

NATIVE PEOPLE AND THE SOCIALIST STATE: THE NATIVE POPULATIONS OF SIBERIA AND THEIR EXPERIENCE AS PART OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

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Abstract/Resume

This is a review of the recent history of the Indigenous people of Russia. The author speaks of their experiences under the Tsars, then under socialism in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and now under the new Russia.

On passe en revue l'histoire récente des Aborigènes de Russie. L'auteur parle de leurs expériences sous les tsars, puis sous le socialisme de l'Union des républiques socialistes soviétiques, et maintenant sous la nouvelle Russie.

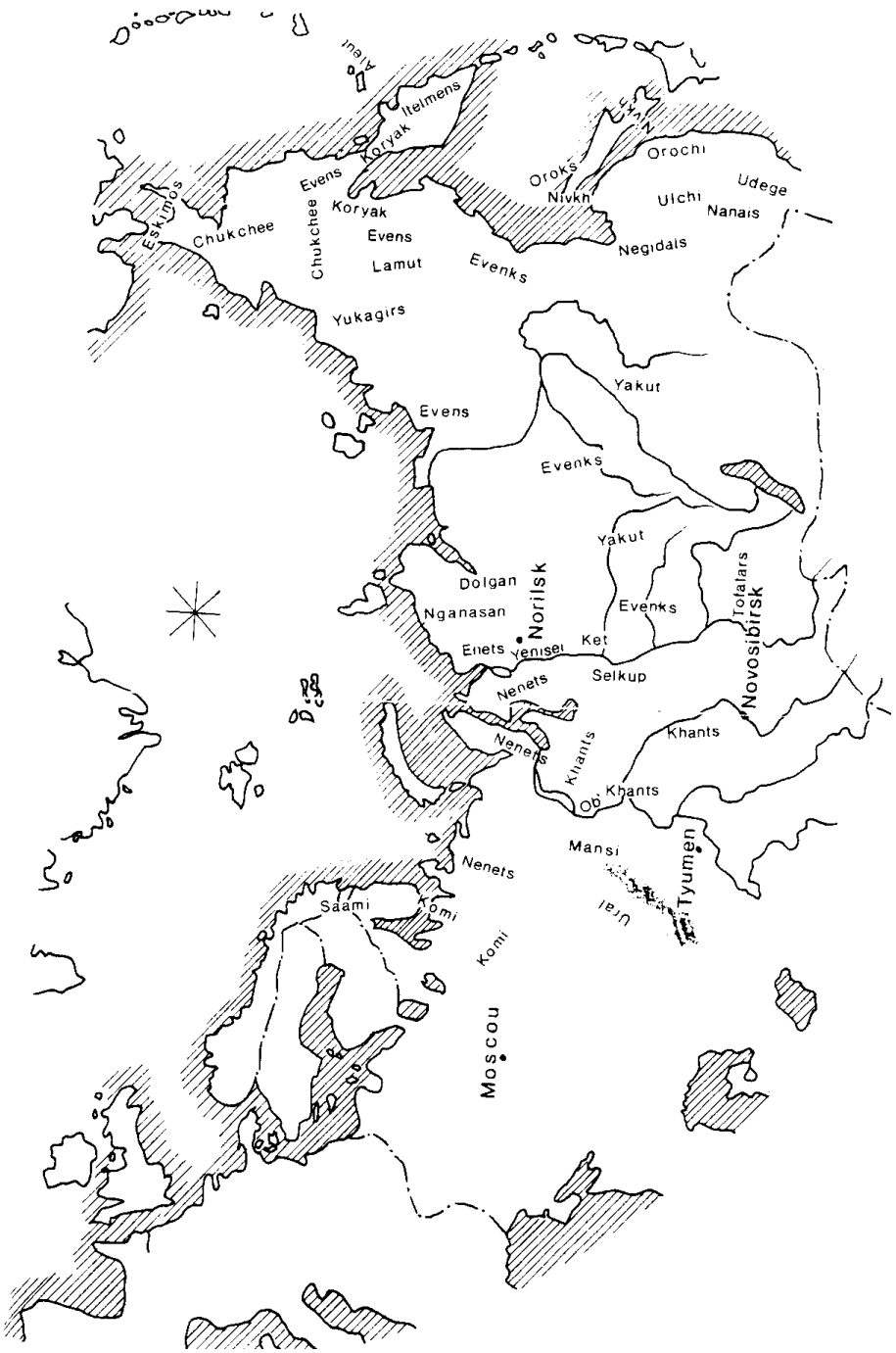
Indigenous peoples around the globe have experienced colonialism, assimilation, and paternalism, whether it be in capitalist or socialist systems. From Tsarist times to the present the Indigenous peoples (see Figure 1 for definition) of Siberia have had to face Europeanization. In the Soviet period, the Indigenous people experienced the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (Bartels, 1986:19). Simply put, they experienced the "dictatorship of industrial society" (Bartels, 1986:19). Soviet policy towards its Indigenous people was a type of benign paternalism that, over time, has grown into a tumour that now must be removed. Today, solutions based upon the intentions and mistakes of the past are being offered to try to stem some seventy years of cultural tampering, developmental policy, general mismanagement, and neglect. Similar to the other Indigenous populations of the world (such as those in Canada), the Small Peoples of the Soviet North or Siberia (i.e. Aleuts, Chukchee, Eskimos, Nganasans, see Map 1 for location of groups) demand a recognition of their rights, values, culture, and self-determination. The Small Peoples want control of their destiny. To them, the all powerful nation state is not a valid trustee. With the current trends in Soviet society, the Indigenous people may again be able to master their destiny within the Russian Republic and Soviet State. Soviet policy has fluctuated widely when it comes to governing the Small Peoples. Policies developed in the early years have digressed to such an extent that Indigenous society is characterized by stagnation and

