

SOCIAL WELFARE AND NORTH AMERICAN FIRST NATIONS: A SOCIALIST POLITICAL ECONOMY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract / Résumé

The idealization that dissimilar people, when viewed as subordinate or inferior, can live together harmoniously has been dispelled through experience. In particular, the history of relations between North American First Nations and the governments of the United States and Canada have been fraught with conflict. Using a socialist political economy perspective, conflict is viewed as an integral strategy used by First Nations to make sociopolitical gains and to cope with adversity.

L'image idéalisée que l'on se fait que deux personnes dissemblables, une fois perçues comme étant subordonnées ou même inférieures, peuvent vivre en toute harmonie est contredite par les faits. Nous constatons en particulier que l'histoire des relations entre les Premières Nations nord-américaines et les gouvernements des Etats-Unis et du Canada est riche en conflits. Suivant une perspective politique socialiste, le conflit est envisagé comme une part intégrante par les Premières Nations d'un moyen servant à l'obtention de gains sociopolitiques et à faire face à l'adversité.

North America First Nations have engaged in a centuries long struggle with American and Canadian authorities in a bid to maintain their sociocultural identity and freedom. Integral in this endeavor are treaty guarantees, held by Native people to be a means of protecting their way of life. Unfortunately, these negotiated safeguards have failed to fully insulate North American First Nations from the influences of an oppressive state. Instead, Native people have become increasingly reliant upon government sponsored services and programs (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). This dependency, foisted on North American First Nations by the state, has been derived from a mixture of sympathies for those considered less fortunate, and fears about those perceived to be a threat to public safety and national security. In turn, this has led to the creation of a multiplicity of corrective social welfare and social control measures. However, these measures have proven unsuccessful in either generating Native autonomy, or engendering social compliance.

This article proposes a socialist political economy theory perspective for viewing how the social welfare transfer systems set up for Native people by American and Canadian governments have adversely affected the struggle of North American First Nations for self-determination. This approach identifies the dynamics of the relationship between Native people and the respective governments. Examples of conflict between North American First Nations and the state are presented to illuminate the applicability of this theory to current social welfare policy in the United States and Canada.

Historical Approaches to Social Welfare

Industrialization and peace with its neighbors during the latter part of the 19th century led American and Canadian governments to redefine their relationships with North American First Nations. The critical element in these changes was the reinterpretation of relations from exchange to transfer (Lacy, 1982; Sider, 1987). This was founded on the governments' desire to expand the concept of nationhood through territorial annexation, and was rationalized by the belief that non-Natives could better utilize the lands and the resources they contained. By opening up previously designated "Indian lands" for non-Native settlement a surplus of available property was accumulated for capitalist gain. Thus the need to control the lives and livelihood of Native people became an imperative. To accomplish this, the government imposed social welfare and social control measures which favored economic growth and political stability over Native self-determination and well-being.

Distilled into a series of assumptive approaches, relations between North American First Nations and the state were marked by a succession of value-laden and belief-based socioeconomic policies aimed at co-optation and assimilation. These approaches included: 1) "Savage Taming"; 2) Mutual Benefit; 3) State Wards; and 4) Assimilation. However, a final approach, 5) Self-Determination, reflects a Native-generated response to the dominant majority's insensitive sociopolitical agenda and practices.

1. Savage Taming

Throughout the past two centuries, North American First Nations have been viewed as a potential threat. Both the United States and Canadian governments considered Native culture "inferior, savage and hopelessly out of step with the rest of society" (Nichols, 1989:259). Sider (1987) points out that an initial and continuing view saw Native people as savages who could best be helped by being "tamed." This view amply served the purpose of dispossessing and exploiting Native people. It also provided a mechanism for interpreting North American First Nations through a Euro-centric cultural filter. In particular, the assumption of superiority provided the foundation for policies based on beliefs that Native people were incapable of self-determination or full participation in the larger society (Warburton, 1997).

