

## Chapter 4

### Innu Nationalism: The Past in Pursuit of the Future

...you see all of us I think, has a seed that is planted in us, we all know where we belong but sometimes we are confused about how strong that seed should be. We have to retrain ourselves to think that we can be strong and proud... (President, Innu Nation).

Politics has become a central part of everyday life in Sheshatshit. Many of the "webs of significance" in which the Innu are currently suspended are political webs. The political culture which has developed over the last fifteen to twenty years reflects a growing political consciousness and a strong desire on the part of Innu leaders to free themselves from the tutelage and control of Euro-Canadian bureaucrats and missionaries.

Innu leaders have, since post-settlement political activities began, espoused a highly ethno-nationalistic ideology which directly confronts the legitimacy of the state (Tanner, 1993:76). Tanner argues that this form of political expression is rooted in the cultural history of the Innu, who maintain that they have always had a concept of independent nationhood, albeit hard to verify (Tanner, 1993:77). Today the campaign for self-government is infused with symbols of Innu ethnicity that revitalize the memory of an Innu past and provide a general framework for a future which is distinctly

defined as "Innu". As illustrated in the previous chapter, the ethnic symbols being employed are effective primarily in the political arena; within the community the meaning these symbols hold is more complex.

The transformations in the political organization of the Innu over the past 100 or more years have been quite dramatic. Prior to settlement a primarily egalitarian form of political organization existed. During the early settlement years, overwhelmed by the rapidity of change and the Innu responded with relative submission to the imposition of a political hierarchy by the Church. Soon after the first generation of formally educated youth came of age, a new political body came into being. Today Innu Nation politics are forceful, highly independent and nationalistic.

#### **4.1 An Overview of Political Development**

Early structures of leadership and authority were, according to Mailhot and Michaud (1965:97-110) and McGee (1961:35-37) situationally determined. In the case of group caribou hunts, a different chief was selected each time and his authority was limited to a particular hunt. The older, more experienced hunters usually held these positions; they were never hereditary (Mailhot and Michaud 1961:97-110). The hunting groups were made up of bilateral kin and membership was fluid and flexible. The male elder was often the consensual leader (Tanner, 1993b:1).



During the large summer gatherings, a chief would be selected by the missionary, however this position of leadership would not necessarily be accorded recognition by other community members. Within the family tent the father was supposedly the boss and the chief carried no weight. The father "may be influenced by his cronies, by the will of his wife, and even by his children and other members of his household. The chief does not even enter into consideration. In effect there is no chief" (McGee, 1961:36).

A common misconception amongst ethnologists studying "primitive" societies was to view egalitarian societies as apolitical and devoid of power structures. This was due to the early conceptions of power as being based on relations of command-obedience (Clastres, 1987:7-26). A similar tendency occurs in Speck's accounts of Innu political organization prior to settlement in the early 1900s. In this account the Innu were described as totally lacking political and social organization and community ritual prior to settlement. He attributed this condition to the vast country, sparse population base and the seasonal separation into small family groups which remained primarily out of contact for most of the year (1935:16-21). To the extent that religious and political activities among the Innu pertained to flexible and territorially mobile groups, they did lack the type of organizational structure that might have existed within a more

fixed and bounded community. Speck's conception of the political hindered his ability to understand the forms of political organization which did exist outside of a fixed form of social organization.

Henriksen (1989) who lived among the Innu from 1966-68 provides some insight into the values and inherent tensions which existed within the leadership and social organization of the Naskapi hunters of Utshimassit. Leadership and social organization were characterized by the tension between autonomy and sharing. The distribution of meat and skins by hunters to families in their immediate camp and visitors played an essential role in assurance of their own survival. And in the case of sickness or a bad hunt, it assured greater mobility between camps and maintained a system of generalized reciprocity. The ability of a hunter to provide meat and skins to camp members was an expression of his strength and competence as a hunter (1989:41). Given the equal distribution of material wealth among the Naskapi, the role of wotshimao or "leader of the hunt" was determined by skill and reputation and not by material status. Every man who had a wife and ammunition (signs of autonomy) was able to compete for this position (1989:48). The role of leader was always changing and would often depend on who left the camp first in the morning and who decided to follow. There always had to be a leader in a group hunt, but hunters would occasionally go out on their



own (1989:45). Leadership, was generally enjoyed in proportion to one's ability as a hunter, but a lesser hunter could also succeed in attaining the position of leader, if he so desired, even if only for one day (1989:48).

The egalitarian and consensual process used in the assignment of leaders did not reflect the lack of importance or status of this position. Henriksen wrote, "There is no doubt that it is extremely meaningful for a Naskapi to be a first man" (1989:47). The strong sense of competition in the hunt would be channelled into who could shoot and give away the most caribou (1989:49-50). The stress that the Innu put on the values of equality, independence and autonomy existed in tension with the position of the wotshimao and created a dilemma in Innu culture (1989:51-52).