The definition of Indigenous is subject to both variation and misunderstanding. The definition used in this paper is:

- [1] a word synonymous with the common usage in Canada of "Native" and "Aboriginal", as well as the Siberian term "Small Peoples."
- [2] Indigenous refers to a person born in a geographical area within which he or she can trace their ancestry. The land that the individual is from is commonly referred to as a homeland.
- [3] Indigenous refers to, in this case, a people living in a region prior to its discovery by Europeans.
- [4] Indigenous also refers to the original inhabitants of the and, region or geographical area.

Some of the Indigenous peoples of the Soviet north are the Aleuts, Buryat, Chukchee, Chuvans, Dolgans, Entsy, Eskimos, Evenks, Evens, Itelmens, Kets, Khants, Komi, Koryaks, Mansi, Nanaism, Negidals, Nenets, Nganasans, Nivikhi, Orochi, Oroks, Sammi, Selkups, Tofalars, Udege, Ulchl and the Yakuts.

Figure 1: The Indigenous Peoples of the Soviet North



Map 1: Small Peoples of the Soviet North.

Source: Map reproduced from *Indigenous Peoples of the Soviet North* IWGIA Document 67, Copyright Copenhagen, 1990 by International Work Group of Indigenous Affairs.

cultural loss (Programme of the Association of the Small Peoples of the North of the Soviet Union, 1990:53). This problem is serious enough to make some believe that the Small Peoples will become extinct if something is not done soon (Mihalisko, 1989b:4). Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, alike, are attempting to find solutions to halt this cultural annihilation.

The proximity along with a connection to Europe and China has opened the Indigenous inhabitants to the "civilizing" effects of more "highly developed" civilizations for a longer period than their Indigenous North American counterparts. The first European contact with the Indigenous people of Siberia was recorded in the 11th century (Lineton, 1978:88). The socialist state eventually confronted Indigenous peoples as did its predecessor, the Tsarist state. Complete control over western Siberia by Moscow was not achieved until the reign of Ivan the Terrible (Lineton, 1978:88). Conquered Indigenous groups were forced to pay a tribute to the Tsar's officials. However, the Chukchi and nomadic people were never totally defeated; thus for many years the Tsar had to give them more gifts than he received in tribute (Bartels, 1986:3). Wooden forts, manned by Cossacks, were established along important waterways, to be used as bases for fur traders and for military action against Indigenous groups.

Treatment of the Native population in Siberia by the Tsars was characterized by benign-paternalist neglect, tempered at times by forced Russification (Lineton, 1978:88-94; Cherkasov, 1982:66). Moscow decreed that the Natives were to be treated with respect, but corrupt local officials often ignored this. The Indigenous peoples were often viewed as inferior peoples by the Russian settlers and officials in the north. Complaints of mistreatment by officials were acted upon swiftly when and if they reached the court in Moscow. Unfortunately, this "respect" and "protection" from the court in Moscow did little to prevent the disastrous effects of continued contact. Regular fur trading connections, new diseases, and alcoholism were imported. Traditional economies were disrupted and destroyed, and game animals were depleted (Bartels, 1985:38). Eventually, this led to economic dependence upon the outsiders. Ever increasing numbers of Natives became little more than indentured servants, and labourers for the non-Native bourgeoisie (Lineton, 1978:91). The fur tax (tribute), which had been imposed since the conquest of Siberia, now caused extreme hardship as the numbers of fur bearing animals continued to decline, and fishing and hunting grounds were increasingly encroached upon by non-Natives. The ineffective protection of Native customs and traditions by the Tsars did little to stem the continued economic pressures (Lineton, 1978:92, 102).

Siberia was also used as dumping ground for political prisoners by the Tsarist State. This gave the Indigenous inhabitants ample opportunity to discover that not all non-Natives supported the Tsar and his policies. These exiles often came with valuable skills, (i.e. doctors) which gained

some exiles acceptance in the Indigenous communities. Later, after the October Revolution, these former exiles would use the knowledge of Native customs, traditions and way of life, to help their former hosts. Bogoraz, for example, was an exile among the Natives for several years and later a key member of the Committee of the North established in 1924 (Bartels, 1986:3-5).

After the 1917 Revolution civil war erupted. It was not until 1925 that the last of the "White" forces (pro-Tsar) were defeated in Siberia. Many Aboriginal people fought on the side of the Reds (the Revolutionary Forces). The war disrupted trade, depleted game stocks and reindeer herds. With the disruption of trade, the Natives were unable to obtain guns, ammunition, fish nets, hooks, traps, knives, and many other Western trade goods that they had become dependent upon (Bartels, 1986:6). Consequently, many Natives were on the edge of starvation. Thus the situation of the Siberian Indigenous people was worse than before the Revolution and Civil War (Bartels, 1985:38).

