

DREAMS AND REALITIES OF DENE GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT/RESUME

The author wrote this paper as a policy critique while a consultant to the Dene Nation in 1980. He points out the need for clarity of goals in planning for self-government and in designing the processes of political, economic and social development. Above all, the forms of governmental structures and laws must follow the functions intended by self-government.

L'intention de l'auteur en écrivant cet article était de critiquer leur politique alors qu'il était consultant pour la nation Dene en 1980. Il insiste sur le besoin de clarifier les objectifs en ce qui concerne la planification de l'autonomie et les projets relatifs au processus de développement politique, économique et social. Avant toute chose, les formes de structures et de lois gouvernementales doivent suivre les fonctions prévues par l'autonomie.

Colonizers do not exploit resources. They exploit people!
(Sekou Toure, an African anti-colonial leader)

Author's Preface

This article is a revision of a policy critique which I wrote in October, 1980, while I was a consultant for the Dene Nation in the Northwest Territories. It has been revised only in the sense that events, institutions and policies peculiar to that time are explained to the present reader. Also, as it was an exciting time full of debates, including debates amongst the southern consultants, I have toned down some of the rhetoric of the period. Otherwise the fears and warnings of 1980 remain and bear repeating for those Native groups still engaged in their aboriginal rights struggles.

The Meech Lake Constitutional Accord, which excluded serious acknowledgement of Native claims, was negotiated in a climate of Canadian and global economic recession. When the following paper was written there was a great economic boom in northern Canada, with great oil megaprojects and a feeling of imminent breakthrough on northern Native rights.

Oil companies were anxious to get at the Beaufort Sea oil and all sorts of pressure was put on the Dene, the Inuvialuit and others in the "energy corridor" to come to a quick settlement. On all sides there was the expectation that the halt in development which the Berger report recommended, pending satisfactory resolution of Native claims, would be overcome. Resource multinationals bloomed in anticipation of great profits about to flow south, and giants like Dome Petroleum accumulated their venture capital largely in expectation of a quick Native settlement and the final go-ahead signal for the Mackenzie Valley pipeline. For their part, the Dene greatly resented this pressure for the quick settlement accepted by the Committee of Original People's Entitlement (C.O.P.E.), the political arm of the Inuvialuit of the Mackenzie Delta. On the other hand the Dene saw this as a time when they could take advantage of the barely contained excitement of the multinational corporations and local White businessmen to get at the resources in the corridor. Most Dene leaders, I believe, thought this might be the time to finally negotiate a favourable settlement. So it was a time of very intense activity. The federal and territorial governments provided plenty of funding for the Dene Nation for lawyers, for travel to National Energy Board hearings, for consultants and social animators. The near hysteria which often accompanied such anticipated resource booms was having a real effect on Dene communities and the solidarity of the Dene organization. Many of the Dene leaders were worried that the whole *raison d'être* of the Dene Nation

was about to be forgotten. Amidst the most intense resource rush since Klondike gold fever, the leadership feared that their vision of a better, "decolonized" Dene society was being lost on the rank and file. As one Dene chief put it, "We've been educating our people for years, yet all some of them can think of now is that damn cheque they're supposed to get when we sign a settlement." Of course the business press at this time did it's best to keep up a level of excitement that was hardly conducive to deep thought about the fundamental purposes of Dene government. The federal government too kept the Dene spinning with endless meetings with various ministers, the National Energy Board, with new demands for proof of aboriginal ownership which entailed a complex mapping of nearly a century of trapline land use, constant inventions of yet more socioeconomic research projects, and the like. At the time some Dene and some White consultants suspected that this whirl of activity was deliberately devised by government and business to keep us all off balance, to prevent calm, rational preparation for negotiation, and to postpone serious thought about Dene self-government. In retrospect I see no reason to negate that suspicion. It was into this flurry of forces that the following paper was presented.

It did create quite a ripple, for many Dene in the middle-level leadership felt that the issues it raised were serious and were indeed being neglected. Others in the higher leadership felt the principles of Dene Government were already covered in the original Dene Declaration (Appendix 1), and further elaboration of these principles was largely a legal and technical matter. Some of the southern consultants who had put forward many of the legal and technical proposals, in several volumes, thought it entirely impudent that a junior consultant like myself should suggest that some basic principles were missing in their work.

