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THE INNU: ANOTHER CRY FOR HELP

Introduction

In 1993 Canadians became acutely aware of the marginal existence of the aboriginal Labrador Innu Nation, part of a larger tribe that includes the Innu of Quebec. A shocking videotape shown on news broadcasts showed six children from the tiny community of Davis Inlet off the northeast coast high on gasoline fumes, and disoriented. (See “Davis Inlet: Moving From Misery” in the March 1993 issue of News in Review.) In response to the larger crisis of which the gas sniffing was symptomatic, the governments of Canada and Newfoundland agreed to move the Innu of Davis Inlet to a new community at Sango on the mainland, where they would have essential facilities they lacked: running water, sewage disposal, and proper insulation against the winter cold. The move will finally take place in 2001 or 2002. Also in response, many of the Innu children known to be substance abusers were sent to Poundmaker’s Lodge, a Native treatment facility in Alberta.

November 2000, however, brought a new plea from the Innu of Labrador—this time from Sheshatshiu, a community of approximately 1000 people south of Davis Inlet. Paul Rich, the band chief, begged the governments of Newfoundland and Canada to remove at least 39 children addicted to sniffing gasoline from their community so they could get some help. This time Canadians again saw images of children, some as young as eight, wandering the community at night, mouths and noses covered by bags filled with gasoline.

This second plea led Prime Minister Chrétien to promise a new, secure treatment centre for the Innu, with a program to be developed specifically for them. It also prompted Brian Tobin, Minister of Industry (and former premier of Newfoundland), to announce that the Innu of Labrador would finally be given First Nations status under the Indian Act, thus giving them authority to pass their own bylaws to deal with social problems in their communities. A 1999 agreement with Canada and Newfoundland to transfer education programs and community policing to the communities is yet to be implemented. Responding to the children’s stories of lives of inactivity and boredom, Governor General Clarkson lent her support as honorary patron to a campaign to raise money for new community centres with a gym, pool, and hockey rink for both Sheshatshiu and Natuashish—the latter the new Davis Inlet community.

In the time between these two incidents, many other events have prompted potential change in the relationship of the Innu and the governments of Canada and Labrador. A proposed land-claims agreement for the Innu of Quebec—control of 500 square kilometres of land in return for abandoning all claims to their traditional 300 000 square kilometres of territory—horrified the Labrador Innu. Insisting they had never surrendered any territory, they made their own demands that would give them direct control of 23 per cent of Labrador and joint management, with the governments, of another 22 per cent—a land claim similar to those of Native peoples in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. Under-scoring the gravity of the situation, Survival, an international organization supporting aboriginal peoples, published a damning report titled “Canada’s Tibet—The Killing of the Innu,” calling worldwide attention to the problems of the Innu. The Innu themselves believe that the only solution to their social problems is to be given full control of their own communities and of their once traditional lands on which their nomadic, hunting lifestyle is based.
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Decisiveness and Decision-making

Viewing television news images of the children of Sheshatshiu sniffing gasoline, many Canadians wondered how a problem that Canada and Newfoundland had promised to deal with seven years before in Davis Inlet could resurface in another Labrador Innu community. Why hadn’t the Canadian and Newfoundland governments succeeded in preventing this second crisis? What decisions were made and how conclusive were their results? Was this second incident proof of government inability to act decisively or to make effective decisions?

As you watch this report, focus on the questions that were posed in the previous paragraph. As well, jot down answers to the specific questions presented below.

The Immediate Problem
1. What does Chief Paul Rich feel needs to be done immediately to save the gas-sniffing children of the community? What does he want for the long term?

2. What does social worker Kathleen Kufelot feel needs to happen?

3. Why is the Newfoundland government hesitant to act?

4. What is the position of some of the Innu parents?

5. What does reporter Natalie Clancy call “the heart of the problem”?

The Roots of the Problem
1. How do the Innu view their traditional lands?

2. How does Paul Rich describe the actions of the Newfoundland government?

3. Against what groups have the Innu protested especially in recent years?

Immediate Solutions
1. How have the governments and the Innu chosen to deal with the substance abuse (gas sniffing) by children in Sheshatshiu?