With the advent of the Soviet government, Natives were no longer officially viewed as inferiors, but as equals, at least in their suffering from the effects of capitalistic exploitation. The Committee of the North, established in 1924, took immediate steps to assist the Indigenous people (Bartels, 1986:7). Until 1934, it "was responsible for the economic development, conservation and management of the wildlife, establishment of political and legal institutions, trade, medical care, and education in Native regions" (Bartels, 1986:6). The Indigenous people were exempted from taxation, and conscription. The law also required that Native people, including Native women, sit on courts of the people (Bartels, 1986:12). "Culture bases" were also established. Cinemas, cooperatives, clinics, and libraries were located at the cultural base (Bartels, 1986:12). The Committee of the North, consisting of Marxists and non-Marxists, was a conglomeration of experts on Indigenous peoples (Bartels, 1986:7). In 1930 the Soviet Union established national/autonomous areas for Indigenous peoples and local tribal governments. These governments have lasted until the present, although their original Indigenous majority has been reduced to a minority. Actually, by the completion of the first five year plan, the Native people in most areas were in the minority (Kolarz, 1969:82).

Idealistically these "primitives" maintained elements of primitive communism and thus could skip stages in the communist development theory. It was believed that the Indigenous people could skip the intervening stages of feudalism and capitalism, and proceed directly to an advanced socialist society. Education, political organization, and modernization were seen as steps allowing Indigenous peoples to "catch up" to the more developed western areas (Bartels, 1986:9-11). Teachers, doctors, and technicians were sent out to assist the Small Peoples. Education was deemed to be of great importance, so free schools were

established, up to and including university. Alphabets were developed for the Small Peoples to assist in their education. In 1938, the Committee for the New Alphabet of the Peoples of the North was established to speed up the process of development (Gurvich and Taksami, 1986-1987:37). Even today, alphabets are being created for Indigenous groups, and scholars are simplifying old alphabets, (albeit at a much slower rate now that the revolutionary fervour has subsided). Unfortunately, there are not enough Native scholars to assist in the development of these alphabets. Besides being instructed in their own languages, the people were taught Russian in order to facilitate their entrance into the State economically and politically.

Like other peoples across the Soviet Union, the Indigenous people were subject to Stalinist state policies and campaigns. Native reindeer herders and herds, as well as all other areas of the traditional economy were collectivized. Later, to form larger cooperatives, reindeer herders, hunters, and fishermen were collectivized, forming larger organizations subject to state control. Collectivization destroyed centuries-old villages and communities without much thought to their social and psychological effects upon the people (Taksami, 1990:27). By the late 1960s, the collective farms were re-organized into state farms (Cherkasov, 1982:71).

In common with the people of other areas within the Soviet Union, such as the Ukraine, the Small Peoples opposed collectivization. This led to the process being slowed, and sometimes reversed, while the people were educated about the benefits that collectivization could bring (Bartels, 1986:14-15). Cadres flocked north, not only to liberate and politicize the population, but also to conduct anti-religious campaigns. The League of the Militant Godless confiscated symbols of worship, drove missionaries out, abused and arrested shamans, and attempted to educate the people about what was considered their folly (Kolarz, 1969:77). Shamans opposed Soviet policies and thus became the focus of attack by the Stalinist state. The Militant Godless claimed that shamans took advantage of ignorant, superstitious Natives and obstructed the betterment of Native people as a whole (Kolarz, 1969:75-77). Shamans were arrested and expelled from tribal territories (Kolarz, 1969:77) by authorities attempting to prove to superstitious Natives that the State was both more powerful than, and not afraid of, the shamans. The loss of the shamans weakened the ties of communities to the past, this further disrupting the traditional ways of life for many Indigenous peoples. Native people were even killed due to their "capitalistic opposition" to state policy. For example, the Buryat lost approximately ten thousand people and all their temples due to Stalin (Edwards, 1990:15-16).

Another state policy, following the lines of collectivization and still present, was that of settling the nomads. Nomadic existence was viewed by the Soviet state as backward and destined for extinction (Mihalisko, 1989b:4). The main reason for the continued existence of nomadism is

that the reindeer refused to settle where the state ordered. The sedentarism forced upon the reindeer, combined with the killings by herders (to prevent the state from collectivizing the herds), led to a significant decline in the number of animals. In addition, ecological damage, such as oil and chemical pollution, continues to reduce the number of reindeer.

Since the 1934 disbanding of the Committee of the North, nothing has gone right for the Indigenous people of the Soviet North (Mihalisko, 1989b:6). In 1935, power over Northern Affairs was assumed by the Chief Administration of the Northern Sea Route (CANSR) or a local government. Three years later, a decree from the Council of Peoples Commissars ordered CANSR to relinquish power over all enterprises and institutions that were not directly connected with the development of a northern sea route (Kolarz, 1969:67). From 1938 to the present, the state has controlled all aspects of northern development and maintenance.

World War Two interrupted the progress of the Indigenous people. Many Indigenous students, teachers, and members of the intelligentsia joined the Red Army and their loss further slowed development in the post war years (Bartels, 1985:40). The Cold War also affected Indigenous people. Young Native intellectuals were taught that the United States and the West were their enemies and sought to enslave them. Groups that lived along the coast of Siberia were forcibly resettled away from the coast, cutting off contacts with relatives and friends living in Alaska and Canada (Garrett, 1988:507). The NKVD-MVD, and later the KGB, enlisted the services of the Indigenous people to return escaped prisoners to the Gulags (Kolarz, 1969:70). Finally in the 1950s, atomic testing was carried out in the north, disregarding Indigenous protest (Pika and Prokhorov, 1988:76-83).

The only Indigenous group that seemed to benefit from the Cold War was the Aleuts. In 1932, an Aleutian National District was established, although it was largely ignored until 1949. At the beginning of the Cold War, however, Soviet authorities developed the District and provided benefits to the Aleuts in order to show their brethren living in the United States how good life was in the Soviet Union. Few other Indigenous groups received such lavish treatment, however (Kolarz, 1969:85-86).

