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INDIANS



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INDIANS OF CANADA

REFERENCE SERIES NO. 2

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Publié également en français.

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Publié également en français.

Illustrations of the headdresses in the centre page spread are by Joni Lazore, a Mohawk from the Akwesasne Indian Reserve.



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First Nations



Long before the first European explorers landed on the shores of North America, the vast land mass that is now Canada was populated by a diverse range of aboriginal peoples. Misnamed “Indians” by Christopher Columbus in 1492 when he mistakenly believed that he had arrived in India, today they form an important part of Canadian society.

As the original inhabitants of Canada, and with a history that dates back tens of thousand of years, Indian tribal groups are today referred to as “First Nations.” Despite sharing a deep and spiritual relationship with the land and the life forms it supports, First Nations have widely varying cultures, customs and languages. They are also politically and culturally distinct from Inuit — aboriginal people who live in the Northwest Territories, northern Quebec and Labrador. A third group — the Métis — are the offspring of Indian and non-Indian parents.

Registration

Today, there are more than 440 000 registered Indians in Canada. To be registered means that an individual is recognized under federal law as being a status Indian and is listed on the Indian Register which is maintained for the Government of Canada by its Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND).

Registration entitles Indians to certain benefits (including assistance for post-secondary education and some non-insured health benefits) which may not be available to non-Indians.

Membership in a band

Registered Indians may also be members of a band — a formally recognized group of Indians. Membership in a band entitles Indian individuals to the collective treaty and/or aboriginal rights of that band. Band members may also have the right to live on a reserve and to share in the assets of the band.

Terms used in this publication include:

“Indian” and “status Indian” refers to an individual who is recorded as an Indian in the Indian Register; most are members of an Indian band.

“Treaty Indian” is a term used to describe an Indian who is a member of a band that signed a treaty.

“Non-status Indian” is an individual who is of Indian ancestry but not registered as an Indian. Together, the Metis, Inuit and Indians (status, non-status, and treaty Indians) are referred to as aboriginal, first nations or native.

Currently, there are some 600 Indian bands in Canada. Average band membership is about 700 people. Several bands have fewer than 50 members, and the largest (Six Nations of the Grand River) has roughly 13 000 members.

Reserves

Approximately 60 per cent of registered Indians live on reserves — special areas of land set aside through treaties or the *Indian Act* for the sole use and benefit of Indians. There are more than 2 200 such reserves across Canada. Most reserves are located in rural areas, many are isolated and some are not inhabited. In fact, approximately one in six Indians lives in an area so remote that there is no year-round road access to the nearest town.

Registered Indians living on a reserve are eligible for a variety of federal programs, including health, education, social assistance and, where available, housing assistance. As well, they may be exempt from paying income tax on earnings from on-reserve businesses or employment.

The 40 per cent of registered Indians who live off-reserve do so for a variety of reasons such as seeking employment opportunities or attending school. Although many Indians have never lived on a reserve, they nevertheless, maintain close ties with their traditional communities.

Population — age and distribution

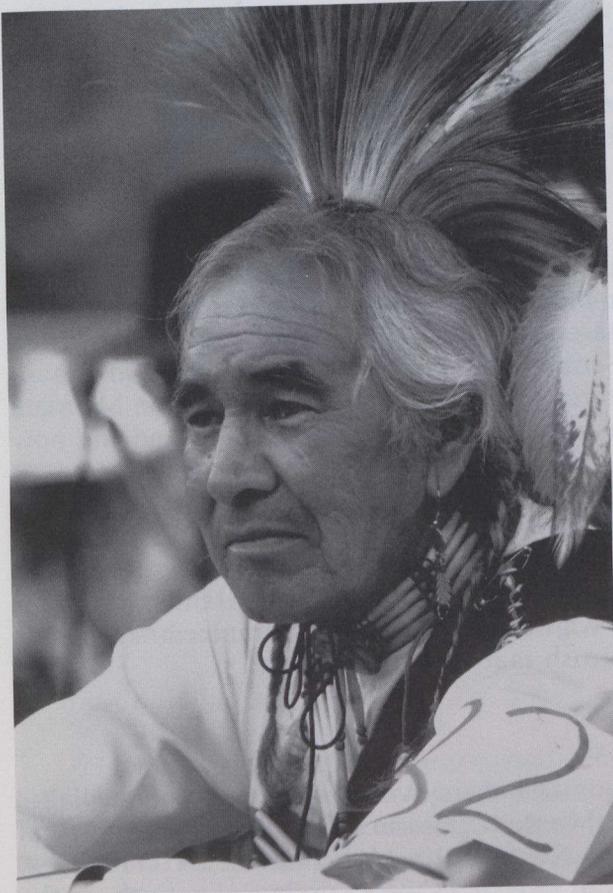
Registered Indians currently comprise about 1.5 per cent of the Canadian population. The Indian population is relatively young, with well over half of registered Indians being under 25 years of age (compared to only 37 per cent of all Canadians).