2. According to Dr. Jane McGillivray what is required to solve the problem?

Long-term Solutions
What long-term solutions will likely be required to enable the Innu to solve their social problems?

Follow-up Discussion
After a second viewing, summarize what you think are the responsibilities of both levels of government as well as the Innu themselves regarding the substance-addicted children of Sheshatshiu. Are these responsibilities any different from those of a provincial or municipal government or parents if a similar situation occurred where you live?
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Symptoms, Afflictions, and Remedies

Preventive medicine aims, through good health care, to avert illness before it occurs. Social maladies can sometimes also be avoided before it's too late. Examine the recent chronology of events below and decide if they reveal any preventive measures that could have been taken, whether actions taken were short-term or long-term remedies, and who, if anyone, has acted as a social-health caregiver.

**November 8, 1999** Survival, an international organization dedicated to assisting aboriginal groups around the world fighting for survival, publishes the report “Canada's Tibet—The Killing of the Innu.” Stephen Corry, director-general of Survival, condemns the Canadian government for being “directly responsible for the appalling suffering of the Innu people.”

**November 25, 1999** The federal and Newfoundland governments and Innu leaders reach a preliminary agreement to provide Native communities with control over their own education and police.

**May 18, 2000** The Charles G. Andrew Youth Restoration Centre opens in Sheshatshiu. The centre is designed to provide treatment for up to 12 Innu youth with substance abuse problems.

**June 7, 2000** Newfoundland Premier Brian Tobin, who toured northern Labrador in March as chair of a task force looking into the social and economic problems of Labrador coast communities, says that problems of alcohol abuse in Native communities include several aboriginal leaders who refuse to admit their own alcoholism.

**November 16, 2000** Innu leaders make an unprecedented request for assistance to the governments of Newfoundland and Canada. Identifying at least 30 children who are chronic gas sniffers in Sheshatshiu, Peter Penashue, president of the Innu Nation, asks that they be removed from their homes and the community for treatment.

**November 20, 2000** Innu chief Paul Rich says that there is no appropriate facility (one providing long-term care, and one residents cannot walk away from) in all of Canada to which the Innu children may be sent.

**November 22, 2000** Twelve Innu children are taken to a hastily created detoxification centre in Goose Bay. Seven other children, also under court order, evade being taken into protective custody by authorities.

**November 25, 2000** Davis Inlet Innu leaders fly to Toronto to draw attention to the plight of young people in their community. Of 154 children between the ages of nine and 20 in their community, about 80 are chronically addicted to gasoline sniffing.

**November 26, 2000** Federal Industry Minister Brian Tobin and Newfoundland Premier Beaton Tulk promise to build a detoxification centre in Labrador for solvent abusers. Tobin
also declares that the federal government will include the Innu of Labrador under the Indian Act, giving them the power to send the children in their communities to treatment centres.

**December 7, 2000** Writing in *The Globe and Mail*, Peter Penashue insists that the real requirement “to ensure the future of a healthy, vibrant Innu society is a comprehensive land-claims agreement that recognizes (not extinguishes, as is Canada’s policy) Innu rights, including ownership of sufficient lands and resources so that we can build a self-sufficient economy.”

**December 11, 2000** Governor General Adrienne Clarkson invites Innu leaders from Sheshatshiu and Davis Inlet to join her for dinner to discuss their problems. On December 17, 2000, she agrees to serve as honorary patron for a foundation that will build two sports facilities in the Innu communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish (the new community to which the Innu of Davis Inlet are to be relocated). On a visit to Davis Inlet and Sheshatshiu, January 18-19, 2001, she says that Canadians need to realize that there are Native people across Canada living in Third World conditions.

**December 13, 2000** Chief Simeon Tshakapesh and Minister of Health Allan Rock announce that long-term treatment will be provided for the gas-sniffing children of Davis Inlet. Health Canada, the Newfoundland government, and the Innu will join to offer programs for entire families. Referring to previous unsuccessful attempts to solve substance abuse problems by removing children from Labrador for treatment in Alberta, Chief Tshakapesh says, “We will never again allow others to control our future.”