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Indigenous people of the Soviet North had similar experiences to those of other people across the entire Soviet Union. It was only after the Second World War that their condition relative to other groups began to deteriorate, in large part due to state economic policy. Another contributing factor that increasingly led to the marginalization of the Indigenous people was massive immigration with the stagnation of the Soviet economy.

The young revolutionary Soviet state promised to end the use of force against Indigenous people, and to end exploitation, and promised future economic development and the establishment of equal rights in language

and culture (Lineton, 1982:95). Three of the four promises have been broken. Where does this "trail of broken promises" leave the Indigenous inhabitants of the North? Industrialization in the Soviet North has been occurring at an advanced rate since the 1930s. In the ever continuing search for hard currency, the Soviet State has been increasing the development and exploitation of oil and gas fields. To accomplish state-planned economic targets, people with a "narrow-minded business attitude" (Kolarz, 1969:69) were retained. The most important detail to these individuals was the fulfilment of the current five year plan, not the interests or needs of the Native people (or anyone else living in the region). When the Indigenous inhabitants got in the way, they were simply pushed aside and their lands appropriated for development.

The Constitution of the Soviet Union, at the All-Union level, guaranteed that all national districts were represented by a deputy in the Soviet of Nationalities (Cherkasov, 1982:67; Vdovin, 1973:43). This, in effect, placed the representatives of the Small Peoples in a position to represent and defend the Small Peoples in national debates (Cherkasov, 1982:67). Unfortunately, prior to Gorbachev's freeing of society, the legitimacy of the representatives was suspect and their representation questionable. Now that the central command system is deteriorating, the representatives are free to vote as they choose. In addition, as a result of free, competitive elections, the representatives are now able to more effectively represent their people. There is a proposed constitutional amendment that would give the power of veto to Indigenous members in the Soviet of Nationalities over policies that are detrimental to the existence of Indigenous groups. If enacted, the Indigenous representatives could effectively safeguard the Indigenous interests. However, with the Soviet Union collapsing and the Russian Republic growing in strength, the assertion of power by the representatives of the Small Peoples at the All-Union level is weak.

The bureaucratic command system, once prevalent in the Soviet Union, had detrimental effects in the Soviet North. Settlement areas were wiped out by bureaucrats and the inhabitants of the now defunct areas were resettled "by persuasion or by force" (Mihalisko, 1989b:4). This policy destroyed many of the traditional communities of the Small Peoples, and by concentrating them in larger areas further subjected them to dominance by the bureaucratic system. Appointments to positions in the North were viewed as undesirable, so that transfers or appointments to the North were often made to punish an individual (Kolarz, 1969:68). One qualification necessary for appointment to the North was adherence to the Party and the command system (Taksami, 1990:27). Not considered to be qualifications were the origins of the individuals appointed, or any understanding of the customs, traditions, and values of the Small Peoples whose affairs the individual was to administer. These appointments applied from the collective or state farm level on up. Orders and

appointments from above and by outsiders to the Native communities destroyed traditional economies, and robbed the Small Peoples of the right to self-government and self-administration (Taksami, 1990:25). A direct result of state policies and the theft of self-determination, is that few Natives are found in command positions today among state farms and in industry (Taksami, 1990:27). These non-Native managers and bureaucrats seem to be concerned solely with the fulfilment of the current five year plan; they appear to be unconcerned with the effects which their policies of exploitation have upon either the ecology or the inhabitants of the region.

Economic development has meant the loss of livelihood for many Native people, the depletion of reindeer herds and pastures, and the pollution of lakes and rivers, as well as a loss of fishing grounds and a decline in the numbers of fish and game stocks available for harvest by Indigenous people. Many of the best hunting and fishing grounds have even been turned over to people who are attempting only to "get rich quick" in practices which further harm both the environment and Native people (Taksami, 1990:28). Many of the cities in Siberia are among the most polluted in the Soviet Union, or indeed the world (Edwards, 1990:20). Oil and gas spills, research, and development have polluted the environment. For example, rivers and lakes are extremely polluted in the Ob basin and the Yamal peninsula (Dahl, 1990:12). The Nentsy around the city of Yambrug call the city "messy place" because of the ecological devastation there (Edwards, 1990:36). Further unchecked industrialization of the Soviet North threatens the ecology of the region and thereby the Indigenous peoples of the area (Dahl, 1990:12).

Furthermore, the profits or benefits from the exploitation of the resources are not seen by inhabitants of the Soviet North. The Yakut Autonomous Republic, within the Russian Republic, is rich in resources but little of the profit returns to the region (Edwards, 1990:32). Most of the income generated remains west of the Urals, while the small amount that manages to make its way to the East is swallowed by the immigrants.

Immigration to the Soviet North has made the Indigenous peoples minorities within their homelands. Originally, in the "national areas" established during the 1930s, the Small Peoples had control of the Soviets and administration. Today, they are outnumbered by recent immigrants at all levels of local government. In short, the various Small Peoples have lost control of the homelands and thus, their ability to self-govern. In theory, this loss of the ability to self-govern theoretically should not be either politically or economically threatening to them. Each national area has the constitutional obligation to protect the interests of the Natives (Pika and Prokhorov, 1988:3). Unfortunately, few immigrants have the best interests of the original inhabitants at heart; most are more interested in taking advantage of the higher wages available in Siberia than in the survival of a way of life that has existed for centuries.

