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Tightening the Reins: Resistance Grows and Organizes

Chapter Outline

As the twentieth century progressed, the Canadian government continued on with an assimilation policy. However, Indigenous people continued to question their treatment and organize as a way to put pressure on governments. Residential schools were continuing to strip Indigenous peoples of their cultures and ways of life. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the schools were slowly phased out and the children “integrated” into the public systems. The 1960s saw an additional attack on Indigenous families with what became known as the “Sixties Scoop,” whereby 15,000 Aboriginal children were adopted into non-Indigenous families. One example of protest and reaction to the nearly one hundred years of attack on Indigenous families was the move towards Indigenous control of Indigenous education; Indigenous communities took charge of their own schools with the hopes of providing a relevant and safe education for children. This initiative resulted in band schools appearing on reserves across Canada but not without difficulties. In spite of challenges with implementing proposed changes to the First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act, a recent agreement in Ontario between the provincial government and the Anishinabek Nation, now provides a model for other provinces and territories to follow.

As a result of the social upheaval following the Second World War, a new attitude was brought to bear on Canadian Indian policy. Indigenous soldiers had again enlisted in high numbers and when they returned to civilian life, the restrictions and inequities they faced, became more evident. With the leadership of Indian war veterans, in 1946 the government of Canada established a Joint Senate and House of Commons Committee on the Indian Act. It resulted in major amendments to the Indian Act in 1951 such as those regarding the ban on Indigenous spiritual practices like the potlatch and the loss of Indian status upon the completion of a university degree.

The 1960s saw continued political organization. As part of Expo in Montreal, Indigenous peoples set up a pavilion and publicly expressed dissatisfaction with their treatment in Canada. However, a few years earlier, the government had appointed an anthropologist, Harry Hawthorn to investigate the condition of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Hawthorn spoke against assimilation efforts and also promoted the idea of ‘citizens plus,’ to denote that in addition to the normal rights of citizenship, First Nations also possessed certain additional rights as charter members of the country. However, in 1969, Pierre Trudeau’s Liberal government introduced the 1969 White Paper that was wrapped in the concept of equality. In reality, it was an attempt to further assimilate and rid Indian people of any “special” rights they may have, including treaties and reserves. Indigenous leadership immediately countered this policy initiative. The most famous of these came from the Alberta Indian chiefs who presented their paper *Citizens Plus*, also known as the Red Paper. One element of the White Paper did materialize with the creation of the Indian Claims Commission in 1969.

The political mobilization of First Peoples was manifested in the rise of multiple national organizations and resistance movements aimed at gaining more autonomy with regards to self-government. Of particular note were the efforts and strategies used by the Haudenosaunee, and in particular, a traditionalist of the Longhouse religion, Deskaheh, who travelled to Europe to gain support for his people. Indigenous policing bodies known as the Peacekeepers and Warriors also arose among the Haudenosaunee to fight for greater autonomy. The Métis in Alberta also made progress with regards to acquiring rights to land that eventually led to the Métis settlements.

Another major challenge to the government of Canada came from First Nations women who, under the Indian Act, had lost their status after marrying a non-Indigenous man. As a result of a complaint by Sandra Lovelace to the United Nations, the Indian Act was deemed to be in breach of human rights. In addition, with the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982 and with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms making it clear that discrimination on the basis of gender would not be tolerated, the Indian Act was amended in 1985 under Bill C-31, eliminating the gain or loss of status through marriage.

Learning Objectives

- To understand the evolution and change of Indian policy that resulted from continued challenges by Indigenous leadership to restrictive policy and legislation
- To recognize the purpose of the 1969 White Paper and Indigenous response to this legislative proposal
- To recognize the challenge by First Nations women to the Indian Act and the result of this challenge
- To understand the Indigenous experience of residential schools
- To understand the struggle for Indigenous autonomy through specific resistance movements
- To understand the rise of Métis settlements in Alberta

Key Terms, Figures or Sites

Assembly of First Nations The national representative organization of the First Nations in Canada. It grew out of the National Indian Brotherhood, which changed not only its name in 1982 but also its structure to become an “Organization of First Nations Government Leaders” (p. 269).

Blue Quills Opened in 1970, the first school in Canada administered by Indigenous people, near St Paul, Alberta, approximately 200 km northeast of Edmonton (p. 266).

“code talkers” Indigenous soldiers who served as radio operators during the First World War (US, Choctaw) and the Second World War (Canada, Cree; US, Navajo) receiving and transmitting coded messages in their Indigenous languages (p. 268).

Compulsory enfranchisement Department of Indian Affairs policy, dating from early twentieth century to mid-century, whereby the superintendent-general had the power to enfranchise Indigenous people he considered qualified, whether they wanted it or not. This meant that the individuals

concerned had the rights of other Canadian citizens, including the right to vote, but no longer had status under the Indian Act (p. 261).

Deskaheh Guyohkohnyo title held by Haudenosaunee traditionalist leader Levi General (1873–1925) who sought sovereignty for his people at the League of Nations (p. 272).

Ewing Commission Commission appointed in 1935 by the Alberta government to investigate social and economic conditions of the province’s Métis population and chaired by Justice Albert Freeman Ewing. It resulted in the Métis Population Betterment Act (1938) and the creation of Métis settlements (colonies) in Alberta (p. 276).