**December 14, 2000** Minister of Indian Affairs Robert Nault announces plans to spend two days in Davis Inlet meeting with Chief Tshakapesh.

**Follow-up Discussion**

1. In your opinion, who are the people whose actions appear to have the greatest significance or impact in terms of the recent events affecting the Innu people?

2. What role is the Governor General, our ceremonial representative of the head of state (Queen Elizabeth), playing in efforts to help the Innu? What might the political implications be of her actions in terms of the political, economic, and social status of the Innu and even other Native peoples in Canada?
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*Alienation and Despair*

Gas sniffing is the most highly publicized form of substance abuse among young Innu but it is not the only chemical use indulged in by the youth of Sheshatshiu. A survey by the community’s public health nurse indicates that more than half of teenagers in Sheshatshiu drink alcohol, sniff gas, and take illegal drugs. The main reason the children give for substance abuse is boredom. As one teenager said, “There’s nothing to do. We want to play hockey, play gym. We want to do stuff.” Others talk about the need to escape poor living conditions and decrepit housing.

Often the children’s behaviour is patterned after that of their parents, many of whom use alcohol as their means of counteracting the feelings of hopelessness they feel at being trapped in what they feel is an alien way of life. When they drink, they neglect and abuse their children; the children turn to easily available drugs like inhalants—especially gasoline—to escape their own loneliness and boredom. In *The Globe and Mail*, social commentator Margaret Wente agreed that boredom was indeed an overwhelming feature in the lives of Innu young people, describing it as “boredom of lives without goals or purpose or role models. Chronic, toxic, deadly boredom.” Not all Innu children are victims of dysfunctional families, but feelings of being bored are, as is the case with many young people, an indication of larger issues. For many young Innu it is a lack of opportunity and challenge that can lead to such feelings.

*Lost Past, Lost Future*

Peter Penashue, president of the Innu Nation, sees alcoholism and substance abuse as “a symptom of powerlessness, of alienation and despair in the face of government policies that have deprived us of our land, stripped us of our rights and denied us the opportunity to be a self-determining people.”

Innu and non-Innu agree that the children are caught in a culture clash between the old way (traditionally nomadic hunters) and the new (a settled, wage-based economy). Writing also in *The Globe and Mail*, Eric Hood said, “We . . . created a situation in which their traditional life suffered in comparison to the material excess of modern life. Young people are urged to become educated for this new life, only to be disappointed when it becomes clear that they are equipped for neither the wage economy nor traditional life on the land.” These points of view suggest that substance abuse, violent crime, and suicide can be the result when communities have no real economic base and little confidence in the future.

The 1996 Census revealed some statistics that substantiate why Innu youth in particular might feel helpless in terms of their future. The statistics showed the following:

- Thirty-nine per cent of Innu between the ages of 25 and 44 have less than a grade 9 education. (The national average is four per cent.)
- Only nine per cent of the Innu between the ages of 15 and 24 are in full-time education. (The national average is 59 per cent.)
• Fifty-two per cent of young male Innu are neither in school nor in the labour force.

• Twenty per cent of young male Innu have been in the labour force, but are currently unemployed.

In 1999 Survival, the organization that works with threatened aboriginal groups around the world, called the Innu “the most suicide-ridden people of the world.” (The Innu have a suicide rate of 178 suicides per 100 000 population, whereas the Canadian rate is 14 per 100 000). A 1999 federal-provincial “Report on the Health of Canadians” had already declared that First Nations peoples have a suicide rate two to seven times higher than the national average of other groups in Canadian society.)

Follow-up Discussion

1. Observers have suggested that gas sniffing is only a symptom or external evidence of the despair felt by Innu children. The Innu clearly see self-government and control of their own lands as the key to resolving the desperation experienced by many of their people. Outsiders most often list education, economic opportunity, and a willingness for the Innu to assume some responsibility for their own actions as the primary requirements for bringing about change. Are these two views mutually exclusive? How might they be considered together or reconciled in order to effect a unified approach to the problem?