For my part I felt that the Dene Declaration was an excellent set of principles, but that many aspects of the egalitarian, consensus-run society that the Dene sought were not worked out in practical terms. Many consultants had elaborated all the ins and outs of federal, provincial and local powers, resource royalty options and the like. They had worked out elaborate options on voting rights in the new Dene homeland. These included schemes borrowed from Switzerland to prevent voting by "guestworkers". It was never clear, for example, whether workers from the south with less than 5 or 10 years residency were to be barred from voting only on long term resource issues which could endanger the ecology, or whether they would be prohibited from voting on labour law, occupational health, taxation of migratory workers, or any general issues of citizen's rights. In the effort to protect the northern environment from predatory multinational exploitation,

southern workers could have been subjected to the very undemocratic behaviour the Dene claimed to oppose.

On another level, plans for any profits to accrue from an aboriginal rights settlement were to flow to the Dene people, at least in abstract, but no checks and balances were laid out on the leadership, no clear plans to prevent corruption, no clear plans to decide what kind of income distribution or class structure would derive from the new resource projects and the traditional hunting/trapping life. The Dene at that time had a dedicated, modestly-paid leadership, but the issue was not one that could be left to faith or precedent in the new order of Denendeh.

In the weeks before presenting my paper to the Dene assembly I went through literally yards of consultants' reports at the Dene Nation office in Yellowknife, and as I got to the last few volumes I realized, with great apprehension, that the issues I have been describing were indeed not covered. There was some good rhetoric from the years of Trudeau's participatory democracy, reference to the "pedagogy of the oppressed", "decolonization" and so forth, but no structures or strategies beyond Dene "consensus". One might think that this omission reflected a libertarian spirit of anti-bureaucracy yet there was plenty of legal, structural detail on all sorts of other matters. So I felt obliged to point this out in a paper, though it was not in the immediate scope of my consultancy contract.

The issues raised did not get resolved, needless to say. The whole situation was soon changed by the stock market plunge of 1981, the collapse of oil prices, and the resultant slackening of pressure for Mackenzie Valley Development. The Dene leadership went through many changes. Some of the fears expressed in the paper came to fruition, yet many Dene continue to "keep the faith" of the original Dene Declaration, and to seek practical ways of bringing about their ideals in the real world. It is my hope that this revised paper will assist them and their allies in their project for better government, not just Indian government.

Part One: On The Development Of Dene Government

I. "Form Follows Function": The Shape of Dene Government Can Only be Decided After the Purposes of Dene Government Are Made Clear.

Before someone starts to build a boat they normally know what they want to use the boat for. If they know the "function" or purpose then it is relatively easy to decide if the boat should take the "form" (shape or design) or a kayak, canoe, barge, speedboat, oil tanker or skiff. Similarly, if the Dene decide first the function or purpose of their government then the form will follow logically. For example, if the Dene want a government to create a few

rich people and leave the rest on welfare, then they can choose one type of government. If, on the other hand, they want a government that will keep the Dene more or less equal and help create work for everyone (whether traditional bush work or modern wage work or a combination), then they will choose a very different form of government. Yet it is just such an issue - the type of class structure that the Dene Nation expects or wants to develop - that Dene government proposals have ignored or treated very vaguely. Instead, the proposals have all gone at it backwards like looking through a boat catalogue to decide what it is you want to do out there on the water.

II. Deciding the Form of Government Before Deciding the Function Makes Enemies and Problems We Don't Need.

The Dene Nation is moving to take control of game management, education, citizenship control and so on. The way that is being done - looking at the takeover of various forms (departments of education, game, etc.) before looking at functions - is, I believe, a very dangerous and provocative method of going about it. It is creating a very understandable backlash amongst people who don't know what is going to happen or why. For example, judging by results of a student survey at Aklavik, the people there are very afraid of local control of education and would oppose it. You cannot entirely explain this reaction by a sense of inferiority amongst the Dene and Inuvialuit of Aklavik. Nor can you blame this hesitation entirely on racism amongst the Whites of Aklavik. In large part I believe this fear of takeover is fear of the unknown. Teachers fear that if the Dene Nation "takes over" they may lose their job protection, that they can be fired if the Chief dislikes them personally (this really happens on some Band-controlled reserves in the south!), that accreditation of teachers will be in chaos, and so on. Can anyone blame them? Similarly, students may be worried that their diplomas and credentials won't be recognized outside, and so on. It is just this kind of fear of the unknown which led to the hysteria that caused two deaths in the struggle for local control of education in the Cree Community of Iie-a-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan a few years ago. At that time the progressive forces who favoured local Cree control did not make their intentions clear because they were not clear themselves. In the confusion a conservative alliance of the Bay, Church, R.C.M.P. and racist teachers was able to create a panic which divided the community in a way that still has not healed. This is the result of putting the takeover of forms before purposes.