As an example of "savage taming," Christian missionaries, bent on converting unbelievers, determined that North American Indian culture and religion was without value, and prevented their acceptance by and full participation in the larger society. In response, missionaries proposed that Native people should receive Christian education, which would lead to the adoption of Western-based values, and ultimately, assimilation into the social mainstream (Sider, 1987).

2. Mutual Benefit

During times when trading and military campaigns necessitated collaboration, a reciprocal mutually beneficial exchange relationship arose wherein Native people were helped, but also were helpers. This arrangement contributed to the definition of North American Indian Tribes and Bands as sovereign nations, and was enshrined in treaties (Deloria, 1969; Lacy, 1982; Tyler, 1973). From the state's perspective, treaties were essential mechanisms for national expansion negotiated during periods when government policy was aimed at controlling the "Indian problem" by whatever means necessary including; isolation, relocation, and extermination. Despite these policies, North American First Nations endured, and remained distinct in language, art, religion, and culture, much of which is attributable to treaty guarantees which effectively insulated Native people

from cultural imperialism (Deloria and Lytle, 1984; Yates, 1987). In addition, treaties have provided a historic basis for legal claims against the government for redress (Williams, 1990; Deloria, 1979; Smith, 1984).

3. State Wards

The late 19th century saw the beginning of a conscious social policy directed toward Native people. In Canada, the British North America Act placed Native people in a dependent status by making them wards of the state, and placing their lands in trust. Sequestered to Reserves, Native self-governance was abolished and health, education, and social services were placed under federal control (Mawhiney, 1995). Likewise, in the United States, North American First Nations were, for the most part, forcibly removed from their homelands and placed on Reservations as the demand for land by European settlers transformed the previous trading-partner relationship. Denied enfranchisement and isolated on Reserves and Reservations, Native people were socially and culturally detached from the social mainstream and its institutions. In Canada, few people criticized government attempts to control Native people. Whereas, in the United States repeated wars and unpopular policies brought attention to the plight of North American First Nations by concerned religious groups and social activists (Nichols, 1989).

4. Assimilation

In both the United States and Canada, governments began to develop a centralized approach to policies dealing with Native people based on the need to control neocolonial expansion and monitor state and provincial disregard for Aboriginal sovereignty. The culmination of governmental concern over the "Indian problem" was the creation of special branches of government to deal with issues involving Native people. In the United States, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was created. Located initially within the War Department, the BIA eventually came under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior in 1849 (Deloria, 1979). The reasoning behind the BIA's move to the Department of the Interior was founded on the government's changing view of North American First Nations and a modified national priority. North American First Nations no longer posed a physical threat to public or national security. At the same time, the government wanted to control territorial expansion, land ownership, and resource usage.

The American General Allotment Act of 1887 illustrates how the government attempted to control Native people. This Act effectively restructured Indian land holdings by moving them from a communal "in severalty" arrangement to a private ownership system (Cornell, 1988). The govern-

ment felt that this change would allow for the eventual control of sovereign Indian lands by enticing nomadic hunting and gathering tribes into farming and away from their traditional lifestyles. The Act provided for the arbitrary division of Native lands into sections that could be subdivided among heirs of the original holder's estate. After sectioning was completed, the "surplus" lands were sold off to interested non-Natives. However, the Act was implemented inconsistently across the United States, and as a result its effectiveness as a mechanism to end the Reservation system and encourage assimilation was weakened.

Subsequently, the United States passed the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 marking a significant turn in government policy by ending allotment and returning certain formerly expropriated Native lands (Champagne, 1994). North American First Nations who agreed to the terms of this Act were asked to forfeit their treaty rights in return for the recovery of a portion of their lost land. This attempt to default on treaty guarantees provoked a wave of conflict between Native people and the government around issues of self-determination (Boldt, 1993; Findley, 1994; Resnick, 1994).