The rapid industrialization of the North, without consultation with the Native peoples, has had disastrous effects upon the Natives themselves. Living standards for Native people in the north are the lowest in the entire Soviet Union (Mihalisko, 1989b:3; Dahl, 1990:16). The life span of the average Indigenous inhabitant is shorter than that of the residents of most third world countries. The average life expectancy for Native men is only forty-five, while for women it is fifty-five years of age (Mihalisko, 1989b:5). In fact it is some sixteen to eighteen years below that of the Soviet national average (Schindler, 1990:14). The International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs report on the Indigenous peoples of the Soviet north suggests a life span of some ten to sixteen years below the national average (Taksami, 1990:29). Clearly a significant difference in life span exists between European Soviets and the Indigenous peoples of the north. Suicide rates (at 34 times the all Union average [Mihalisko, 1989b:5]), aggressiveness, and alcoholism are all on the rise, implying that Native individuals and societies have lost their ability to deal with rapidly changing social and economic circumstances (Mihalisko, 1989b:5).

The most severely affected group within Indigenous societies are the young. Those who are educated can find little or no employment in their fields of study. Managers of industry prefer to hire non-Native applicants over Native applicants. The reason for this is that non-Native persons are more likely to be indifferent towards the destruction of pastures or rivers, while Native persons are likely to resist such activity. As well, young Native people are reluctant to take up traditional occupations because those fields of employment are seen to be economically backward and carry little prestige (Pika and Prokhorov, 1988:7). Even those Natives who are employed in non-traditional jobs must cope with manual labour and poor paying, low-status jobs (Pika and Prokhorov, 1988:7). Common among the young as well is a preference for modern comforts over the life of a nomad. All these factors combined lead to a high level of dissatisfaction and cynicism among the younger generation (Bartels, 1986:17) as well as a high unemployment rate.

With the advent of *glasnost* and the ecological debate in the Soviet Union, developers must now take into consideration Native inhabitants and their wishes. Before this, Native protests were simply ignored for the "betterment of the state." The ecological threat has brought many non-Natives into alliance with Native groups against the developers (Dahl, 1989:219). But will the non-Native majority always support the interests of the Native minority? *Glasnost* has also exposed to the world the consequences of Russian and Soviet colonialism, the disregard and neglect of the rights of Indigenous peoples (Dahl, 1990:12).

Moscow now at least listens to the complaints of the Indigenous inhabitants. The new openness has allowed the Indigenous peoples to take advantage of fora of expression, formerly closed to them, in their drive for survival (Mihalisko, 1989b:6). Criticism of Soviet policy and conditions

amongst the Indigenous people in the Soviet north is on the rise in the media. The question of political representation has been raised by Indigenous peoples in these fora as well. The Small Peoples are protesting development, are forming local, regional and national associations, and are beginning to operate on the international level to propose solutions to their problems. In response to the threat that exploitation and exploration pose, the Indigenous inhabitants protest regularly, sometimes using confrontational tactics. The Nenets of the Yamal Peninsula, for instance, protested the development of gas deposits, fearing that such development would destroy their way of life. The Khants physically blocked a section of the Ob to save spawning grounds from a gravel digging operation. In support of the Khants, the local Soviet ordered the digging stopped (Dahl, 1989:227). A proposed large scale hydro-electric project on the Nizhnyaya Tungusha River in the Evenk Autonomous Area was effectively blocked by the combined action of the local Soviet and the Evenk people (Dahl, 1989:219-220). Protests by the intelligentsia and the Indigenous population of the Yamal Peninsula forced Moscow to place a one year moratorium on further resource development in 1989 (Dahl, 1989:222). The groups involved here demanded to be consulted in the future about the development of their lands. Protests about the destruction of their homelands and calls for local autonomy and self-determination continue to this day. As the Indigenous people gain more confidence and support, both inside and outside of the Soviet Union, the protests will only grow louder. The time when people accepted decisions from above has passed. The state planners must now take Native interests into consideration or expect protest from the local inhabitants (Dahl, 1989:219, 220).

Seeing the beneficial nature of mutual support, the various Indigenous groups have formed political interest organizations determined to support and defend the interests of Native peoples. In 1989 the Saami of the Kola Peninsula formed a new Saami organization which claimed to represent approximately twenty-five thousand people. The name of this new organization-Arun-reflects the founders' desire to survive, as literally translated it means "revival" (Dahl, 1989:228). The goal of Arun is to protect the Saami culture and way of life, and to assure its continued survival. A second example of local action is in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region, where the people formed an association called "Saving Yugra." This was done in response to the Tyumen oil extraction zone located within the Region. The head of the organization, Tatyana Gogoleva, has suggested creating vast preserves for Indigenous economic activity, with current industrialization in these areas reduced or stopped altogether (Dahl, 1989:228).

At the All-Union level, the various Small Peoples of the Soviet North came together to form *The Association of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North (ASPSN)* in March of 1989 (Dahl, 1990:5). The first public call for such an organization was suggested by Vladimir Sangi at the meeting of

the *Writers Association of Russia* in 1988 (Dahl, 1990:12). This is the first national association of the Indigenous peoples of the Soviet north. The ASPSN is a political organization charged with the defence of Indigenous interests. A unified stance seems to be to the advantage of the Indigenous peoples. The founding meeting that occurred in the Kremlin was a victory for the Indigenous people, for it signalled government recognition of the ASPSN (Indigenous Peoples of the Soviet North: Document 67 IWGIA 1990: 19, 21, 53; Statutes of the Congress of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North, 1990c:47). Membership in the ASPSN is open to all Indigenous people from the Soviet north. Immigrants and non-Natives are allowed to join the ASPSN if they have resided in the north for generations or are interested in preserving the north and the Indigenous people living there (Declaration of the Congress of the Small Peoples of the North 1990a:46). The ASPSN has three main tasks:

- 1) to defend and implement sovereign rights and interests of the people of the North on all administration levels
- 2) to preserve and promote cultural distinctiveness
- 3) to establish and expand international relationships with peoples of other countries (Taksami, 1990:43).