Indian populations also vary widely from region to region. For example, fewer than one out of every 100 people in the Atlantic provinces is a registered Indian. In the Northwest Territories and Yukon, however, approximately one person in five is a registered Indian. (Métis and Inuit living in the North have not been included in this figure.)

A people in transition

Historically, Indians have been one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups in Canada. Restrictive legislation governing Indians and their land, efforts to assimilate Indians into non-native society, a lack of economic development opportunities, inadequate education — these and other factors have been links in a chain of dependency on government.

Today, however, Canadian Indians are making others understand that they were once free, self-sustaining nations with their own forms of government. They have achieved significant progress in virtually all aspects of daily life over the past 25 years, with the promise of even greater breakthroughs in the 1990s. Indians are, in fact, in a period of transition as they pursue a cultural, social, political and economic revival.





Prehistoric times

Most anthropologists agree that the North American Indian originated in Asia and migrated over the Bering Sea from Siberia. Recent discoveries of primitive tools have led some to speculate that man was present in the New World as early as 40000 B.C., when North America was largely covered with glaciers. With the melting of the glaciers (around 8000 B.C.), these prehistoric inhabitants adapted their lifestyle from hunting the giant sloth and mammoth to pursuing much smaller prey such as deer, bear and elk. By 1000 B.C., prehistoric populations had become more stable and individual cultures began to emerge in different areas of the continent.

Cultures

In Canada, six distinct Indian culture areas have generally been recognized. In each case, the geographical environment played a large role in shaping the culture. Each culture was composed of a number of tribes, some of which are now extinct.

Woodland Indians

The easternmost culture area was that of the nomadic Woodland Indians, who lived in a harsh climate of long, cold winters and short, hot summers. This culture area encompasses what are today the provinces of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and much of Ontario. The Woodland tribes were the Micmac, Malecite, Montagnais, Naskapi, Ojibway, Algonkin, Cree and the now extinct Beothuk.

These tribes depended on moose, deer, bear, beaver and caribou for food and clothing. Diets were supplemented by fresh-water fish and fowl, and by shell-fish and cod harvested along the Atlantic coast. All Woodland tribes lived in "wigwams," essentially a framework of poles covered with bark, woven rush mats or caribou skin.

Iroquoian Indians

By contrast, the Iroquoian Indians lived in more permanent villages in the area that is now southeastern Ontario. There were nine principal tribes — the Huron, Tobacco, Neutral, Erie, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca (the latter five tribes were known collectively as the Iroquois). Theirs was a fertile land where a mild climate provided ample time to plant and cultivate crops.

Adapting to their stable environment, the Iroquoian Indians became superb farmers and developed early systems of democratic government. They lived in "longhouses," large dwellings that housed extended families. Constructed of poles and slabs of bark, a typical longhouse was 10 m wide, 10 m high and 25 m long.

Plains Indians

The Plains Indians occupied a vast territory of grasslands, or prairies (parts of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta), that was once home to thriving herds of antelope and buffalo. These tribes — the Blackfoot, Blood, Piegan, Gros Ventre, Plains Cree, Assiniboine, Sioux and Sarcee — were greatly dependent on the buffalo for food and clothing. Thus, they lived a nomadic lifestyle, following the buffalo herds on their migrations across the prairies.

Plains Indians lived in "tipis," slightly tilted, cone-shaped dwellings constructed of poles covered with buffalo hides. Before the introduction of the horse to North America, dogs were used to pull the disassembled homes and possessions of Plains Indians from one temporary living site to another. The arrival of horses (about 1730) made travel faster and easier for these tribes, and they quickly became skilled riders.