In both the United States and Canada a perceived "antidote" to Indian dependency on government dealt with "helping" Native people through forced assimilation. North American Indian children were sent to boarding schools where the use of Native language and the practice of traditional culture were prohibited (Deloria, 1979; McCarty, 1987; Senese, 1986). Influenced by Social Darwinism, the Canadian government established the Department of Indian Affairs in 1862, and invested it with the responsibility for facilitating the mainstreaming of Native people (Howse and Stalwick, 1990). The Department of Indian Affairs carried out this process through passage of the Indian Act in 1876 (Nichols, 1989). This legislation both restricted the land and cultural rights of Native people, and set out government obligations for managing Indian affairs. Later, the Department of Indian Affairs, in a move similar to the United States, was merged with the Department of Northern Affairs to become the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) in a bid to maintain territorial jurisdiction over "crown" lands, and resources. In each instance, domination leading to assimilation was the identified goal.

5. Self-determination

The final approach deals with Native generated self-determination founded on the conviction that North American First Nations, as separate nations, should be self-governing. For example, in the United States, First Nations possess both sovereign nation status and the rights of US citizens (Deloria, 1985). Likewise, in Canada, First Nations are viewed, along with

the English and French, as being one of the three founding peoples of the country. In fact, amendments to the Canadian constitution proposed in 1992 suggested that federal and provincial governments formally recognize First Nations as one of the original ethnic-pillars of this "tripartite nation" (Resnick, 1994).

For most Native people, self-determination has been bound to treaty rights. Treaties, ratified constitutionally by law, led the majority of North American First Nations to grant or forfeit large tracts of land and natural resources to the government in exchange for specific property and resource guarantees. However, governments, for the most part, have failed to respect the terms of these treaties, and Native people are demanding that the conditions be honored. For many Native people, self-determination focuses on recovering lost lands and controlling resources as set forth in the body of the original treaties (Jaimes, 1992; Landsman, 1987; Murdock, 1987). For others, self-determination centers on the spirit of the treaties, and the individual and collective struggle of Native people to be recognized by the larger society as culturally distinct and capable of self-determination (Standing-Bear, 1988). In either case, self-determination, from a North American Indian perspective, demands that previous sovereignty arrangements be respected and revitalized.

Cross-National Trends

A comparative analysis of American and Canadian policy reveals that similar ideological conflicts exist with regard to government relations with Native people. While both these countries were historically, adherents of classical liberalism, the focus on individualism is more pronounced in American society. Historically, the social structure in Canada has incorporated a greater measure of collectivism, but in both countries, the natural law of the market remains dominant.

Social policy that seeks to control the lives of Native people is in direct opposition to the principle of self-determination and illuminates the conflict that characterizes relations between the state and North American First Nations. In Canada, the special status of First Nations, enshrined in the British North America Act of 1867, and subsequently, through the Canadian constitution has insured that their distinctive cultural identity is enshrined in law. However, the Canadian government's treatment of Native people and disregard for their rights does not convey the same respect for sovereignty as evidenced in America (Churchill, 1993; Hawthorn, 1966).

Education

Canadian legislation historically provided for the federal government's assumption of educational responsibilities for Native children. Christian missionaries aided the Canadian government in this regard by establishing residential schools which offered Native youngsters room and board, educational instruction, and teachings in the Christian faith.

Similarly, in the United States during Grant's tenure as president, missionary groups spearheaded by the Quakers and other Christian reformers, established off-Reservation educational programs to serve Native people. Known as the "Quaker Policy," and operating under such names as the Society of Friends and the Indian Rights Association, these religious organizations were bent on indoctrinating and converting Indian children to the values of the dominant society founded on belief in Christianity (Champagne, 1994; Nichols, 1989). These missionary groups were given permission by the BIA to remove Native children from their families of origin and place them in non-Native homes for Christian instruction and acculturation. This removal and placement of children was in direct opposition to traditional Native community-based child rearing and education practices (Devlin, 1988). Although these policies of removal have been phased out in favor of Reservation and Reserve-based schools or busing to local public schools, Native children are still predominantly being taught by educators whose philosophies, approaches, and curriculum are geared towards the values, standards, and needs of the dominant society.