Hawthorn Report (1966) Report by anthropologist Harry B. Hawthorn on Indigenous social, educational, and economic conditions. Hawthorn criticized the existing assimilation policy and presented a view of Indigenous people as “citizens plus” (p. 270).

National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) (1968–82) National association resulting from the split of the National Indian Council into two bodies, one representing status and treaty Indigenous groups (NIB), the other non-status Indians and Métis (Native Council of Canada) (p. 269).

Peacekeepers Self-governed police force formed in Kahnawake, near Montreal, following a breakdown in relations with the Quebec provincial police. It eventually became the reserve’s official law enforcement body (p. 273).

Saint-Paul-des- Métis First tract of land set aside for Métis settlement, in 1896 in Alberta (p. 274).

“Sixties Scoop” Expression referring to the practice during the 1960s of removing Indigenous children from their communities and having them adopted into non-Indigenous families (p. 266).

Warrior movement A militant, nationalist movement among the Kanienkehaka, described as the defence arm of the Longhouse religion but not universally accepted as such. The Warrior movement was founded by Louis Hall in the early twentieth century but is opposed by some traditionalists, who point out that the teachings of Shanyadariyoh focus on peace, not warlike behaviour, and that the founder of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Dekanawidah (“the Peacemaker”), brought and taught peace to the Five Nations. The Warriors were principal actors during the Oka crisis and at Caledonia (p. 273).

White Paper (1969) A white paper, or parliamentary paper, is a document in which the government presents its policy or proposed policy on a specific topic. In the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, 1969, the Liberal government put forward its proposal to end Aboriginal treaty rights and special status (p. 270).

Study Questions

1. What is compulsory enfranchisement and how was this concept used by Indian Affairs?
2. Why did the Department of Indian Affairs put a stop to direct communication with individual First Nations people and what was the result?
3. How did residential schools fare in terms of educational attainment for the students?
4. What was the “Sixties Scoop” and what impact did it have on Indigenous families?
5. Why is Blue Quills important to the development of Indigenous education in Canada?
6. Who were “code talkers” and what purpose did they serve?
7. What is the relationship between the National Indian Brotherhood and the Assembly of First Nations?
8. What were the highlights of the Hawthorn Report and why did some Indigenous leaders see it in a favorable light?
9. What was the purpose of the 1969 White Paper?
10. How did Indigenous Peoples respond to the 1969 White Paper?
11. Who was Deskaheh and why did he approach the League of Nations on behalf of the Haudenosaunee?
12. What was Saint-Paul-des-Métis and why did it fail?
13. What was the Ewing Commission and what recommendations did it propose?
14. What level of self-government are the Métis of Alberta (from Métis settlements) able to practice?
15. What is the history of Bill C-31 and what was accomplished by First Nations women in relation to this legislation?
16. Who was Francis Pegahmagabow and why was he important?

Essay Questions

1. Briefly explain the different views held by the government and Indigenous people with regards to residential schools and their purpose.

In the eyes of the government, residential schools were aimed at “civilizing” First Peoples by forcing them to renounce their culture in favour of a Western education. Formal schooling was provided by boarding which also served to separate Indigenous children from their families. Residential schools were one of the most powerful assimilation tools used by the government. From the Aboriginal perspective, the schools resulted in stranding First Peoples between two cultures. As noted on page 265, John Tootosis, the head of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians in the late 1950s stated: “On one side are all the things he learned from his people and their way of life that was being wiped out, and on the other are the white man’s way which he could never fully understand since he never had the right amount of education and could not be part of it.”

2. What are some of the major recommendations made by the Hawthorn Report?

The Hawthorn Report was produced by anthropologist Harry B. Hawthorn and released in 1966. Among the 151 recommendations made by Hawthorn was that Indigenous people should not be forced to assimilate. He also stated that Indigenous people should have the opportunity to study in their own languages pointing out that school texts were not only inaccurate but even insulting. Hawthorn also suggested further revisions to the Indian Act (p. 270).

3. What strategies were used by the Haudenosaunee to gain more autonomy from the government?

The Haudenosaunee rejected the authority of the government and the provisions of the Indian Act from the outset. Hereditary chiefs advocated for self-government and exemption from the Indian Act as early as 1890 through a petition. Of particular concern to the chiefs was the government’s imposition of an electoral system that did not recognize traditional forms of government. Younger Christian supporters of the new system were called “Dehorner” and were challenged by traditionalists who followed the Longhouse religion. Later, the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations band, established a committee focused on lobbying for sovereignty to little avail. They even attempted to re-establish the alliances of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Despite their efforts to have their traditional governance structures and practices recognized, the government imposed an elective council in favour of the hereditary one (pp. 272-273). As a result of all this conflict, the band established its own independent police force called the Peacekeepers. However, some band members felt they did not take a strong enough stand and the Warrior movement was also formed; they became a powerful force for greater autonomy and their acts of resistance set the stage for the confrontation at Oka in 1990.

Additional Resources

Further Readings

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- <https://fcpp.org/2012/03/06/reinterpreting-indian-control-of-indian-education-accelerating-indigenous-educational-achievement-through-choice/>
- Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada – Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy (The White Paper, 1969)
- <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100010189/1100100010191>
- DWRG Press, The Canadian Aboriginal Issues Database – Alberta Métis Settlements
- <http://www.ualberta.ca/~walld/ab2next5.html>
- Native Women’s Association of Canada
- <https://www.nwac.ca/>
- The Canadian Encyclopedia – Sixties Scoop
- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sixties-scoop/>