Plateau Indians

The Plateau Indians occupied what is now the British Columbia interior — a territory that ranges from semi-desert conditions in the south to high mountains and dense forest in the north. There were six principal tribes: the Interior Salish, Lillooet, Thompson, Shuswap, Okanagan and Lake Indians.

Although they lived in vastly different environments, these tribes had in common a strong dependence on salmon as a year-round source of food. Wild roots and berries also formed an important part of their diet. These tribes are known for their distinctive homes, which ranged from subterranean dwellings to buffalo hide tipis and lean-tos made of poles and spruce bark.

Pacific Coast Indians

The Pacific Coast culture area had a mild climate and heavy rainfall, which produced dense forests of gigantic firs, pines and red cedars. The principal tribal groups were the Tsimshian, Gitksan, Skeena, Haida, Nootka and Coast Salish. In addition to living on the mainland, Pacific Coast tribes occupied the Queen Charlotte Islands and Vancouver Island.

Tribes in this region obtained food by harvesting salmon, shellfish and whales from the sea. Compared with other Indian cultural groups in Canada, they had elaborate social structures that included a nobility, commoners and slaves. Today, Pacific Coast Indians are known throughout the world for their distinctive and powerful art forms, especially the totem pole.

Mackenzie and Yukon River Basin Indians

The sixth cultural group, the Indians of the Mackenzie and Yukon river basins, had a more difficult way of life than many other tribal groups. Their territory took up more than a quarter of Canada's total land mass, encompassing what we now know as the northern regions of the Prairie provinces and parts of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon Territory. There were 12 principal tribes: the Chipewyan, Beaver, Slave, Yellowknife, Dogrib, Hare, Kutchin, Han, Tutchone, Kaska, Mountain and Sekani.



The land of the Mackenzie and Yukon River Basin Indians consisted of dense forests, barren expanses and swampy terrain known as muskeg. Winters were long and severe, and the people of these northern tribes were primarily occupied with day-to-day survival. For food, they depended on scattered and often scarce herds of such migratory animals as caribou and moose, and on fish. Their nomadic existence was reflected in their choice of simple, easily erected dwellings such as lean-tos and tents made of animal skins.

Spiritual beliefs

Just as their lifestyles often differed dramatically, the six Canadian Indian cultures developed distinct spiritual beliefs and ceremonies.

For example, many of the religious practices of the Indians of the Mackenzie and Yukon river basins were related to hunting, butchering game and disposing of the bones, as were those of the Woodland Indians. Among the Iroquoian, the Huron believed that all things, including fabricated items, had a soul and were immortal.

The Plains Indians worshipped such great spirits as the Sun, the Thunderbird and Napiwa, the Old Man of the Dawn. For their part, the Pacific Coast tribes believed that the human and animal worlds were interconnected, and that salmon were actually supernatural beings who lived in human form beneath the sea.

In virtually all tribes, adolescent males were required to undertake a "vision quest" before being accepted into manhood. In these ceremonies, Indian males sought out a guardian spirit that would remain with them throughout their lifetime. In one Plateau Indian tribe, girls underwent a two-year period of seclusion in a separate hut, where they received intensive training for womanhood.

Languages

Over thousands of years, the different Indian tribes in Canada developed distinct languages. These have been classified into 10 major linguistic families, each of which is made up of individual but related languages. Together, these 10 families comprise more than 50 individual aboriginal languages.

Indians belonging to the same language family do not necessarily share the same culture. Similarly, Indians who share the same cultural background do not necessarily belong to the same language group.



The newcomers

Although there is evidence that European seamen came into contact with North American Indians as early as A.D. 1000, European explorers and settlers did not settle permanently in Canada until the 16th century.

France was the first country to show a strong interest in the territory that is now Canada. The first French explorer, Jacques Cartier, encountered Micmac Indians almost immediately upon landing in the New World in 1534. Cartier's subsequent attempts to establish settlements failed, in part because he had alienated local Indian tribes by abducting some of their members and taking them back to Europe.

