2 The "Canada Problem" in Indigenous Politics

Chapter Outline

This chapter analyzes Indigenous politics through the lenses of the "Indian problem" and the "Canada problem." For Canada, the "Indian problem" has been about transforming Indigenous peoples into Europeans and assimilating Indigenous Peoples into Canadian society. For Indigenous peoples, the "Canada problem" is about transforming Canada into a place that allows them to live as Indigenous peoples in distinct communities. The chapter outlines some of the changes that have occurred over the last half-century in relation to the development of Indigenous governments and suggests that there have been some signs that the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada is changing for the better.

The chapter then turns to the ways in which these concepts have been addressed over the last 50 to 60 years. The "Indian problem" is discussed through the Hawthorn–Tremblay Commission Report of 1966 and the *Statement of Indian Policy*, known as the White Paper, of 1969. The concepts of "citizens plus" and the elimination of Indian status are highlighted. In comparison, the "Canada problem" is discussed through the "Red Paper" of 1970 and the *Calder v. Attorney General of British Columbia* case of 1973, both of which challenged Canada's assertions of dominance.

The next issue discussed is Indigenous self-government. This section provides an overview of the evolution of self-government from the mid-1970s through the Penner Report (1983) and the constitutional talks of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and provides examples of self-government agreements. As a result of the efforts of Indigenous leaders and their supporters, the debate over self-government has shifted from *why* to *how*. In other words, the discussion is now about implementation.

The chapter concludes by discussing the role that the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may lend to the realization of self-government; however, it is suggested that, despite the many positive steps taken over the last 50 years, the reality is that conditions for many Indigenous communities remain deplorable, and there is still much work to be done. Nevertheless, initiatives such as self-government and the constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples and their rights are resulting in Canada edging closer to becoming a post-colonial state. The authors argue that a generation of leaders educated in Indigenous political philosophies, as well as in the state's legal and political processes, may be able to move things forward in a positive way.

Learning Objectives

- To understand what is meant by the "Indian problem"
- To understand what is meant by the "Canada problem"
- To be aware of the attempts made to deal with the "Indian problem" in the second half of the twentieth century
- To recognize that both Indigenous and Canadian political leaders have a role in attempts to address the "Canada problem"
- To recognize what has been accomplished and what still needs to be accomplished in order for Canada to become a post-colonial state in relation to Indigenous peoples

Study Questions

1. What is the "Indian problem"?
2. What is the "Canada problem"?
3. What is meant by the "colonial legacy" when referring to Aboriginal peoples?
4. What is the Hawthorn–Tremblay Commission Report? How did it lay the foundation for modern Indian policy?
5. What is the White Paper of 1969 and why is it important?
6. How did the "Red Paper" of 1970 respond to the White Paper of 1969?
7. What was the significance of the 1973 *Calder* decision?
8. What are the important historical markers in the evolution of Aboriginal self-government?
9. How could the Guswenteh, or two-row wampum, be used to move self-government forward?
10. Can the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations be used as a tool to improve the political relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples?

Additional Resources

Readings

Asch, Michael, John Borrows and James Tully. 2018. *Resurgence and Reconciliation: Indigenous–Settler Relations and Earth Teachings.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Borrows, John. 2016. *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Coulthard, Glen S. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Manuel, Arthur. 2015. *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake Up Call.* Toronto: Between the Lines.

Nickel, Sarah. 2019. *Assembling Unity: Indigenous Politics, Gender, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Poelzer, Greg, and Kenneth S. Coates. 2015. *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation: A Road Map for All Canadians*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Websites

âpihtawikosisân. 2012. "Indigenous Issues 101." http://apihtawikosisan.com/aboriginal-issue-primers/

This blog, written by a Métis woman in Montreal, introduces readers to a number of Indigenous issues.

Assembly of First Nations. 2019. http://www.afn.ca/

This is the official website of the Assembly of First Nations. It provides information on the organization's history, structure, and its numerous initiatives.

Indigenous Politics Twitter Feed. https://twitter.com/indigpoli?lang=en

This Twitter feed provides up to date information on Indigenous political issues.

Indigenous Works. https://indigenousworks.ca/en/resources/indigenous-organizations

Provides links to Indigenous political organizations in Canada.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission. http://www.trc.ca/

The official site of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provides links to resources and collections.