Social Control

The social control of Native people has been approached differently by American and Canadian authorities. In the United States, the government has maintained the position that, as sovereign nations, First Nations need to be dealt with as potential adversaries. As such, they historically have relied upon federal armed forces to impose law and order.

In an attempt to move away from reliance on the military the government enacted the Peace Policy of 1869 (Nichols, 1989). However, the Reservation-based agents of the Office of Indian Affairs were unable to maintain peace and stability. The ensuing local skirmishes between Native and non-Native people escalated to the point where the military was involved again in 1872 in a bid to quell dissension, and redefine the boundaries of tribal Reservations. Eventually, in 1876, the government reverted back to using the military on a regular basis to enforce its policies in the West.

In Canada, the government took a more paternalistic approach in dealing with Native people whom it viewed as wayward dependents living on crown controlled lands. As such, the Canadians approached Native

social control as a policing and protection matter. In order to achieve this, the government created the North-West Mounted Police in 1873 with jurisdiction over both Native and non-Native inhabitants. This constabulary force held combined military, police and judicial authority over Indian, Métis, and Inuit territory west of the Province of Ontario. Subsequently, the Northwest Mounted Police became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and proceeded in a similar vein to exercise martial and judicial authority across the country over Native and non-Native people (Lunn and Moore, 1996).

Self-Determination

The United States passed the Indian Self-determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 ensuring that Native people would be able to exercise their right to: 1) self-determine; 2) plan and control programs; 3) set priorities; and 4) manage all aspects of the educational process (McCarty, 1987; Senese, 1986). This legislation, however, allowed the BIA to retain control over approving, financing, and suspending projects. The principle of Native self-determination produced a conflict of interest between successful Native programs and the desire of the BIA to promote its own survival and legitimacy.

In Canada, the government adopted the Assembly of First Nations' (1988) report, which recommended the transfer of responsibility for education to Native people. In the Canadian context, the objective of government policy has been to develop self-government arrangements within the existing constitutional framework. Agreements on Native self-government include: 1) community infrastructure and public works; 2) education; 3) social and welfare services; 4) justice; 5) health and hygiene; 6) wildlife management; 7) agriculture; 8) culture; and 9) access to and residence on Reserve (Boldt, 1993). Canadian national policy clearly states that the government does not intend to re-negotiate or redefine existing Native treaty rights, and represents a strategy that facilitates the assimilation of Indian government into the provincial-municipal system (Boldt, 1993).

Ideology and Social Welfare

The creation of social welfare policies is based on critical assumptions by the state of how to achieve a democratic society. Socialist political economy is useful in analyzing how the social and economic policies of government help to stabilize the dynamics of the process of capital accumulation (Salter and Salter, 1997). An analysis that addresses the contradictions within society helps in understanding 1) Native people's resistance to the established order, and 2) the conflict that is produced when the state

supports the capitalist class. Socialist political economy theory challenges liberal democratic ideology with its pluralist conceptions of the state and the neutrality of government. Socialist perspectives assume that the state is a central part of the problem because it acts in the interests of the capitalist class in society. The state accomplishes this through two functions: 1) accumulation (activities that support the infrastructure necessary for creation of surplus or profit; and 2) legitimization (the means by which the inequality of the economic and social order is obscured and transformed into pluralist propaganda (Miliband, 1969; Poulantzas, 1973; O'Connor, 1973; Panitch, 1977).

Social welfare policy, is used as a means to avert social disruption. In addition, it promotes accumulation of wealth for the capitalist class through state intervention to promote the increased health of the working class. The role of the state in capitalist societies is to protect individual economic interests by safeguarding property rights and enforcing the law. While the fundamental economic value of liberalism is a belief in the private ownership of the means of production, there is recognition that the social welfare state is necessary as an instrument to correct/modify the negative aspects of capitalism. Fundamentally, liberal pluralism is grounded on assumptions that the state acts as an impartial arbitrator of competing interest groups.