The fur trade

Nevertheless, Europeans continued to visit the east coast to fish its abundant waters and engage in trade for furs with the Woodland Indians. Over the next 50 years, the French developed a fondness for beaver hats that led to a growing and lucrative trade. Intertribal trade in furs for other commodities had existed long before the arrival of the Europeans. However, the desire of the Europeans for fur combined with their offerings of "magical" new products sharply raised the value of furs as articles of trade. In return for beaver pelts, the French adventurers provided Indians with European manufactured goods, including the musket (an early firearm) and food items such as biscuits and preserved goods.

The development of the fur trade is one of the most important events in the history of Canada. It also marked a turning point in the lifestyles of many Indian tribes. They began to trap more animals for pelts, and therefore had less time for traditional subsistence activities. As a result, their diets changed and they became more dependent on European foods. As well, the demand for furs led hunters farther afield, often into the territory of other tribes. Intertribal warfare intensified, and was given a new dimension by the muskets Indians acquired through trade and alliances with Europeans.

Permanent settlement

In 1608, French adventurer Samuel de Champlain founded the settlement of Quebec (today's Quebec City) as a fur trading centre. It was also around this time that England took a more vigorous interest in the northern regions of the New World, sending its own traders to North America in search of furs.



A struggle soon developed for control of Canada, and several Indian tribes developed trade and military alliances with England and France. Tribal warfare also erupted, primarily within the Iroquoian culture. When it ended, the five-tribe Iroquois confederacy had destroyed the Huron nation and dispersed the Neutral and Algonkin tribes from their traditional territories.

Christianity and disease

With the arrival of permanent European settlers in Canada, virtually no aspect of Indian life remained untouched. In addition to European products, the new arrivals brought Christianity; the teachings of Jesuit missionaries from France weakened the traditional spiritual beliefs of many Indians. The Europeans also brought disease which devastated aboriginal populations. In fact, some historians have estimated that within a 200-year period, Indian populations were reduced by as much as 95 per cent by such diseases as typhoid, diphtheria, plague, influenza, measles, tuberculosis, smallpox and scarlet fever.

The spread of European influence

The struggle between Britain and France for control of land and trade in Canada lasted for more than 150 years. During this time, fur traders representing the two powers advanced through the continent, engaging Indians in barter. As the influence of the white settlers spread west, many Indian tribes became increasingly dependent on manufactured goods. Firearms and disease took a great toll on human and animal life, and intertribal rivalries flared.

Beginning in the 1770s, the Pacific Coast Indians made permanent contact with traders from the United States, Spain and England. Again, intertribal warfare increased, disease devastated tribal populations and traditional Indian lifestyles were disrupted. As well, with the arrival of settlers on the west coast, farmers began to take over the land of many tribes.



Plains Indian Woman



Treaties and reserves

Britain gained control of most of North America in 1760 and three years later issued the Royal Proclamation, which, among other things, reserved lands for Indians and prescribed that only governments could deal with Indians on land matters. Purchase or settlement of this territory was strictly forbidden without special leave and licence obtained from the Crown. The Crown began entering into a series of land-cession treaties under which Indians gave up their claims to specified tracts of land in return for lump sum cash payments and other benefits. Treaties were used by the Crown to clear lands of aboriginal title so that settlement or resource development could proceed. Treaty-making continued in northern Ontario and the western provinces until 1923.

Starting in 1830, in parts of what is now eastern Canada, settlement on reserves began under government guardianship and Indians effectively became wards of the state.

Post-Confederation period

With the birth of the Canadian nation in 1867, the new federal government was given legislative authority over "Indians and lands reserved for Indians." This resulted in a special relationship between the federal government and Indians which continues to today.

In 1876, the first *Indian Act* was passed, giving the federal government great powers over Indians living on reserves. Although the *Indian Act* has been revised several times in the past century, many of the restrictive provisions of the original legislation remain in place.