Complementing these tasks are many goals, including the right to self-determination, self-government, and the retention of Indigenous ways, culture, and values. Other aspirations include ecological preservation, constitutional status, improvement and upgrading, defining land boundaries specific to Indigenous use only, and the review and submission of legislation concerning them (Programme of the Association of the Small Peoples of the North of the Soviet Union, 1990b:55-56; Statutes of the Congress of the Small Peoples of the Soviet North, 1990c:47; Dahl 1990:16). ASPSN wants to cooperate with society at large to achieve its goals. The most important goal is to work in conjunction with all levels of government in order to ensure that their interests are represented, and that they will not have to suffer the tyranny of the majority. ASPSN also wishes to work with other organizations (such as the environmentalist movement) and to work at the international level. However, ASPSN is unfortunate in lacking a firm charter and final programme. More importantly, the political profile of the organization has yet to be agreed upon (Dahl, 1990:21). Yet, ASPSN is an exceptional start for a people who were allowed no voice for many years. The will to challenge and to talk has returned to the Small People.

Prior to the formation of ASPSN, Indigenous groups from the Soviet North had been politically active on the international scene. The Indigenous people of the Soviet North, both as a whole and individually, hope to cooperate with other Indigenous peoples around the globe (Dahl, 1989:228). In 1988, the Siberian Yupik-speaking Eskimos visited their

relatives in Alaska, the first official trip by this group since the United States and the Soviet Union closed their mutual border in 1948. The Soviet Eskimos and the Chukchi also attended the Inuit Circumpolar Conference in Greenland in the summer of 1989 (Dahl, 1989:228-9; Reese, 1989:15). This delegation had observer status at the meeting since they had not applied for membership in the organization. Similarly, the Saami people of the Soviet Union are seeking contacts with other Saami. At the request of the Saami living within Soviet borders, delegates from the Nordic Saami Council visited the Kola Peninsula in the Soviet Union (Dahl, 1989:229).

The Soviet Yupik Eskimos, Chukchi, and Saami recognize that they are suffering from an affliction similar to that of their western relatives—the nation state. The Soviet delegations are concerned with the problems of industrialization, pollution, and the preservation of culture and traditions. Now they hope to be able to exchange ideas about coping with such problems with other groups outside of the Soviet Union (Reese, 1989:15). Some believe that the Small Peoples of the Soviet North are facing extinction if immediate steps are not taken (Mihalisko, 1989b:4). What these steps should be remains contentious. Following in the trend of reform, the *Central Committee of the Communist Party* had established a sub-committee to examine the problems and to propose solutions for the Small Peoples of the Soviet North prior to the dissolution of the Party. Suggestions for solving the problems of the Small Peoples come from various sources, ranging from the Small Peoples themselves to the intelligentsia. The *Committee for Northern Affairs* has proposed several solutions based upon suggestions from various parties (Mihalisko, 1989b:6). One of the proposed solutions is the creation of "special restricted economic activity zones," which is a type of Reservation system. Any change that is made in state policy towards Indigenous people, however, needs to be determined by the people themselves, not by the greater Soviet state or the Russian Republic. The Natives must determine how much of the past they want restored (Taksami, 1990:32).

Reforms to housing conditions and medical care must be enacted first (Declaration of the Congress of the Small Peoples of the North, 1990a:46; Taksami, 1990:32). A revival of feasts, celebrations, and old songs is needed, as well as the creation of cultural centres and museums. The right to hunt, fish, and trap year round for subsistence must be restored, in addition to creating some type of allowance system, but not welfare (Taksami, 1990:32, 33, 34, 36).

Next, the entire education system for Indigenous people must be revamped, starting with a basic curriculum for Indigenous students (Hannigan, 1986:16). Education must be changed to be compatible with the culture and traditions of the people, and must be taught in their own languages. Only through educating the young will the preservation of language and culture occur. Thus, there is a need for more and better textbooks in the various Native languages. As not all of the Indigenous

groups have written languages, the development of alphabets for these people is necessary. Teachers trained in the languages of the people are also needed, for only through education in the Native tongue will these languages be preserved.

To ensure an Indigenous education, the current system of boarding schools for children must be abolished. The boarding schools instill Native children with non-Indigenous values, robbing them of the ability to survive upon the tundra (Taksami, 1990:35-36). In other words, the White man's education they receive robs them of the ability to work in traditional areas, as they have not learned to see such occupations as advantageous. The boarding school system needs to be replaced by a system based upon the nomadic lifestyle. Two suggestions are developing, roaming schools that follow the nomads, or centering the school year around the migration cycle of the reindeer. The need for higher education for Indigenous people is great as well. ASPSN is calling for the re-establishment of the University of the Peoples of the North in Leningrad (Declaration of the Congress of the Small Peoples of the North, 1990:45). Development of higher institutes of learning for Indigenous people is a must. These institutions would be open to all Soviet citizens, with preference given to Indigenous students. Moreover, young Natives are needed to work in the traditional sector, but there is a lack of adequate training available (Taksami, 1990:3840). With the establishment of Native curricula in schools, this problem would be eliminated. Furthermore, these institutions would graduate people conscious of Indigenous values, cultures and peoples, and be concerned with the effects of development upon the people and the environment of the North.