2. Nothing has brought more attention to the plight of the Innu as a people than the images of the gas-sniffing children of Davis Inlet in 1993 and those of Sheshatshiu in 2000—not even the report by Survival. What does this indicate about the powers of the various media for calling attention to social problems? How might future media coverage affect the finding of a solution to the Innu’s problems?

Voices from the South

Although especially acute in these two northern communities, alienation and despair among young people is not a phenomenon unique to the Innu people. Communities in southern regions of Canada experience such problems frequently but, according to some observers, have greater resources for dealing with it. Write an open letter to the Innu youth of Sheshatshiu and Davis Inlet in which you express what you see as the universal aspects of their problems. Suggest ways you are aware of in which communities in the south cope with such problems among young people.
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Why Gasoline?

Gasoline sniffing is a form of substance abuse that is by no means limited to the Innu communities of Labrador. The Addiction Research Foundation reports that, in 1995, three per cent of students in grades seven through 13 admitted to using inhalants such as gasoline. While gasoline sniffing may happen anywhere, the problem is especially prevalent in isolated northern communities and is regularly reported as a significant problem by First Nations groups. It is one of the most readily available drugs; any unlocked gas tank is an easy target. As Owen Wood points out on CBC News Online, “Inhalants provide a cheap, legal, and easily available high.” The fact that gasoline is a legal substance is one of the things that makes sniffing so difficult to control.

Gasoline is one of a group of petroleum distillates, which also includes airplane glue, paints, cleaning fluids, and lighter fluid. The vapours of drugs classified as inhalants are inhaled to produce mind-altering, or psychoactive, effects. The vapours have effects on the body very similar to those of alcohol: hallucinations, euphoria, lethargy, loss of appetite, slurred speech, and blurred vision. Regular sniffers should also expect to suffer from depression and apathy, nosebleeds, chronic headaches, eye pain, and sores on their mouths and noses. Chronic abusers can expect kidney and liver damage, nervous system and brain damage, and potential heart failure.

Inhalants such as gasoline also have a higher risk of sudden death than all other drugs. Sudden Sniffing Death is caused by unexpected stress triggering irregular heartbeats, followed by collapse and death. Furthermore, inhalants are addictive, and withdrawal is difficult—with effects including hand tremors, constant headaches, excessive sweating, and nervousness; in other words, a state very similar to delirium tremens, or “the DTs.”

Successful treatment for sniffers involves removing them from their peer relationships, building their self-confidence, and providing strong family support.

Follow-up Activity

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has developed a Web site for First Nations youth called the Aboriginal Youth Network. Recognizing the significant problem that sniffing poses for aboriginal youth, the site provides information on solvent abuse. Visit the site at www.ayn.ca/modules/solvent/.

How effectively do you feel the site presents the case against solvent abuse?
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A Sense of Self

“If the Innu had control over their land and what happens on it, they would have the time and space to adapt to outside society at their own pace and in the manner of their own choosing.”
— “Canada’s Tibet—The Killing of the Innu”

The Innu are unique among Canada’s Native peoples in that they have never entered into treaty negotiations in which they have given up any part of their traditional lands. As a nomadic people, they ranged over large parts of Quebec and Labrador for at least 2000 years. It was only in the 1950s, after Newfoundland entered Confederation, that the provincial and federal governments began actively campaigning, with the assistance of the Catholic Church, to settle the Labrador Innu in government-built villages. Such settlement would allow the government to administer aid to the Innu, who were suffering from a decline in the caribou herds, and many Innu saw it as an opportunity to improve their future and that of their children. Village life would provide them with permanent homes and health care, and provide their children with the education they needed to live in the larger Canadian society. However, the price was a radical change in lifestyle for the Innu and government control of their traditional lands.