Tsimshian



Chipewyan



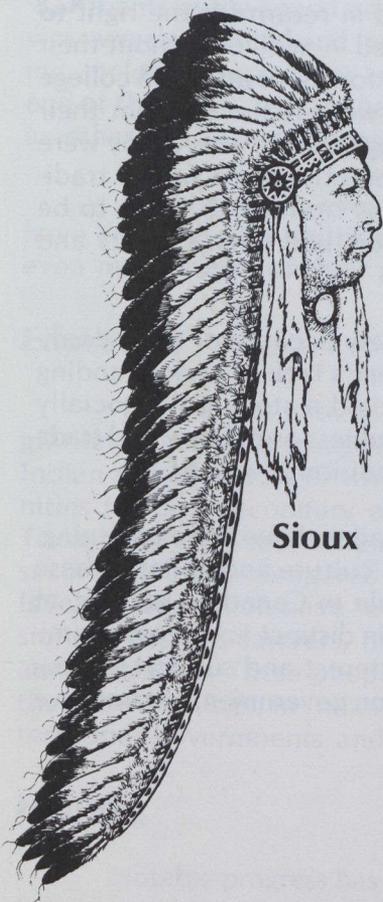
Cree



Haida



Kwakiutl



Sioux



Bella Coola



Mohawk



Kootenai

Assimilation efforts

During the 1800s and into the 1900s, numerous efforts were made to assimilate Indians into the “white man’s” world. For example, the concept of “enfranchisement” was introduced, whereby Indians were encouraged to renounce their aboriginal title to land in return for the right to vote in elections. Indians were also enfranchised — with or without their consent — if they joined the clergy or the armed forces, or attended college or university. In other cases, Indian children were removed from their families and communities and placed in boarding schools, where they were forbidden to speak their native language or practice their native traditions. There were also attempts to train Indians from some tribes to be farmers, even though they and their forefathers had been hunters and fishermen for centuries.

Most efforts at assimilation failed, largely because of the indomitable spirit of Indian people and the government’s lack of understanding of Indian culture. At the same time, Indians paid a steep price socially and economically with the passing of their usefulness as military and trade allies and with the disappearance of their traditional way of life.

However, strong and forceful Indian leaders have been emerging, signalling a re-awakening of traditional Indian culture and beliefs. These leaders call for an equal place for their people in Canadian society, at the same time emphasizing their desire to remain distinct and avoid assimilation. These efforts generated widespread interest and support among the non-native public, and resulted in pressure on governments to improve the quality of life in Indian communities.





By the mid-1960s, there were signs of definite and continuing improvements in the social and economic conditions of Indians. Health services were enhanced and many more Indian children had access to schooling, including secondary and post-secondary education. As well, by the end of the 1960s, Indians had obtained the same political and legal rights as other Canadian citizens.

More recently, even greater advances have been realized. Indians have emerged as a political force and the Canadian public has become even more aware of their problems and aspirations.

Education

The success rate of Indian students has improved with the integration of native languages, culture and tradition into the curriculum of Indian schools, most of which are operated directly by bands. Opportunities for post-secondary education have also been greatly enhanced. Today, there are more than 15 000 Indian students enrolled at the post-secondary level, compared to only a handful in the early 1960s. Higher levels of education have resulted in a growing number of Indian professionals, such as lawyers, nurses, teachers, social workers and business administrators. These people are assuming positions of responsibility in their communities, in Indian organizations, in the federal, provincial and territorial governments and in business.

Housing

Notable progress has also been made in ensuring that Indian people living on-reserve are provided with adequate shelter. Since the mid-1960s, the number of houses on-reserve has more than doubled and the quality of housing has improved significantly.

Health

The health of Indians is also improving, due mainly to improved living conditions, better access to quality health care and greater community involvement in health education and delivery. Life expectancy for Indians has increased (although it is still well below the national average) and the infant mortality rate is one-fifth what it was 25 years ago. While the incidence of some diseases has increased with the rate of urbanization of the Indian population, others — such as infectious diseases — have decreased. Overall, the trend is towards continued improvements in the general health and quality of life of Indians.

Economic and political development

Progress is also being made on the economic development front. Twenty years ago, few Indian businesses existed except for family farm operations and some local stores. Today, there are more than 5 000 active Indian businesses, of which 3 000 are located on-reserve and individually owned. About half of these businesses have been established in the past five years, and many with assistance from the federal government. The government has invested in a wide variety of businesses, including motels, tourist resorts, craft industries, grain farming and canoe manufacturing. The majority of these endeavours are now self-supporting.