Leacock commented on the relative lack of rank differences between individuals in Northwest River while she was doing fieldwork there in the 1950s.

I was struck particularly by the unquestioned acceptance of and respect for each individual; by the fact that all persons, irrespective of age or sex were not only respected for their real abilities, but were accorded considerable tolerance for their weaknesses (1981:40).

She provides an illustrative example of this while trying to buy a canoe.

I was surprised at the blunt way my informant derided his brother's ability to make one. Old Pien, he said, was the one who made a good canoe. Later I questioned the brother, to get

the other half of the story-so I thought- and to my surprise he said as bluntly, "Me, I make a lousy canoe. Old Pien is the one who makes a good canoe." The brother made, however, beautiful snowshoes, and was calmly proud of his work (1981:40).

However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, differences in status have been attributed to the distinct family groups associated with specific hunting territories. Prior to settlement the four subdivisions within the band were distinct but closely connected kinship groups. Since then a lot of intermarriage has taken place, making the kinship networks in the community quite complex (Mailhot, 1993).

Today patronage among these groups dominates the political landscape in the community. One's post-secondary educational possibilities and access to jobs is largely determined by whether or not someone from your group or extended family has a position in the Innu Nation or Band Council. The higher-status groups who had aligned themselves with the Church were among the first to receive houses and their children were the first to attend school. As a result several members of this group have come to occupy many of the leadership positions.

Formal political organization in the community began with a period of symbolic chiefs, put into place by the missionaries. During the early years of settlement the Innu lacked a unified political ideology or a public voice with



which to espouse one. In 1969, when the Churchill Falls hydro-electric project flooded vast tracks of their hunting territory and left Innu camps and hunting gear under water, no public outcry was heard from the Innu (Tanner, 1993:77). At this point, very few Innu were fluent in English or familiar enough with the government bureaucracy and the media to voice any outrage they may have felt (Armitage, personal communication). Prior to the 1970s, the Sheshatshit Innu were more or less isolated from mainstream aboriginal political groups in Canada (Tanner, 1993:78).

Innu political organization did not gain real momentum until the mid-1970's. The early political leaders were young men; the first generation to grow up in the community. They were the first Innu to have received a formal education in English and were able to read and write in Innu-aimun. In 1973, when government funding became available to Native groups from the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, these young, educated leaders began to take a prominent role in addressing what they perceived to be the "real" interests<sup>25</sup> of the community.

Initially the Innu joined the Native Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (NANL). In 1975, the NANL changed

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<sup>25</sup> I am referring to the interests identified by the Innu leaders who were expressing the concerns of the Innu as opposed to those defined by the Church.

its name to the Indian and Metis Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (IMANL). Shortly after the IMANL was established, the Innu leaders broke away and formed the Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association (NMIA, later to become the Innu Nation) (Kennedy, 1987:16-17). The break from IMANL was based on their motivation to increase direct funding for their own political agenda and also because the Innu were concerned that Mi'kmaq from island Newfoundland would dominate leadership positions within IMANL. The Innu leaders claimed that their Mi'kmaq partners were less aboriginal (Kennedy, 1987:17). Despite their relative inexperience, Innu politicians proved to be highly instrumental in their approach.

In pursuing their own specific political goals, Labrador Innu leaders will often deal in an openly assertive manner with any others who express different aims to their own. This is even the case when dealing with leaders of the larger neighbouring aboriginal groups, the Labrador Inuit or the Quebec Innu, and it is also often the case when dealing with non-aboriginals. Even allies, if they do not agree with a leader's aim and strategies, may find themselves dealt with in an unexpectedly hostile manner (Tanner, 1993:81-82).

In the late 1970's allies from mainstream Canadian indigenous groups as well as non-Innu consultants, social scientists and political activists began arriving in Sheshatshit. Some of these individuals were particularly influential in introducing theories of dependency and decolonization to Innu leaders. Many of these theories provided Innu leaders of the time with



a framework and a vocabulary through which their ideas could be expressed.

The period from 1977 to 1986 saw the growth and expression of a pan-Innu ethnic-nationalist ideology among the Innu leaders. Leaders from Sheshatshit and Innu communities in Quebec travelled to Geneva and elsewhere, meeting with the United Nations and other agencies to protest the treatment of the Innu by the Canadian government. In the early 1980s, the leadership began focusing their efforts on the use of Innu airspace for low-level flight training by air forces from Canada, the United States, Germany, Holland, and Great Britain. Supporters from Canadian peace groups, churches, the general public, as well as European peace groups, rallied around the Innu in their opposition to low-level flying.