Social welfare policies that define government responsibility for North American First Nations are based on values and bureaucratic structures that do not represent the interests of Native people. Historically, Native people represent the first social group to receive government subsidized cradle-to-grave benefits. These policies were created to promote the accumulation function of the state and reflect colonial attitudes of cultural superiority. Social welfare is an institution of the state that serves both a legitimization function and a capital accumulation function as it provides a mechanism for subsidizing capitalist production. In this way, social welfare is interpreted to be a potentially destructive force geared toward shifting power to the state at the expense of the recipient (Sider, 1987; Galper, 1980). The demand for North American Indian lands and resources created a political climate where, over time, expropriation appeared as a legitimate exercise of power by the state (McCrary, 1993).

Marxist doctrine rests on a set of assumptions about change which sees societal progression as a dynamic, evolutionary process that is based on the continuous redefinition of the contradictions in the relationships between the capitalist and working classes. Marx (1967) believed that as the class struggle intensified, the state, would turn away from liberal democratic governance and intensify its repression which in turn would lead to violence. Fundamentally, the state operates as the only institution that possesses a

monopoly on the legitimate use of force and thus becomes an agent for controlling dissent and resistance. The capitalist class accepts some compromises to secure the stability in which capital accumulation can continue.

Native people have been constrained by state regulation throughout their history as they have tried to retain and regain control over their land and destiny. The coercive power of the state has been used repeatedly to insure that Native people are unable to block economic development and accumulation by the capitalist class (Warburton, 1997). To ensure this, Canadian and American governments have consciously set in place policies and programs to limit and destroy Native socioeconomic and cultural self-determination under the guise of protection, preservation, and social welfare (Nichols, 1989).

To achieve self-governance, a transfer of power from the state to Native people is required, wherein government bureaucrats and politicians abandon their assimilationist stance in favor of one which incorporates an appreciation of cultural difference and the right to self-determination (Howse and Stalwick, 1990; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). However, in gaining control, Native band and tribal subgroups risk becoming fragmented and alienated one-from-another as the oppression which brought about self-government is lifted. In essence, cohesion, bred from oppression and conflict, was necessary for the survival of the larger group's identity and the pursuit of collective interests.

Reformulating class conflict as the organizing principle of political struggle is one of the major objectives of post-modern approaches to social welfare. Post-modernism advances arguments that in an era of late capitalism, we need to reconstruct conceptions of welfare to emphasize "difference, challenges to authority, increased choice in individual identity and the disapproval of ethnic arrogance" (Leonard, 1997:22). In post-modern interpretations of socialism, the politics of difference suggest that diverse subgroups can and do advance their cause most when they identify as one, and pursue common goals. In so doing, self and subgroup-interests are subsumed by that of the collective, and the effects of capitalism, patriarchy and neocolonialism on oppressed victims are lessened (Leonard, 1995). The history of conflict that has characterized Native peoples relationship with the governments of Canada and the United States has been one which suggests solidarity and struggle are important elements in a transformation to self-governance

The transformation of socialist ideals has resulted in a reconceptualization of class struggle to accommodate a range of social identities, race, gender, culture, sexuality, age and class. Emerging political discourse that unmask the structures of oppression that are economically and socially

reproduced are important to fuelling the type of collective resistance that is a pre-condition of human emancipation. This post-modern approach to conflict, which has been articulated comprehensively by Leonard (1997) is part of the transformation of socialist political economy that resists making class relations the central organizing principle of transformation of the capitalist system.

Impact of Ideology

The ongoing oppression of Native people is related to the difficulty that the state has experienced in trying to assimilate them into the sociocultural mainstream. In turn, cultural assimilationists have come to view Native people as responsible for their own problems, a position which blames the victim. This process of victim blaming, described by Djao (1983) and Ryan (1976), includes the identification of the problem, elaboration of the oppressed group's differences from the majority, and assignment of corrective responsibility to the government for Native welfare. This "cloaked" Social Darwinism broadens the focus of attention from genetic or personal deficiencies to poverty, social injustice and discrimination, but does not change the perception that oppressed individuals, and their collective group are at fault.