Another area of great concern is the development of the resources of the North. The Indigenous people are not against the development of the North; they only want development if it will not harm the northern environment or themselves. In other words, they want destructive resource development stopped (Dahl, 1989:227; 1990:14). The Natives want to see some of the profits derived from the exploitation of the resources returned to their communities. Before development and exploitation of a resource has begun, the Native people feel that the protection of their way of life should be guaranteed (Dahl, 1989:227). In addition, some Natives, the intelligentsia, and government officials would like to see the establishment of special economic-environmental zones where the Natives would be in complete control of the land.

Indigenous people would also like to see the demise of the large collective and state farms, with control of the land being returned to the People. These huge corporations are against traditional Native values, because they operate on a profit and exploitationist perspective (Taksami, 1990:32). The restoration of the small family unit is seen as a solution which would reduce unemployment and other associated ailments, such as alcoholism.

At the local Soviet governmental level, Native people are requesting a bicameral style of government. Natives would hold power in the second or upper house; hence, any policies that are determined to be detrimental to their society could be vetoed. Other suggestions include the reestablishment of village councils, having national areas where Natives are in the majority, and creating other types of self-determination, such as clans, tribal governments, and councils of elders (Declaration of the Congress of the Small Peoples of the North, 1990:45). If enacted, the specific functions of such bodies would need to be defined, as well as determining the status of autonomous areas, ethnic areas, villages, and Soviets (Taksami, 1990:30). Finally, local government bodies must have the final word in conflicts with the larger state over development policy (Bartels, 1986:19). Some examples of self-government cited by the Small Peoples include Greenlandic Home Rule, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and the Canadian Nunavut proposal (Dahl, 1990:19). A further recommendation is the creation of a two-chamber Soviet at the level of the Russian Republic. The second chamber, similar to that of the All Union level, would have representation from the various autonomous areas (Dahl, 1989:227; 1990:18). This reform would also be extended to include the Soviets of the autonomous areas.

The Indigenous people would like the Supreme Council of the Russian Republic to form new autonomous areas, national regions and village settlement councils, and to extend the rights of local Councils of Deputies. Indigenous people are also seeking the guaranteed representation of Native people in all areas and levels of government. The Supreme Council has also been requested to form committees in areas of mixed population to take care of inter-ethnic relations. These committees would also have the right to veto decisions which are in opposition to the Indigenous interest (Taksami, 1990:BI).

Internationally, ASPSN wants the Soviet Union and the Russian Republic to ratify international treaties concerning human and Indigenous rights. Two examples include the newly revised and adopted ILO Convention 169 (107), and the "Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries" (Dahl, 1990:19-21). In the view of Soviet Natives, these treaties would strengthen their land claims, and their demand for the return of lands (Dahl, 1990:19-21).

The most important and controversial proposed reform/solution is the creation of "reserves," or *rezervatsii*. The term "reserve" refers to much more than the North American Indian policy of Reserves. The word *rezervatsii*, translated directly from the Latin word "reservation," becomes *sokhranenie* in Russian, or "preservation" in English (Mihalisko, 1989a:31). When the idea was brought forward in the 1920s by Vladimir Germanovich Bogoraz, it was rejected by the Bolsheviks. It still is believed by some that Reserves would only serve to isolate the Indigenous people and make it easier to exploit them (Kolarz, 1969:66). Supporters of the

idea believe it will preserve the Indigenous people. Bogoraz believed that Reserves would protect the Aboriginal groups, whom he referred to as primitive tribes, from the influence of Russian civilization, preserve a land base for the Natives, and prevent them from becoming extinct (Schindler, 1990:15-16). The conception of the idea rests on the premise that with the continued development and destruction of the northern ecology, soon there will not be room for traditional occupations. It is also seen as a solution by Indigenous people to maintain their culture and homeland. In short, they could not be removed from their homelands if they controlled the land, hence, avoiding many of the social consequences of such actions (Schindler, 1990:15-16). The "reserves" would actually be "zones of priority land use" or "preserves" (Taksami, 1990:33). In other words, Indigenous use of the land would have priority over industrial development and exploitation: Aboriginal people would have direct control over the administration of the land. Therefore, the preserves would help stop further exploitation of the Indigenous people by the ministries. These preserves would be created by combining all undamaged lands. Thus, the Natives could live "free of industrial enterprises and lines of communication" (Aipin, 1989:7) if they wished. The Commission for Arctic Affairs has recommended that a legal basis be established so the zones can be created. It has yet to be debated or approved by the Supreme Soviet or the Russian Republic. These zones will only work if they are not overrun with problems similar to those faced by their North American precursors (Mihalisko, 1989a:34).

The most significant benefit if the *rezervatsii* were established would be self-government for the people living there. Indigenous people would have the final say concerning the utilization of their lands. Thus they would be able to demand compensation from industry practicing non-traditional resource exploitation and would share in the profits derived from their lands (Taksami, 1990:33). They would also administer all functions that a self-governing people would expect to maintain, such as education, local government, and social services. Many problems would be solved. *Rezervatsii* would help the Indigenous people preserve their language, culture and traditions. Unemployment, suicide, violence, and alcoholism rates would all decrease, and, as a result, mental health would improve as well. Individual pride would, in effect, be restored (Aipin, 1989:7).