There are also some Indians who hunt and trap in certain regions to supplement their income. Almost half the trappers in Canada today are aboriginal. Trapping provides them with the rare opportunity to both earn a cash income and still practise traditional skills, keeping alive the spiritual relationship with the land and the animals.

Strong, sophisticated and dedicated Indian leaders have been a part of the Canadian political scene for many years. Indian interests are represented by more than 35 national, provincial and tribal organizations. These groups deal with all levels of government and, increasingly, with international organizations like the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the International Labour Organization in Geneva.

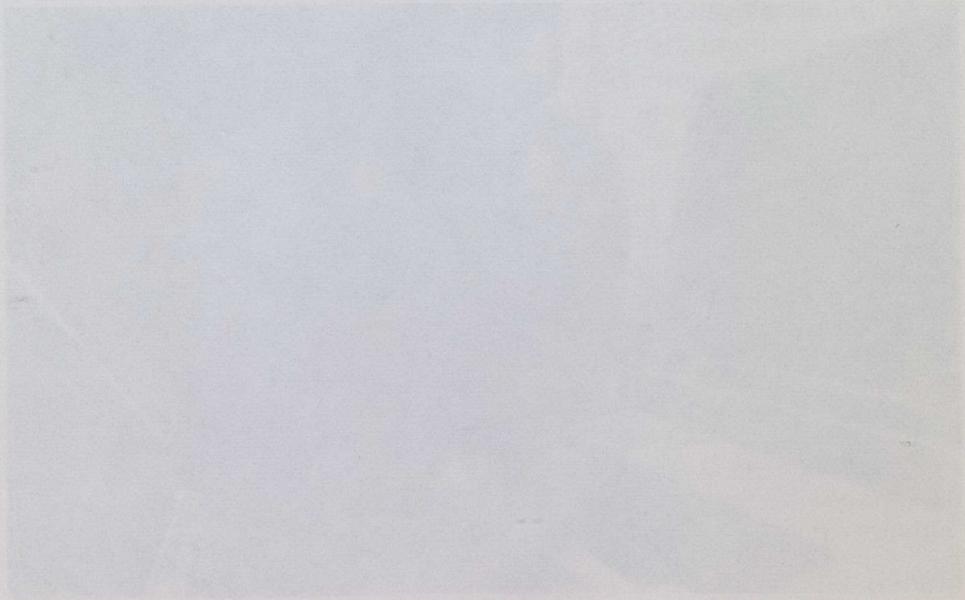
Culture

Since the 1950s, there has been a remarkable reawakening of Indian culture in Canada. Native language courses have been instituted in schools, along with programs on Indian culture and history. About 50 per cent of Indian students now have access to instruction in their native languages. Cultural centres are flourishing, and traditional practices and beliefs are increasingly being used to combat alcoholism and drug problems.

Indian elders are once again playing the vital role of linking the generations. Every summer, Indian groups across Canada hold powwows — spectacular celebrations reminiscent of the annual gatherings held by Indians in earlier times. Although there are still certain spiritual ceremonies such as the Sun Dance, many modern powwows also feature dance competitions for all ages and the sale of Indian arts and crafts. Powwows offer Indians and non-Indians alike an opportunity to witness a wide array of colourful costumes as children and elders perform dances and songs passed on to them from generation to generation.

Challenges remain

Progress has been made, yet serious economic and social problems remain. For example, unemployment rates are high compared to the non-native population and housing is still inadequate on many reserves. Indians continue to face barriers to economic development. Working with Indian community leaders, the Government of Canada is actively engaged in addressing these and other issues.





Devolution

Since 1956, Indian people have acquired more control over their own community life and affairs. This process, known as devolution, consists largely of Indian communities assuming responsibility for administering many of the programs and services funded through the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. These may include education, health services and housing, and are largely administered by band governments. At the end of the 1980s, approximately 70 per cent of DIAND's Indian Program expenditures were administered directly by Indian communities.

Constitutional issues

Several events in the 1980s have brought Indians closer than ever before to their long-held goal of self-government within Canadian society.

The first of these was the recognition in the *Constitution Act, 1982* of the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the Indian and other aboriginal groups in Canada. Native leaders played a vigorous role in the negotiations leading up to the passage of this legislation, by which Canada obtained, for the first time, a formal constitution approved by the Canadian Parliament.