Native people are portrayed as culturally deprived, fatalistic, and lacking the skills necessary for independence. Their home environments supposedly suffer from poor role models and familial instability. Most importantly, they fail to share the values of the larger society. Children of "impoverished cultures" are assumed to expect and desire their disadvantaged positions. This questionable logic presumes that their minority culture must change while the pre-dominant culture remains static and non-adaptive (Mullaly, 1997). Cultural difference is misconstrued as cultural deprivation. In fact, Native people have a rich cultural heritage that forms an integral part of their community, family, and personal lives. Yet, Native people, despite their culture and ancestry, are ill prepared for the harsh realities of the majority society's institutions and pronouncements (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The social welfare process serves to embed and constantly reinforce the effects of poverty and race through interactions and lowered expectations of Native people by the pre-dominant culture. Believed to be unworthy, if not incapable of success, a self-fulfilling "blaming the victim" prophecy is conveyed wherein Native people are viewed as worthless and unable to succeed (Djao, 1983; Hawthorn, 1966). Until there is a change in political consciousness such as that envisioned by post-modern interpretations of the politics of difference and the politics of resistance, attempts to address

the real sociopolitical and economic problems encountered by North American First Nations at the individual and subgroup level will continue to be piecemeal, frustrating, and futile. However, the application of a socialist political economy analysis provides both assessment and understanding of the social welfare transfer between Native people and the dominant society.

Government policies and programs which favor certain vested Native individuals and groups over others have perpetuated within and between Band and Tribe disagreements and antagonisms, and blunted resistance to the state. In addition, by orchestrating conflict, founded on the awarding or denying of benefits, American and Canadian governments have been able to justify the need for social control, and rationalize why self-determination for Native people is not feasible. As an aside, this arrangement has also allowed the government to target Native activists for courting and co-opting (Deloria, 1985).

Like repression, the provision of safety valves fails to address the underlying causes of conflict. Society remains unstable as long as fundamental power relations remain inequitable. Violent episodes in Native history span hundreds of years and are exemplified in America by the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota and subsequent seventy-one day armed conflict with federal authorities in 1973 (Champagne, 1994). This eruption of violence led to the conviction of American Indian Movement (AIM) activist Leonard Peltier, who was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences for first degree murder in the June, 1975 shooting deaths of two FBI agents at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota (Champagne, 1994). As recently as 1993, Native people gathered for a peaceful ceremony commemorating those who died at Wounded Knee II in 1973 and in the 1890 massacre (Brokaw, 1993).

In Canada, during the Summer of 1990, provincial police and military troops were used to quell dissident Native people who were attempting to enforce treaty rights at Kanestake, or Oka, as it is most commonly known. This led to protracted armed standoffs, and subsequent casualties on both sides (Gabriel, 1992). These violent incidents show that repressed hostility, founded on inequity, can lead to social conflict.

On September 12th, 1995, an Aboriginal activist, Anthony Dudley George was killed while protesting a land claim at a Chippewa burial ground in Ipperwash Provincial Park in Ontario. The Harris government refuses to hold a provincial inquiry to investigate the conduct of police in this instance of armed conflict in Ontario (Dare, 1997).

Socialist political economy theory provides a valuable framework for viewing the history of conflict between Native people and the governments of the United States and Canada. The Europeans, who conquered North

America, imposed upon the Native population a status of subject peoples in their own land. Deloria (1969) points out that the choices faced by Native people were relocation or annihilation. The tolerance shown by Native people to the denial of redress for their grievances is related to their non-oppositional and autonomous values that support their culture (Deloria, 1979; Locust, 1988; Nofz, 1987; Sider, 1987; Standing-Bear, 1988). The value system of Native culture supports finding one's own way rather than imposing one's way upon others. When faced with an oppressor, Native culture supports altering the relationship with the oppressor. By contrast, the value system of the dominant Euro-American and Canadian culture sought to alter or eliminate, not only those who were conceived as being a threat, but also those who were inconvenient or different.