If the Dene Nation wants to make instant enemies of the teachers, half the parents and children, and various departments and colleges of education, then it can just announce that it is taking over education "because this

Is Dene land." The Dene Nation will make enemies of people who should not be enemies and make future cooperation more difficult as the Dene decolonize their school system.

The same thing goes for game management, forestry and so on. If the Dene Nation simply announces its intention to take over the forms of government, it will create panic and backlash amongst not only local game wardens and bureaucrats but many sincere conservationists as well. In all such cases the Dene Nation will end up fighting everybody on all fronts instead of isolating and defeating the few genuine, die-hard racists who oppose any move to Dene control of Dene government.

If on the other hand the Dene Nation looks at function or purpose first, many of these problems can be avoided. For example, the Dene Nation could very well decide that the main things it wants in education are a curriculum that has a serious social studies section on Indian studies and the true nature and history of the multinational resource companies, plus an affirmative action program to develop Dene teachers. If the Dene Nation decided on these main purposes, then all sorts of false fears and unnecessary fights could be avoided with teachers, departments of education and so on. In addition, the Dene Nation would be able to conserve its energy for the real fights such as with the resource companies who would want history books that make the multinationals look good, or the die-hard racists who don't believe Dene can become teachers.

Similarly if the intention of Dene Game Management is to improve the care of the land by letting more Dene express their experience and love of the land in game management, then the programs and timetable follow naturally.

Instead of frightening sincere conservationists, one could work with them to oppose the real multinational enemies of nature who are already polluting the land and getting ready to do worse.

III. The Supermarket Shopping List Mentality - Another Bad Result of Looking at Government Designs Before Deciding the Purposes of Dene Government

I have said that the list of options for government forms is already long, complicated and confusing. Yet the bureaucratic way of looking at things has encouraged people to add on more and more of their favourite local projects and plans ranging from day care centres and small businesses to taking over the Indian Affairs office in Yellowknife. Nobody seems to be deciding what the main purposes, the main goals of Dene Government are to be. To go into negotiations this way would be a problem because we would have no overall strategy. We could go to government with our long

shopping list and after a few days of negotiations could lose our sense of priorities. The Dene Nation could end up winning a bunch of little things and losing on the major issues, because we had not decided what were the major issues. The point is that we must decide on the main issues first and all the details can be fitted into their proper place later, perhaps including everybody's favourite local projects.

IV. Incomplete Preparation on Important Issues - A Result of Failing to Look for the Main Goals of Dene Government

When your energies are being spread around on a "shopping list" of demands, some of the most important things get very superficial treatment or are ignored entirely, I've already pointed out the lack of serious attention given to the type of class structure (differences of wealth and power) that the Dene foresee in their nation.

V. The Failure to Point Out Dene Rights That Should be Taken for Granted

Because the authors of the Dene Government plans have spent much time on bureaucratic details, they have failed to highlight an extremely important point. Not one inch of Dene land should be given up for rights of self government that southern people take for granted! This is the big lesson of the James Bay Agreement. The Cree People gave up their land largely to get rights that almost all other Canadians already have. The Dene would be sadly shortchanged to do the same thing. Yet nowhere in the documents I have looked at do I see a clear distinction between rights to self-government all Canadians should have regardless of nationality, and special rights for the Dene minority nationality. Once again the failure to look at the main goals and purposes of Dene Government could lead us to a great disappointment during negotiations, to give up something in return for just plain normal democratic rights that everyone should have regardless of nationality.