The second important event was the First Ministers' Conference on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters held in March 1983. At this conference, aboriginal leaders from across Canada joined the federal government, representatives of the Yukon and Northwest Territories and nine provincial governments in signing an accord to amend the country's constitution. The four amendments included constitutional recognition of rights acquired through land claims agreements, the guarantee of aboriginal and treaty rights equally to men and women, a commitment to consult aboriginal peoples before any changes affecting them were enacted, and provision for a continuing series of conferences on aboriginal matters into 1987.

Special Committee on Indian Self-government

In 1982, a Special Committee on Indian Self-government was established by the Parliament of Canada. The Special Committee's report, released the following year, has had an important impact on Indian people and government.

The Special Committee examined in great detail the relationship between Indian communities and the federal government. Many Indian witnesses who appeared before the committee stressed that only Indian control of legislation and policy in key areas would ensure the survival and development of their communities. Based on this and other testimony, the first of more than 50 recommendations put forth by the Special Committee was that the federal government should establish a new relationship with Indian First Nations, and that an essential element of this relationship must be Indian self-government.

According to the Committee, this new relationship should have as its basis constitutional recognition of Indians' right to self-government. It also proposed that while constitutional recognition was being sought, legislation should be passed to enable Indian communities to assume a wide range of self-government powers. As well, the Special Committee pointed out the need for a strong economic foundation to support self-government — a foundation that was dependent on Indians having an adequate land and resource base and on the settlement of land claims.

Following the release of the report, the federal government confirmed its commitment to constitutional recognition of Indian self-government. This was discussed at First Ministers' Conferences in 1985 and 1987, but no agreement was reached. Nevertheless, the federal government believes that aboriginal peoples, while enjoying all rights of Canadian citizens, should have institutions of self-government that meet their unique requirements. With this in mind, the federal government is prepared to have further aboriginal constitutional conferences if there are reasonable prospects for success.

Recent government policy



Since 1984, the federal government has followed three main policies in regard to Indian people:

- to support Indians in their efforts to become more autonomous and to take charge of their own communities;
- to maintain and improve the community services available to Indians living on-reserve; and
- to settle native land claims.

Land claims

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in native land claim activities. There are two types of land claims, comprehensive and specific. Both provide an opportunity for natives to establish a land and economic base.

Comprehensive claims are based on aboriginal title arising from traditional native use and occupancy of land. Such claims arise in those parts of Canada where aboriginal title has not been previously dealt with by treaty or other means, including the Yukon, Labrador, and most of British Columbia, parts of Quebec and the Northwest Territories.

Comprehensive claims normally involve a group of bands or aboriginal communities within a geographic area. Settlement agreements are comprehensive in scope, including such elements as land title, land use and resources such as specified hunting, fishing and trapping rights, financial compensation and other rights and benefits.

The first comprehensive land claims settlement reached in Canada involved the Cree and Inuit of northern Quebec and the James Bay region. This historic agreement was signed in 1975. In return for surrendering aboriginal title to vast areas of land, the Cree and Inuit were awarded \$225 million over 20 years. They were also given tracts of community lands with exclusive hunting and trapping rights over large areas. Provisions were also made for the Cree and the Inuit to establish new systems of local government on lands set aside for their use (see Self-government).

Specific claims arise from the non-fulfilment of Indian treaties or alleged wrongdoing on the part of the Crown related to the management of Indian land and other assets. More than 300 specific claims have been submitted to the federal government over the past two decades, most of which have been accepted for negotiation. By the end of the 1980s, some 45 specific claims had been settled.

Self-government

In 1984, the Parliament of Canada passed the *Cree-Naskapi (of Quebec) Act, 1984*. This Act set in place the first self-government arrangement for Indians in Canada. It encompasses the Indian bands that were parties to the first modern land claims agreement.

Since that time, the federal government has also been supporting the development of community self-government arrangements. For aboriginal peoples, self-government represents a means both of regaining control over matters that directly affect them and of preserving their cultural identity. The community-based approach acknowledges that self-government must be flexible enough to take into account the different requirements of aboriginal communities across Canada.

