every stage. A permanent council or 'conference' is needed, ideally within the United Nations system, e.g., to better fulfil the goals of the Brundtland Report for better protection of indigenous hinterlands.<sup>13</sup> There are enough indigenous hinterlands with more than enough territory – *in the 'first world' alone!* – to show that a new sort of ethno-cultural entity with a new sort of political economy is emerging in the world. Nevertheless, national governments will do very little for them unless indigenous peoples maintain the momentum. The best way to move ahead is to share ideas and inspiration widely.

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<sup>13</sup> See 'Empowering Vulnerable Groups', in Chapter 4, in Brundtland GH et al., 1987: *Our Common Future: The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, Oxford University Press.

## Conclusion

Despite Canada's endless constitutional struggles and accompanying despair, Inuit in the North, as well as Cree, Dene (in NWT and Yukon), Métis, Nisga'a, et al., have been rebuilding the Northern two-thirds or three-quarters of Canada according to a new political economy. This hopeful problem-solving is replacing bitter tensions and even more bitter injustices of the past. That being said, Canadians and their governments have almost no understanding of this 'big picture', what it requires in the way of continuing support, what must be done to continue the success story. Essentially Ottawa has been reacting to Inuit and other indigenous initiatives. The only positive approach with any official backing was found in the 1985 Coolican report and the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the latter a proposal for regional indigenous political settlements all across Canada.<sup>14</sup>

The indigenous political movements which emerged in the Northwest Territories from the late 1960s were outraged reactions to injustice and inequality in society and politics, and to the denigration of indigenous culture by a white élite. The focus moved to land, sea, and environmental issues a little later. Nunavut is an Inuit response to inequality, as well as a positive assertion of territorial rights. Nunavut's ideals and legitimacy demand that it not fall prey to social division itself. This will not be easy. A highly-paid public sector élite (including the corporations created by the Nunavut claims settlement) will collect 'frequent flyer' points while many people will have few means or prospects.

The Canadian media have now served notice that they will no longer simply keep quiet about disparities between the fine rhetoric of indigenous leaders and the actual situations their people endure at their hands.<sup>15</sup> The mundane fulfilment of indigenous self-government, of course, means politicians and officials being held responsible for decisions, outcomes, revenue-raising, and spending in the name of the community. Nunavut leaders will not have the sort of honeymoon period, the 'willing suspension of disbelief', they could have received a decade ago. Fortunately Nunavut has had a weekly newspaper for years, *Nunatsiaq News*, which has set a very high standard in public responsibility, social wisdom, and political commentary under the editorship of Jim Bell. Indigenous peoples anywhere in the world would be fortunate to have such an asset as they develop an authentic political culture as part of their accession to genuine self-government.

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<sup>14</sup> Coolican M et al., 1985: *Living Treaties: Lasting Agreements: Report of the Task Force To Review Comprehensive Claims Policy*, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa; see especially Vol 2 in RCAP, 1996: *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 5 volumes, Ottawa; and this author's attempt to provide a federal agenda for Nunavut and similar projects, Jull P, 1997: 'Re-Inventing Canada: The North and National Policy, Revised 3rd Edition', *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, CD-ROM, Public Works and Government Services (Publishing), Ottawa.

<sup>15</sup> The clearest statement is made by William Thorsell, the editor of Canada's national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, in a column on October 31, 1998, 'An open look at aboriginal issues'.

Building a uniquely Inuit and Nunavut political culture is the great domestic task now. Inuit must overcome the sort of petty community-centred bargaining which has become a disease of the Northwest Territories political system. Fighting over the bounty provided by southern taxpayers, while having difficulty with major policy development and setting directions, has been the curse of the NWT's non-party government system.<sup>16</sup> There will always be special pleading for one's own community, of course, but the Inuit movement was a reaction against all that. That is, the old NWT government set up community councils and gave them budgets so that Inuit could play at making decisions about street light purchases and other local goodies. Inuit insisted that the larger issues of cultural survival, culturally relevant teaching and public services, management and protection of environment and food species, and the ability to map their own future were more urgently needed. And so they rejected the NWT. Now they must do better.

They must also come to grips with great national and international economic enterprises and trends which would use their lands and seas as disposable economic assets or shipping corridors. That, too, was the whole point of achieving Nunavut as a separate jurisdiction responsible for Inuit, to Inuit.

The challenges of victory in their long struggle to achieve Nunavut may become pale in the face of the reality of having won. Now they must not drift into the lazy local ways of the old NWT, merely taking over the administration they long deplored, but show that they really do have something different, something unique, and something important to put in its place. To get this far they have overcome the timid, the local, and the small thinkers among them. They must not abandon their great project to those people now. Besides, locally minded people will be fully occupied in making Nunavut work at grass roots level, an essential process itself.

The dual constitutional framework of Nunavut, the first such in Canada, provides important governing powers to the Inuit-only claims settlement structures as well as to the Nunavut government. In other claims settlements the huge funds and limited accountability of claims bodies have become problems in themselves, and a problem *vis-à-vis* indigenous-dominated public authorities in the same region. If the claims bodies and government work well together in Nunavut they will be able to move mountains. There are many areas of potential conflict, however. Nunavut will need large-minded and magnanimous leaders in its early years.

Indeed, in the Canadian federation Nunavut should always be 'punching above its weight', as Australians say. The 'realist' school who say one must focus on very small and limited things are really only advertising their own lack of imagination and breadth.<sup>17</sup> Nunavut is a big idea, and has been achieved by people with big ideas. It will always be an exception to any Canadian norms. It can turn its uniqueness to advantage.

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<sup>16</sup> NWT parties would have developed sooner but this was deemed impractical until the major *de facto* party, i.e., the Nunavut members' caucus, left the stage.

<sup>17</sup> Nunavut leaders are less likely to be a problem here than non-Inuit advisers.

Nunavut leaders must also be aware that they represent not only a new, but a new type of political entity. The world will not let them forget it, of course – they will receive countless invitations to speak at conferences or on tours of indigenous territories abroad. Some of the great and long-term goals of Nunavut will only be achievable in cooperation and communication with other indigenous peoples, support groups, and international agencies. The Arctic environment and the future of marine species and marine management are the most obvious of those concerns. One would expect Nunavut's government and the Nunavut Inuit claims corporations to be pillars of support for the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. One may also hope that Nunavut will be active in building an international network or council of indigenous hinterlands. This body would share experience and ideas among members to help each other and to strengthen global protection for such marginal regions in the face of hysterical demands by large poor countries or powerful rich countries for their resources.

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