It is obvious to me that all normal democratic rights (like local control over school boards etc.) are a non-negotiable minimum beginning of a settlement. Only special rights can be negotiated and even some of these (e.g. access to harvest the land) must be absolutely guaranteed. Other special rights to respect the national culture, language and so forth are the real issues of debate for the type of settlement the Dene appear to be pursuing. In some ways this settlement seems to have slightly fewer powers than a "province", but in some economic and cultural areas the Dene clearly need powers quite a bit greater than those of the "normal" southern provinces of Canada.

VI. The Failure to Pay Attention to the Needs of a Growing Dene Working Class

More and more Dene people are entering the paid workforce and the land probably cannot provide a full living for all the Dene Nation in the future. Yet the plans for Dene government pay very little attention to this. There is no serious discussion of laws and agencies of labour relations, worker safety in the mines, or forests, or on the water, or any mention of workers' rights. This is a remarkable omission considering the amount of detail written on other less important issues. There is only one mention of possible Dene control of the Unemployment Insurance Commission (and apparently we are to assume from it that the Dene Nation will have unemployment as a normal part of life in the future.

Already there are many Dene in the working class earning wages and running into the same problems facing workers of other nationalities. When the National Energy Board declared that further developments were likely at Norman Wells and on the pipeline to Zama, the Dene voted unanimously at their recent convention to insist that any jobs from the project be given first to Dene, even though they opposed any new developments before a comprehensive aboriginal rights settlement. I think that is an honest, principled and practical position, for the Dene people fully realize that they need jobs and the dignity and independence that come from economic self-support. Clearly nothing is more destructive of a peoples' culture than welfare dependency. When Dene are unemployed they are under the constant surveillance of psychologists and penologists and welfare authorities who try to remake them to fit the social worker's image of a good, Canadian consumer. This lack of economic independence and constant cultural "subversion" makes unemployment probably the worse enemy of Dene culture. Yet many of the Dene Nation's White consultants seem to fear that taking jobs will destroy the Dene culture and their bargaining position for a comprehensive settlement. Perhaps this is why these consultants have spent so little time on the problems of Dene workers of the present and the future. I also fear that some of the southern consultants have a rather dream-like vision of what the Dene should be - a people in touch with nature and uncontaminated by wage labour or the perils of consumerism.

Right now it looks like most of the plans for the future Dene Nation have Dene people outside, above, or below the working class, anywhere but inside the working class. There appear to be plans for Dene outside the working class in traditional bush harvesting, over the working class as managers, bureaucrats and professionals, and even under the working class on welfare. But apparently the Dene nation does not have plans for the young Dene men and women who will risk their health and safety in the mines or strug-

gle for a decent living with dignity in the offices, shops and factories of the future. Surely they are at least as important as the game animals upon which the reports spend so much time.

In fact, I do not believe that the Dene Nation is so blind to the needs of the working class, or that it has such a middle class view of the future. The whole area of working class rights deserves immediate attention. The purposes and goals of the relationship between the working class and Dene government is the subject of the next section of this paper.

Part Two: Two Dene Nation Paths To The Future: A New Middle Class Elite Or A United Nation Of Working People?

VII. The Class Question Within the Dene Nationality Question

Nationality and class are the two most important issues in world politics at this point in the twentieth century. Thus, it will be a great mistake if Dene people avoid looking at the class question that is inside their national question. I have already pointed out that the consultants who have prepared the various Dene Government papers have almost completely ignored this problem. It is as though they believe that any Dene who enter the workforce in wage labour will automatically lose their culture and become assimilated. If this is true then it is a very sad time for the Dene People, for it is quite likely that they will soon have to say goodbye to the majority of their flesh and blood. But is such thinking correct, or does it result from a lack of imagination and poorly developed ideas about the working class? Surely nobody can believe that workers in Greece, Mozambique, England, India, China and Brazil are "all the same" or that they have "no culture". Yet many (sincere) friends of the Dene seem to be saying that wage work will automatically wipe away Dene culture. It is becoming more and more obvious to me that such thinking leads only to one thing: the avoidance of serious and imaginative thinking on how to preserve Dene culture and community in a working world. It will be far more valuable for the Dene Nation to concentrate upon this question instead of twisting and turning in a hopeless attempt to keep the entire people on the land and out of wage labour.

It is also becoming clear that the kinds of political structures (citizenship, local councils, etc.) and political decision-making processes (consensus, etc.) that Dene want depend very much upon the kind of class structure that the Dene expect to develop in their nation. So let us look into this class question further.