Conflict has been the most enduring aspect of the relationship between Native people and their Euro-American and Canadian conquerors (Deloria, 1985). Historically, Native people have chosen compromise over conflict in a bid to maintain their physical well-being and cultural integrity (Deloria and Lytle, 1983). Governments and their agents have often mistaken Native attempts at accommodation for inferiority and weakness (Smith, 1984). However, under dire threat of annihilation North American First Nations have fought back (Smith, 1984). Only when social control and attempts at annihilation proved too costly, due to Native resistance, was rapprochement considered by both governments. In effect, conflict has bred compromise and concession (Deloria, 1985). By contrast, Bands and Tribes who did not actively resist government suffered the greatest deprivations (Smith, 1984). As a consequence, North American First Nations who have forcefully shown their opposition to the state earned the greatest public recognition of their predicament and gained important socioeconomic benefits from American and Canadian governments (Deloria, 1985; Djaio, 1983; Smith, 1984).

Resistance and not compliance, conflict and not passivity are associated with the cultural, spiritual and physical survival of Native people (Deloria, 1985; Deloria and Lytle, 1984; Landsman, 1987; Locust, 1988; Nofz, 1987; Sider, 1987; Smith, 1984; Standing Bear, 1988). Historically, there were hundreds of North American Indian Bands and Tribes representing many diverse languages, cultures, and lifestyles whose resistance to Euro-centric values forged a sense of commonality between Native people (Cornell, 1988; Smith, 1984). Native groups, not historically connected, found themselves drawn together against a common enemy.

Native people have shared resistance to repressive assimilation in their struggle for survival. An important outcome of this has been the recognition by the governments of the United States and Canada of the dual rights of Native people as citizens and as sovereign people (Chaudhuri, 1982). While

conflict has produced some positive outcomes, Native people have also suffered negative repercussions for their refusal to submit passively to the destruction of their culture and identity (Jaimes, 1992; Sider, 1987; Smith, 1984). The continued vitality of Native people bears witness to the positive functions of conflict when it is engendered by resistance to oppression.

While conflict between Native people and the state has sometimes been violent, primarily resistance to exploitation, assimilation and annihilation has been nonviolent (Deloria, 1985; Hall, 1985). When conflict is in pursuit of a specific goal, such as the preservation of land rights or control over education, the least violent means of achieving that end is likely to be adopted (Barman, Herbert and McCaskill, 1986). However, when nonviolent means are ineffective, conflict has led to violence.

In large part, an escalation in tensions from nonviolence to violence are rooted in the persistent Euro-centric perspective of North American First Nations as inferior and dysfunctional. Through this skewed portrait of Native people, the state has been able to rationalize its exploitive policies and practices (Sider, 1987). Yet, even under this duress, Native people have managed to survive (Mander, 1991; Churchill, 1993; Deloria, 1985; Grofman and Migalski, 1988; Standing-Bear, 1988).

Socialist political economy theory, with its focus on conflict and oppression, is a relevant filter for understanding the oppression of Native people within the expansionist capitalist economies of North America. This is especially true when the analysis of conflict is broadened beyond class to include other postmodern critiques of the welfare state such as ethnicity and race (Leonard, 1995, 1996, 1997). In so doing, the solidarity-creating oppression, exploitation, and subjugation experienced by Native people at the hands of the capitalist class become understandable as the shared individual and subgroup experiences become redefined as collective group or "class" gestalt.