For example, some Indian communities have indicated a desire to pursue an entirely new relationship with the federal government, one that would remove them from the constraints of the *Indian Act*. A concrete example of such an approach is the *Sechelt Indian Band Self-Government Act, 1986*, the first self-government legislation to be approved by Parliament since the community-based negotiations began. The act provides for the Sechelt Band of British Columbia to assume control over its lands, resources, health and social services, education and local taxation.

Other communities have expressed a preference for developing more autonomy and self-sufficiency within the *Indian Act*. To respond to this desire, the federal government has implemented alternative funding arrangements that permit band governments and tribal councils to take on increased responsibility for program delivery. In turn, the band governments are responsible for maintaining an adequate standard of service and for financial accountability.

Various proposals for self-governing arrangements have been or are being developed across the country. Because each reflects the aspirations of an individual community, none is necessarily a model for others. One thing they have in common, however, is that they reflect the desire of Indian communities to assume control over their daily lives and the future of their children.

Bill C-31

Until the mid-1980s, under the terms of the *Indian Act*, a registered Indian woman lost her Indian status if she married a person other than a registered Indian. On the other hand, any woman who married a registered Indian man automatically became a registered Indian. With the coming into force of the equality provisions of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1985, this discrimination based on sex was no longer acceptable.

Despite opposition from some Indian people, the Government of Canada took the steps necessary to comply with the Charter, through an amendment to the *Indian Act* known as Bill C-31. Passed by Parliament in June 1985, Bill C-31 had three principal goals:

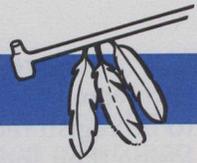
- to eliminate discrimination based on gender and marital status in the *Indian Act*;
- to allow for the “reinstatement” or first time registration of certain Indian women and their children; and
- to enable Indian bands to assume control over their membership.



As a result of Bill C-31, the *Indian Act* now essentially treats men and women equally when determining whether an individual is entitled to be registered as a status Indian, and prevents anyone from gaining or losing their Indian status through marriage. As well, Bill C-31 established the legislative base by which individuals who had lost their status due to sexual discrimination, as well as their first generation children, could apply for reinstatement or first time registration. This means that women who had lost their status because they married a non-Indian are now able to apply to have their status restored. Bill C-31 also abolished the concept of enfranchisement and provided an opportunity for those Indians who had been voluntarily or involuntarily enfranchised to apply for their Indian status.

Eligible individuals who wish to be reinstated or registered for the first time as status Indians must apply to the Indian Registrar, a DIAND official. The first person in Canada to regain Indian status under Bill C-31 was Mary Two-Axe Early, a Mohawk Indian who had fought against discrimination in the Act since she lost her Indian status on July 5, 1985, when she married a non-Indian. By the end of 1990, an estimated 86 000 people will have obtained first-time registration or had their registration restored, making them eligible for federal programs and services available to registered Indians. The number of Indians reinstated or registered for the first time as a result of Bill C-31 is expected to continue to grow in the 1990s.

Aspirations for the future



Through decades of dedication and persistence, Canada's Indian people are now beginning to succeed in establishing a rightful place for themselves in Canadian society. As aboriginal communities assume the challenges associated with greater control over their own way of life, a new relationship is evolving between the Canadian government and Indians.

Many Indians believe that this relationship must acknowledge their rights and privileges as the original inhabitants of Canada. At the very least, Indians want to be recognized as partners in Canadian society, with access to the same opportunities as other Canadians. They want to protect and revive their languages and cultures, and are adamantly opposed to assimilation. In the years ahead, they will continue to actively seek settlement of land claims and other long-standing grievances, joint management of resources in regions adjacent to their lands, and powers to govern their communities according to their own priorities and values.



Appendix

Some Indian nations and their family groups

The family groups of the Indian nations represented in the centre page spread are:

Cree — is the largest nation in the Algonquin family.

Chipewyan — is the largest nation in the Athapaskan family.

Mohawk — are the founders of the Six Nations Confederacy and the largest nation in the Iroquois family.

Kootenai — is the only nation belonging to the Kootenay family group.

Bella Coola — are from the Salishan family group.

Sioux — are one of three nations belonging to the Siouan family.

Tsimshian — is the largest nation in the Tsimshian family.

Kwakiutl — is the largest nation in the Wakashan family group.

Haida — is the only member of the Haida family group.





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