An Anthropologist’s View

However, as Peter Armitage of Memorial University in Newfoundland points out in his 1991 book *The Innu*, many of the Innu soon viewed this settlement as a tragic mistake. Their lives became filled with social problems like substance abuse and family violence—typical signs of “cultural collapse.” Armitage goes on to describe this problem in detail:

“This problem occurs among the people native to an area when they lose effective control of their lives and access to their traditional lands. One system of culture collapse is the erosion of the people’s self-esteem. As a result, their traditional worldview disintegrates, thus leaving them without the foundation upon which their values and the meaning of their lives were built. The victims of culture collapse often sink into despair and a sense of powerlessness as they come under pressure from immigrant populations and their governments. This, in turn, can lead to a downward spiral of self-hatred and increasingly self-destructive behavior.”

Armitage also discusses other factors that reinforced the collapse of Innu culture, especially among the young. Many Innu communities were located near Canadian settlements whose residents constantly barraged the Innu with the message that they were culturally inferior. The schools provided Innu students with no education in their Native language or about their Native culture, again giving them a sense of inferiority. Because the Innu of Labrador had no status under the Indian Act (Newfoundland was not a part of Canada when the act was passed, and there was no mention of the province’s First Nations peoples when it became a part of Canada), they had no power to pass local bylaws as other Native bands across Canada have.

Critical Thinking

1. What information in this *News in Review* report reinforces the notion of culture collapse suggested by Peter Armitage?
2. Why might the fact that the Innu are a nomadic, hunting people make their resettlement particularly traumatic or problematic?

**A Sociologist’s View**
Maura Hanrahan is a sociologist who has spent several years studying Labrador’s aboriginal communities. She insists that all the visible difficulties in aboriginal communities result from one central problem. Writing in *The St. John’s Telegram* she said, “The key point here is that indigenous people are colonized. They are ethnic minority populations subject to a foreign power. This isn’t just rhetoric; it’s a painful reality for those who are living it.” Aboriginal people have been forced to abandon their own cultures and expected to adopt the values and attitudes of the more powerful group. Even their schools reinforce this approach, with Innu children who speak only Innu-aimun entering a school system where their language is barely used.

**Critical Thinking**
Anti-racist education is a priority in many Canadian schools today. What lessons might be gained from the plight of the Innu that can be applied to any situation where ethnocentric behaviour inhibits a clear understanding of a community’s difficulties?

**An Innu Leader’s View**
In an article in *The Globe and Mail*, Innu Nation president Peter Penashue echoes the views of Armitage and Hanrahan. “Deciding that the Innu way of life was inferior to the Euro-Canadian one, you tried to force us from our land, put our children into your schools and make us live according to your laws.” He goes on to say that this attack on the traditional Innu way of life “. . . threw us off balance and we began to lose our sense of who we are individually and collectively. Some of us lost pride and self-image; some tried to drown our sorrows in the bottle. And yes, some of us, because of our drinking, neglected our children so they followed our example and engaged in self-abuse such as gas sniffing. . . . [but] we are committed to finding solutions that address both the symptoms and the causes of the disintegration of Innu society. We know that the solutions must be our solutions.”

**Critical Thinking**
Psychologists point to a “loss of a sense of self” as a key factor in emotional disturbance among young people. Why is this a universal problem of which the Innu situation is a particularly tragic example? How is a positive sense of self instilled in a young person? What social attitudes or behaviour can contribute to a negative individual sense of self?
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What the Innu Want

“Most elders and many younger people spoke of how the land claims process is upside down. They felt the governments should be the ones ‘claiming’ the land, coming to us to ask for land. They pointed out how the Innu have never signed a treaty to sell or surrender their land. Elders spoke of their childhood when they would walk vast distances throughout Nitassinan [the Innu name for their traditional lands], and how they never saw government or non-Innu people live on or occupy these lands. Many were incredulous at the process through which governments came to claim Nitassinan as Crown Lands. Many felt that the government should prove its title or rights to the land. They thought that non-Innu simply moving into Innu lands was not sufficient grounds to acquire legitimate title to the land. Because the Innu had welcomed non-Innu and were willing to share the land, did not mean that they had surrendered ownership.”