Revisiting the post-modern perspective on socialist political economy, it is this *politics of difference* and the shared struggle against a common oppressor from which an awareness of belonging to a single group or class develops. The experience of being part of a larger entity does not require that individuals or subgroups give up their unique characteristics. It does, however, require that those united in solidarity recognize that their interdependence is essential if they are to achieve their common goal. As such, diversity among Native people is effective in generating solidarity as oppressed Band and Tribal subgroups identify with one another's struggle against oppression and form a collective response towards self-determination. An appreciation of the diversity of Native culture is fundamental to understanding present day struggles for self-determination. However, this

difference must not weaken the collective response of Native people to exploitation by the dominant class in an era of global capitalism. This analysis is in keeping with a socialist political economy theory of Native oppression.

Policy Implications

Socialist political economy recognizes the importance of conflict strategies for Native people. If government responses to conflict are based on dialogue and a "politics of difference" then negotiation between governments and Native people can lead to a restructuring of power relationships and a redress of grievances (Leonard, 1995, 1997). Positions that view Native culture as inferior and Native conflict as dysfunctional suggest continued repression with increased institutionalization and incarceration of Native people in North America.

It is expected that there will be further Native resistance to the continuation of inequity in the United States and Canada. This prospect is especially likely in Canada, where Native people form a much larger proportion of the total population than in the United States. The de facto manifestations of this resistance in Canada have already been previously described. Since 1990, there have been further acts of resistance by Native people in Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec (Englestad and Bird, 1992). Policies based on respect for Native cultures and an understanding of post-modern reconstructions of the meaning of conflict are an alternative to continued oppression, and attempts at assimilation.

Conclusions

The connection between the oppression and domination of Native people and the American and Canadian governments' social welfare and social control policies and programs has been explored in this discussion. Conflict with the state, including its welfare and educational institutions, has been described as understandable resistance by Native people to the forces of assimilation. The socialist political economy approach taken recognizes the legitimate goals of Native resistance, and how it relates to and conflicts with the interests of the state.

It is contended that conflict, rather than cooperation and collaboration, has been used by North American First Nations to maintain cultural identity, and to make socioeconomic and political gains. The Native rallying point for much of this conflict has been treaty rights. Whether in body or spirit, the dishonoring of treaties by the state has helped bolster Native solidarity, and their push for self-determination and self-governance. Wary of the

state's atonement intentions, Native people have viewed with caution the governments' willingness to relinquish control over health, education, and welfare matters. North American First Nations have rightly interpreted this agreement to transfer responsibility as a disavowal of past and present liability. In addition, American and Canadian governments have indicated that in order for Native people to have increased decision-making powers, they must also assume responsibility for continued program funding and economic development. Although control over programs and economic development are critical elements in self-determination and self-governance, without a supportive infrastructure to promote economic renewal and development, escalating tensions between Native people and the state should no doubt continue.

The ability of Native populations to promote their independence require strategies for economic development that complement Native culture and identity. Historically, this would involve the use of land and animals as the base for development. Establishing this traditional means of subsistence through land claims settlements, and changes in fish and game regulations has presented considerable conflict between Native people and the governments of the United States and Canada. Thus, we see history, founded on conflict, repeating itself.

Reluctance on the part of the Canadian and American governments to concede to the demands of Native people for control over natural resources and economic development continues to cause tension and conflict. The unwillingness of governments to address the underlying causes of conflict adds to the antagonism which exists between Native people and the state. Violent episodes will undoubtedly continue to erupt well into the next century as conflict between Native people and the dominant majority culture persists.

Socialist political economy theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the increasing mutuality of ends and means of North American Indian organizations within Canada and the United States. While the preservation of culture and the diversity of culture remains a significant element of Native self-determination; economic development is increasingly becoming an important mechanism that binds Native people together. A clear understanding of how the social, political, cultural and spiritual life of Native people is tied to their economic position in the society is the rallying cry of North American Indian leadership for the 21st century. We need to pay attention to the lessons of history, to the lessons of socialist political economy and to the lessons from post-modern approaches to reconstructing political struggle, as we advance toward our shared habitation of the North American continent. Will it be a destiny of redress or rebellion?

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