VIII. Things In the Class Structure of the Northwest Territories That Cannot Be Changed In the Near Future

The Dene can hope to control only part of the development of their own class structure. We see the following limits for the time being:

1. The Dene do not now have the political strength to take over the multinational resource corporations operating in the Northwest Territories, so they can't expect to become the "upper" or "ruling" class of the north.
2. The Dene cannot have complete independence as long as this is the case, nor can they have complete control over development.

As this is the case, the Dene Nation can realistically expect themselves to move to a situation similar to that of the majority of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America - not completely colonized but not completely free either.

IX. The Part of the Class Structure that the Dene Nation Can Try to Control

The multinationals will fight ferociously to keep their control of oil resources and the other highly profitable parts of the northern economy. But they don't particularly care who becomes the local middle class of small contractors, charter airline owners and so on. Indeed it appears from the C.O.P.E. Agreement in Principle that the multinationals and federal government want to create a small, local Native elite of Inuit and probably of Dene too (witness the grants of private small business development funds). So the Dene can let themselves become a tail wagging at the end of a multinational dog very easily. Or they can try to influence the future to develop a Dene Nation that is united, equal, and moving towards more freedom and independence.

X. Middle Class Nationalism: The Easy Path That Will Lead to the Breakup of the Dene Nation

The third world is full of "neo-colonies". These are countries where direct rule by foreigners has changed to indirect rule, where a local Native elite rules on behalf of the multinationals that keep control of the economy. The local Native elites make use of genuine feelings and slogans of nationalism to make themselves rich at the expense of the people.

This kind of nationalism is growing in the Indian and Metis movements in the south. Reserves and communities are being torn apart as a few individuals become rich businessmen or bureaucrats while most of the people stay poor. The division of a nation into rich and poor classes destroys the

unity of that nation and such a division can develop amongst the Dene if they are not very careful and determined about their goals.

The path of middle class nationalism is the "easy" path because it is being encouraged by the governments that now control Native peoples in Canada. This is because it is easier and cheaper to rule indirectly through a small local Native elite of businessmen and bureaucrats than to provide development for the whole people. This is especially true when the Canadian economy is in a recession, the end of which nobody can predict. The middle class path will split the Dene into a small elite, some hunters, a large welfare class and a generation abandoned to the cities and the south, without support from their national community.

XI. Towards a Nation of Working People: The Path That Will Strengthen the Unity of the Dene Nation

If the Dene wish to hold true to the democratic, egalitarian principles of the Dene Declaration, and if they wish to keep and nourish unity between Dene living on the land and those in waged work, those in the bush and those in the cities, outdoor workers and secretaries, political leaders and the grassroots, elders and young Dene, then they must choose a path that will make this unity possible in fact and not just in words.

Such a path leads the Dene people to develop as a united nation of working people, people working in traditional ways on the land and in many kinds of wage labour. They would be united in sharing the common burden of work in the Dene Nation, each taking part as productive, useful human beings engaged in work that benefits all Dene. They could be further united by making a ceiling on the income of any leaders, administrators and other high positions to prevent an elite from growing and splitting itself off from the people.

The most important thing about such a path is the sincerity and political willpower to carry it out. Working out the design for such a society and government follows from the decision. The "forms" to carry out such a decision, whether Dene co-ops or resource corporations, or clauses in the constitution about the income of leaders and administrators, can be developed if the Dene decide that the path of real unity of class and nation is the path they want to take. It will take a great struggle but such a path can be achieved. It is also the only path that makes sense if the Dene are sincere about wanting to maintain their community, culture and unity.

But, unlike middle class elite nationalism which preaches equality while a few get rich, such a path is not an easy road. It will be opposed by the multinational corporations and governments who want to create a Native elite that they can manipulate. Some people who tolerate all kinds of militant cul-

tural and spiritual nationalism from Indians will oppose putting such a progressive national plan into practice in the real world. Such people support the Dene Nation in words but not in deeds. And regardless of how sensible the path of a working people's nation may be, many will call it foolish, impractical, communist and so on.

But I believe that the Dene Nation can make it work. Unlike many Indian peoples in the south, the Dene do not already have an established elite of bureaucrats and entrepreneurs with vested interests to protect. They have been less affected by Indian Affairs manipulation than other Native organizations. So it can be done if the political will of the people is strong enough.