— From “Money Doesn’t Last, the Land is Forever,” the final report (July 1998) of the Innu Nation community consultation on land rights negotiations

“One thing we need to ensure the future of a healthy, vibrant Innu society is a comprehensive land-claims agreement that recognizes (not extinguishes, as is Canada’s policy) Innu rights, including ownership of sufficient lands and resources so that we can build a self-sufficient economy. We do not oppose developing the resources on our lands. But the pace and scale of development must be compatible with our continued use of the land for traditional activities.”

— Peter Penashue, President of the Innu Nation, from his article “Northern Crisis” in The Globe and Mail

These two passages sum up the basis for the Labrador Innu negotiating position with the governments of Canada and Newfoundland. The chief points of their land claim are the following:

1. The land (Nitassinan) is the foundation of Innu society.
2. The Innu have never surrendered their ownership of this land.
3. The Innu welcome the economic development of their lands, but at their own pace and on their own terms.
4. The problems of Innu society are directly related to the governments’ attempts to relocate the Innu to settled communities and to control the development of their traditional lands.

The Innu Concern over the “Assault on the Land”

The Innu demand for control over land development is a direct response to a series of private and government initiatives they have found especially disruptive. They point to the following major examples:

1. The Lower Churchill Project

Hydro-Québec and Hydro-Newfoundland are planning the Lower Churchill Project, which is expected to flood 900 square kilometres of land in Quebec and another 246 in Labrador. Much of this territory is traditional Innu land. It was only after loud and repeated protests that
the Innu were even consulted on the future of the development; their views had been completely ignored in the earlier development on the Upper Churchill River. The Innu are not totally dismissive of the new project. Armand McKenzie, an Innu lawyer, has stated that if the project is found to be viable on both environmental and economic grounds, the Innu are prepared to negotiate with the two governments.

2. The Voisey’s Bay Project

Inco intends to develop an extensive nickel mine at Voisey’s Bay, Labrador. The Innu are concerned not only by its impact on the environment but also by its impact on their family and community social structure. Larry Innes, a law student at the University of Victoria, supported their concern when he wrote in *The National Post*:

> “Recent research in Northern Manitoba and Alaska on communities that received significant employment and other benefits from hydro and road development supports the conclusion that such market benefits might in fact contribute to social breakdown and exacerbate the cycle of substance and family abuse where there are no effective means of control over the pace and scale of development. Where Northern resource developments appear to be a success . . . the common denominator seems to be the significant degree of control that local communities have over the project and their participation in it.”

An independent environmental review panel appointed by the governments of Canada and Newfoundland and the Innu Nation and Labrador Inuit recommended proceeding with Voisey’s Bay. But it also recommended that this happen only after land claims had been resolved and impact-benefit agreements had been concluded with both the Innu and Inuit. The Innu and Inuit welcomed the recommendations, but they were rejected by both governments.

3. Low-level Flight Training

Since 1979, Canada has used the air base at Goose Bay for low-level flight training for NATO forces. Over 7000 sorties per year have been flown, often at less than 50 metres above ground, at supersonic speeds. These flights are distressing not only to the Innu but also to the wildlife that provides their traditional food during the hunting season. The Innu have protested these flights for years—even occupying the runway at Goose Bay—but have been ignored by the government. In fact, in 1996 the number of permitted low-level sorties was raised to 18 000 per year.

The Innu Demands

In early 1999, the Innu made it very clear what they were expecting from land claims negotiations in Labrador. The main proposal was for the creation of two different categories of land under a land-claims agreement.

The first category would involve 65 000 square kilometres of land that the Innu consider the most important; this would be exclusively administered by the Innu government. The second category, to be co-managed by the Newfoundland and Canadian governments and the Innu, would comprise another 78 000 square kilometres.

The Innu would also like to see a series of parks and reserves created in other parts of Labrador, many of which have already been recommended by Parks Canada and provincial wilderness committees.
The first category of Innu lands represents slightly more than 23 per cent of Labrador; the second category is an additional 22 per cent.

The Innu also demand that all industrial development projects in these areas be placed on hold until the land claims are settled.

