

country. In their opinion, the exercise of political self-determination is a necessary step toward national unity. Canada would be strengthened, not weakened as a result.

There must be unity, if you will, or cohesiveness in this country. There must never be any dismemberment of the country. I do not want to get into these western separatists, or Quebec separatists, or any separatists in the country. I can assure that you we will fight that. We do not want our country to be dismembered. Just because what we are talking about is separate, putting into place a separate order. . . that does not mean that we are going to change the nature of this country. Certainly we are going to change the nature of law-making, administering, policy-making, and so on.

Yes, the provinces must become involved—not because the Constitution says so, but because of the very nature of the way in which this country is structured. We can say that the Constitution compels us to have the provinces participate and be involved every step of the way. . . But that is not the real reason, in our opinion. The reason is because they have governments within the provinces or territories, therefore, they too must change their laws, their practices, to accommodate ours; and it must be done fairly. . . We do not have any hang-ups right across the country about the very thing that we are discussing now. (Assembly of First Nations, Sub 3:28)

International Experience

To determine whether the experience of other countries with indigenous populations could be helpful to Canada, the Committee commissioned research on international policy and practice. The study concluded that arrangements in other countries have not generally provided opportunities for genuine self-government by indigenous peoples. No international models were found that would be readily transferable to Canada.*

Some aspects of the relationship between Indian tribes and the United States government, however, were of particular interest to the Committee. Early judicial rulings in the United States recognized the sovereignty of Indian nations and the fact that it stemmed from their own independence, not from the delegation of power by any external government. Tribes were described as “domestic dependent nations” and retain to this day some sovereign powers of self-government. The legal tradition in Canada is very different.

To gain a better understanding of this relationship, the Committee travelled to the United States to meet with U.S. government officials and Indian leaders. Just prior to the Committee’s visit, President Ronald Reagan issued a statement on Indian policy, which read in part:

When European colonial powers began to explore and colonize this land, they entered into treaties with sovereign Indian nations. Our new nation continued to make treaties and to deal with Indian tribes on a government-to-government basis. Throughout our history, despite periods of conflict and shifting national policies in Indian affairs, the government-to-government relationship between the United States and Indian tribes has endured. The Constitution, treaties, laws, and court decisions have consistently recognized a unique political relationship between Indian tribes and the United States which this Administration pledges to uphold.

* Greenland does, however, offer some possibilities as a model for the Eastern Arctic.