Summing Up So Far

In this paper I have argued that Dene people must make clear the goals of Dene government before they look at forms or designs for the government. I have also argued that the most important political question is the class nature of any future Dene Nation, and that, therefore, the class question is the most important question for Dene Government. Finally, I try to point out that a clear view of the Dene class question will also help to make clear the question of Dene national goals.

Part Three: Attitudes About The White Invaders Of The Northwest Territories And Strategies For Dealing With Them

XII. Are All White People Enemies?

Most of the reports that I have read on Dene political strategy assume that almost all White people in the north are pro-development and anti-Dene. They assume that except for a very few, highly moral church people and a minority of conservationists, the vast majority of White businessmen, civil servants and workers are opposed to the aims of the Dene Nation. To me this appears to be making enemies in advance: declaring people to be enemies long before you have decided if they should be enemies or not, or if they can be won over.

In any case there are two ways to get rid of enemy invaders. You can try to drive them out or you can turn them into friends and civilize them.

XIII. What are the Divisions Amongst "White" Canadians?

Certainly there are Canadians in all classes who are diehard, out-and-out racists. BUT I would argue that the great majority are not, and that the majority are confused about the causes of the Dene colonial condition and unsure of the goals of Dene nationhood. It is also clear that many Canadians

have come to love the northern land and wish to make it their home.

On one hand there are the multinationals who see the land only as something to slash, rape and plunder for profit before they leave to do their exploitation in other lands. This class of people - the class which owns and runs the multinationals - have shown over and over again that they are enemies of the land and the people. They dig and drill and blast without permission and without regard for preservation of the land. They make oil spills and put arsenic poison in the water and clearcut the forests just to make themselves a few more dollars. This class of people are enemies against whom the Dene can only hope to defend themselves. Over and over they promise better pollution safeguards and over and over again they fail to do this. So it is also likely that they will never reform.

On the other hand there are the ordinary Canadian working people. In many ways they seem quite similar to the majority of Dene people. Judging by their actual living conditions (such as the trailer town between downtown Yellowknife and Rainbow Village), they don't seem to be much better off than the Dene. And although they do not share the racial oppression of the Dene they certainly share the class oppression, as when armed R.C.M.P. recently charged and clubbed a peaceful picket of strikers at the Giant Mine. Many of these workers love the north and would like to make it their home, with a real sense of community. But the awful working conditions in the mine cause a 200% turnover of workers who quit in disgust and leave for the south. Thus, many are forced to be transients who do not stay long enough to set down real roots in the north.

XIV. Two Ways for the Dene to Deal with Canadian Working People

A. The Middle Class Nationalist Way. This is the bad attitude that can take over if Dene people are not careful: Declare all non-Dene to be enemies and fight all of them until you drop from exhaustion. Don't bother trying to develop a community of nationalities in the north - let the travel agencies keep up their booming business helping non-Dene workers escape as often as possible. Don't pay any attention to the rights of workers to health, safety, dignity, the rights to a home and community, or the right to work and organize themselves without harassment and brutality by the police. Assume that all non-Dene working people don't care about nature. Assume that all of them are part of a "white" conspiracy to cover up oil spills, water poisoning and other damage to the environment.

This is a totally negative way of dealing with non-Dene working people. I do not believe that many Dene have such an attitude, for at bottom it is a racist attitude. Rather I think most Dene are as confused on the question as most Canadians are confused about the goals of the Dene. The Dene

Nation's advisors have not tried to clarify this question as much as they should. The multinational resource companies can only profit from this form of "divide and rule", just as they profited from the Canadian, Indian, Metis and Inuit split.

B. An Alliance of Canadian and Dene working People. Consider the positive potential of befriending and "civilizing" those non-Dene working people who have many interests in common with the Dene. Consider what it would be like to have a community of Canadians who love the north like the Dene, and would respect the land because it would be their home. Consider what it would be like if Dene and non-Dene friends of the earth were on every oil-rig, forest crew and mine who would guard against and report every crime against nature. How different this would be from the present war between the nationalities!

I am by no means proposing a merger of nations or an end to the Dene Nation project for autonomy. Nor am I suggesting that the road will be easy after two centuries of colonial experience. But the road to an alliance of working people in the north is the road that will most benefit and strengthen the Dene Nation. The road of nationality antagonism is a road that will lead to a "war of all against all".