Over the past decade, attempts have been made by various ministries or government bodies to resolve the problems of the Small Peoples. Attempts have been made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Council of Ministers (USSR), the government of the Russian Republic, forty-two Union and thirty-six Republican Ministries, and local authorities (Taksami, 1990:29). Out of all of this activity, nothing has been accomplished. Over 31 billion rubles have been allocated to the needs of the Indigenous people; the money, however, never made it to them. Instead it was spent on administrative buildings, industrial

settlements and in the towns where the administration centres are located (Taksami, 1990:29; 33; 34). Recently, land reform and compensation laws have been passed. In the area of land reform, life-long leases have given local authorities greater control over land and resources. The process needs to be accelerated in order to grant control of mineral exploitation and wildlife management to the Indigenous people and to local authorities (Anderson, 1991:20). A movement to municipalize joint state property is also under way (Anderson, 1991:20).

In 1989 a law was passed concerning the expropriation of land. The law has three basic components:

- 1) all people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, living on the land own it;
- 2) before the land can be expropriated there must be a referendum to approve the expropriation; and
- 3) compensation must be paid to the claimant in the case of indirect loss of land (Dahl, 1989:225; Taksami, 1990:33).

The first two components of the law have been generally accepted as good measures, but the idea of compensation is suspect. First, the Indigenous people do not want straight material compensation. They want legislation which does not "give" them something, but which recognizes them as self-governing and provides laws protecting their cultures and ways of life (Dahl, 1990:18). Second, the lack of clarity specifying to whom the compensation is to go: the Natives, or the immigrant controlled governments. There are also questions concerning how the money will be spent and the possible future of these landless Indigenous people (Dahl, 1990:17-18). It has been suggested that the compensation be used for conservation schemes and to establish a foundation for the development of Indigenous self-government (Taksami, 1990:34). Finally, the law is seen as a possible way for industry and the ministries to circumvent the law. The ministries and industry can (and do) promise "x" number of rubles if the people allow the land to be expropriated. Because Indigenous people are now only minorities, they have little say and can lose their homes without any cash compensation. Often the industries involved with the current confusion being caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union simply ignore the law (Dahl, 1989:224).

Indications of future trouble are easily found. The Yamal Nentsy claim is just one of numerous indicators of a troubled future. The government has promised them all kinds of "goodies" from roads to schools, but has yet to deliver (Edwards, 1990:39). Separate from the Yamal claim is the 1989 promise by the Soviet government to pay out a total of five hundred million rubles in compensation, which has yet to be paid because of the question as to who is to receive the cash (Dahl, 1989:226).

Due to the policy of openness instituted by Gorbachev, Indigenous people are highly optimistic. Many believe that the future depends "on the future of *perestroika*. If *perestroika* continues, ...[the Indigenous] people will survive" (Aipin, 1989:7). As long as society continues to remain open, the plight of the Small Peoples of the North will continue to be expressed in the printed media, the demand for reform will go on, and the tumour will eventually be removed. With the will to survive, optimism, and *perestroika*, the plight of the Indigenous people will continue to catch the eye of the media and aid in the resolution of many problems.

The Soviet Union is listening to and hearing the demands of the Small Peoples; in contrast, the Canadian government continues to talk to the First Nations but yet does not hear what is said. Since they will not listen to the First Nations themselves, the various Canadian governments would do well to look to the Soviet Union for possible original ideas on how to solve the "Indian Problem." Similarly, the First Nations of Canada could look at the ASPSN for original ideas, especially in the area of the unity of all Aboriginal people for the betterment of the whole. In Canada, the movement is fragmented and disorganized. However, disunity still could strike the ASPSN as the disintegration of the Soviet State continues and more so with the possible breakup of the Russian Republic.

Demands and claims by the Indigenous peoples in both countries are the same. Indigenous people simply wish to determine their own destiny without interference. They wish to see the final demise of imperialism. Self-government is a right of all people; the Indigenous peoples are simply attempting to assert their inherent right. Land claims may differ in the sense that First Nations in Canada have treaties with the Crown, whereas the Small Peoples of the Soviet north have none. Both groups want to reclaim lands lost, receive compensation for these lands, and stop further appropriation by non-Indigenous people. In Canada, First Nations have fared better in that they have land bases, albeit limited ones. These Reserves, while isolating the people from much of Canadian society, have helped the people preserve their language, customs, traditions, and links to the past. Unfortunately, Reserves have also created immense social disruption and deterioration.

Public education is mandatory in both Canada and the Soviet Union. Despite this, "non-first peoples" in both countries believe that the Natives are thriving on welfare and other government programmes. This view is highly erroneous. It can only be corrected with time and education.

The Soviet Union and the Small Peoples can learn from the mistakes of Canada and aspire to greater goals. In the current wave of reform, and past Soviet tolerance of minorities and nationalities, the Small Peoples will surpass the First Nations. In Canada, reform is usually carried out at the expense of the First Nations and other groups, a practice which appears likely to continue. Hopefully reform in the Soviet Union will not be carried out at the expense of the Indigenous inhabitants of Siberia. Nevertheless,

the Bolsheviks were correct in their assumption that Indigenous peoples the world over suffered from imperialism. However, instead of eliminating imperialism they merely continued it under the guise of Soviet reform. The reforms only created greater problems for the Small Peoples of the Soviet north. Today the Small Peoples, and Aboriginal people the world over, are taking steps to change the process of "civilization" (Dahl, 1990:12).

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