**Reaction**

As you might expect, not everyone has eagerly embraced the Innu position. Peter Fenwick, a regular columnist who writes on land claims and aboriginal issues in *The St. John’s Telegram*, described the Innu land claim as “bloated,” and the situation as one where, according to him, 1500 Innu are laying claim to nearly 50 per cent of Labrador, totally ignoring the needs of another 26 000 Labrador residents and the 520 000 island-based Newfoundlanders. He also points out that the larger population of Labrador Inuit have an agreement in principle giving them ownership of 15, 600 square kilometres of territory, about six per cent of Labrador. The federal and provincial governments, he predicts, will offer the Innu half or less than that which the Inuit received, with some limited rights in other parts of Labrador.

Fenwick also claims that the hydroelectric and other projects are far too important to the province to be delayed by stalled negotiations, and encourages the government “. . . to disregard the Innu . . . and proceed without a land claims settlement.”

**A Final Word from Peter Penashue**

“We are currently in claims negotiations and we remain hopeful that Canada and Newfoundland will change their positions on the amount of land and resources they want the Innu to give up. If Canada’s and Newfoundland’s proposals prevail, we won’t have sufficient land and resource revenues to build a self-sufficient economy; we will remain welfare dependent. Is that what Canadians want?”

**Discussion**

1. With reference to the views expressed above by Peter Fenwick, how realistic do you think the Innu land claims proposals are?

2. Should the Innu’s 2000-year history in Nitassinan, in addition to their never having concluded a treaty surrendering their land, play a special role in setting the parameters for these land claims negotiations?

3. How should the previous policies of the Newfoundland and Canadian governments, and their negative effects on the social life of the Innu, be taken into account during the current negotiations?

4. What do you feel are the rights of the Innu in terms of expecting the rest of Newfoundland, one of the least wealthy provinces, to postpone needed economic development until the land claims are settled?

5. How does this information underscore the conundrum of the majority-minority dilemma that is at the base of many aboriginal issues throughout the world? Why is it a conundrum?
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Discussion, Research, and Essay Questions

1. Writing in *The National Post*, Patricia Pearson, a Newfoundland writer, said, “The Innu are not isolated from us in a meaningful sense—they are isolated from themselves. Cosmologically and culturally, they are now in the middle of nowhere.” In light of what you have seen and read, how valid do you think this statement is?

2. Survival, the British-based aboriginal rights group, has played a major role in drawing attention to the plight of the Innu and has also condemned Canada’s Comprehensive Claims policy in land negotiations as violating fundamental principles of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights on the Rights of Peoples. (The organization’s report, “Canada’s Tibet—The Killing of the Innu” can found on the Web at www.survival.org.uk/ir%20contents.htm) In your opinion, does the Canadian government have any obligation to respond to these criticisms or from such pressure from outside organizations?

3. Many indigenous peoples around the world are subject to pressures similar to those affecting the Innu. Survival calls this “. . . the desperately difficult problem of how to reconcile two very different ways of living—their own, and that of ‘the West.’” Survival provides information about a number of these peoples on its Web site at www.survival.org.uk. Visit this site, and use its information as a backgrounder for a report on threatened peoples around the globe.

4. Survival makes pointed comparisons between China’s treatment of Tibet and Canada’s treatment of the Innu Nation. Research Chinese government policies toward Tibet, and assess alleged similarities with Canada’s policies toward the Innu.

5. Peter Penashue, president of the Innu Nation, has written: “The Innu way of life today is about preserving choice. Some of our young people will live on the land and pursue a traditional life. Others will decide to become truck drivers or business people or doctors. As we re-establish our society and as our young people learn to take pride in being Innu, abuses will decline as they do in every other society.” How realistic do you think his prediction is? What needs to be considered in order to answer this question?

6. Sheila Keefe, a Métis graduate student studying the media treatment of First Nations peoples, noted that virtually every media story about Davis Inlet since 1993 has mentioned the suicidal gas-sniffing children. As a result, Davis Inlet has become a media symbol of despair. What effect might this kind of exposure have on a community’s self-perception?

7. Can urban Canadians truly understand the worldview of an aboriginal nomadic people? How might a cross-cultural conflict affect land claim negotiations?