If the Dene Nation chooses the road to the alliance of working people, then the forms of government will follow naturally. For example, the problems of citizenship and voting rights can be considered from the point of view of the goals of the Dene Nation citizenry for relations between the nationalities and between humans and nature. Instead of looking at a shopping list of citizenship rights, or trying to apply models from racist, highly exploitive situations (such as Switzerland's horrible discriminatory laws controlling migrant workers from southern Europe and Africa), one can design the forms to fit the intentions. If the intention is to put down all non-Dene, then the Dene can try to form one set of laws or play around with population statistics. If, on the other hand, their intention is to hold down damage from the resource companies and develop friendship among all nationalities in the north within a Dene-led Nation, then a very different set of laws and rights will be proposed.

The same reasoning would apply to such processes of decision-making as consensus. Should multinationals be allowed to take part in consensus decisions? It would seem that consensus wouldn't control them anymore than a crucifix would stop an atheist vampire. Similarly, it is unlikely that consensus itself would stop a Dene business and bureaucratic elite from doing what it wants. The point is to prevent the growth of such an elite.

Political questions like these must be thought out before the Dene people start designing the constitution, rights and processes for future Dene

Conclusion

How human beings treat each other determines the relationship between the people and the land. How the Dene choose to treat the nationalities around them - southern Whites, Inuit and others - will be affected by how they decide to develop the classes of people within their own nation. Within the nationalities or between the nationalities the choice is the same: a war to reach the top of the middle class, or an alliance based on friendship amongst working people.

Appendix I

Dene Declaration

(Passed at the 2nd Joint General Assembly of the Indian Brotherhood of the N.W.T. and the Metis Association of the N.W.T. on 19 July 1975)

Statement of Rights

We the Dene of the Northwest Territories insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a nation.

Our struggle is for the recognition of the Dene Nation by the Government and peoples of Canada and the peoples and governments of the world.

As once Europe was the exclusive homeland of the European peoples, Africa the exclusive homeland of the African peoples, the New World, North and South America, was the exclusive homeland of Aboriginal peoples of the New World, the Amerindian and the Inuit.

The New World like other parts of the world has suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism. Other peoples have occupied the land - often with force - and foreign governments have imposed themselves on our people. Ancient civilizations and ways of life have been destroyed.

Colonialism and imperialism are now dead or dying. Recent years have witnessed the birth of new nations or rebirth of old nations out of the ashes of colonialism.

As Europe is the place where you will find European countries with European governments for European peoples, now also you will find in Africa and Asia the existence of African and Asian countries with African and Asian governments for the African and Asian peoples.

The African and Asian peoples - the peoples of the Third World - have fought for and won the right to self-determination, the right to recognition as distinct peoples and the recognition of themselves as nations.

But in the New World the Native peoples have not fared so well. Even in countries in South America where the Native peoples are the vast majority of the population there is not one country which has an Amerindian government for the Amerindian peoples.

Nowhere in the New World have the Native peoples won the right to self-determination and the right to recognition by the world as a distinct people and as Nations.

While the Native people of Canada are a minority in their homeland, the Native people of the Northwest Territories, the Dene and the Inuit, are a majority of the population of the Northwest Territories.

The Dene find themselves as part of a country. That country is Canada. But the Government of Canada is not the government of the Dene. The Government of the Northwest Territories is not the government of the Dene. These governments were not the choice of the Dene, they were imposed upon the Dene.

What we the Dene are struggling for is the recognition of the Dene Nation by the governments and peoples of the world.

And while there are realities we are forced to submit to, such as the existence of a country called Canada, we insist on the right to self-determination as a distinct people and the recognition of the Dene Nation.

We the Dene are part of the Fourth World. And as the peoples and Nations of the world have come to recognize the existence and rights of those peoples who make up the Third World the day must come and will come when the nations of the Fourth World will come to be recognized and respected. The challenge to the Dene and the world is to find the way for the recognition of the Dene Nation.

Our plea to the world is to help us in our struggle to find a place in the world community where we can exercise our right to self-determination as a distinct people and as a nation.

What we seek then is independence and self-determination within the country of Canada. This is what we mean when we call for a just land settlement for the Dene Nation.