In 1990, the NMIA changed its name to the Innu Nation. The Innu Nation has taken an aggressive role in negotiating for territorial and political rights with the federal government. Having never relinquished control of their lands by treaty or given consent to government use of Innu lands and resources, the Innu Nation demands that their aboriginal rights to the land and to self-government be recognized. Gaining control of Nitassinan is regarded as essential to retaining their culture, relationship to land, Innu-assi and traditional spirituality.

Self-government is described by the Innu Nation as being:

the right of Innu to be self-determining now and for the many generations of Innu to come. It means an adequate land and resource base and control of those lands and resources. It means adequate jurisdictions to run our own institutions such as schools and other programs for our people that include the special needs of children, elders and single parents. It means adequate finances derived from our lands and resources and compensations for past and continuing illegal use of our lands and resources. It means that we will make the decisions about what other uses can be made of our lands. If permits or licenses for use of our lands are issued we will issue them and decide on the royalties and terms and conditions attached to the licenses (Innu Nation, 1992b)

Statements like these have provoked conflicts with other interest groups in Goose Bay. At stake is the livelihood of close to 8,000 residents that may be directly or indirectly affected by Innu government. Innu protest actions over the last decade have enraged many previously supportive members of the local non-Innu population, who currently bear little sympathy or support for the Innu cause (see also Armitage and Kennedy, 1989).

The broader Innu population span the borders of Northern Quebec and Labrador and therefore have overlapping claims, but are forced to work through their respective provincial organizations. This has further complicated the land claims process. The Innu Nation had previously rejected the land claims process as it stood. They argued against the extinguishment clause, and the disunity inflicted upon the



Innu by having the Quebec and Labrador Innu as act as separate participants (Tanner, 1992:153). The comprehensive claims process, the Innu Nation claims, is unjust as it now stands because self-government is not guaranteed as the outcome and the process also tends to be restricted to land and resource issues. The alternative routes to self-government agreements through other forms of negotiations "result in delayed powers which do not have constitutional protection" (Innu Nation, 1992b)

Innu protest actions resulted in the federal government offering to accelerate their land claims negotiations and begin the process of framework negotiations (Tanner, 1992:154). The Innu Nation is currently fighting for a "moratorium on all development and licensing of activities in the aboriginal claims territory unless there is consent by the aboriginal people..." (Innu Nation, 1992b:4). Other demands require that an independent body be set up to regulate who qualifies for negotiations, the level of loan funding, and whether or not funding gets cut off (Innu Nation, 1992b:4). As it currently stands the federal government can simply cut off funding if they are dissatisfied with the way a Native organization is conducting itself.

Characteristic of Innu leaders is their principled and independent approach to setting forth demands in negotiations

with both the provincial and federal governments. This stubbornness often works in their interests.

#### **4.2 Nationalism and Ethnicity in Innu Politics**

Nationalism is perhaps the most powerful force in the political world today. The passionate expression of an ethnic identity which often accompanies nationalism has inspired great emotional commitment and taken on manifold expressions amongst peoples in numerous countries of the world today. Nationalism, according to Gellner, is primarily a political principle which maintains that the political and the cultural unit should be congruent. "Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment" (1983:3).

Both Gellner (1983) and Anderson (1991) see nationalism as a recent phenomenon which has grown out of the conditions of industrial society. The concept of nation-ness or nationalism "are cultural artifacts of a particular kind" ones which today "command ... profound emotional legitimacy" (Anderson, 1991:4). Gellner suggests that it is the homogeneity imposed on previously specialized and distinctive cultural groups by industrialization that gives rise to nationalist sentiments. The setting of ethno-political boundaries has proven to be necessary for the increasing



number of minority groups throughout the world who find themselves in the midst of a modern industrial society which seeks to assimilate them into its expansive and homogeneous melting pot. Innu society has been increasingly permeated by the forces and values of industrial society which are constantly conveyed, vividly and convincingly, on televisions throughout the community.

New technologies and literacy have influenced the recent expressions of ethno-nationalism among the Innu. It may be that similar political ideologies existed amongst the Innu in the past, however the current expression of Innu ethno-nationalism appears to be part of a global political phenomenon. Ethno-nationalist politics are integrally related to the existence of the modern industrial state and the struggle for control of political resources (Kellas, 1991:2). Within the current configuration of state politics in Canada, ethnicity is a key resource to be mobilized in this struggle and Innu have been particularly effective in their employment of this resource in the public domain.

The ethnic basis for nationalism is argued by scholars from both primordialist and contextual perspectives. Stack (1986:1), promoting the primordial roots of ethnic nationalism writes "ethnicity becomes an expression of a basic group identity, basic in that fundamental human attributes are passed down from one generation to the next". The group

identity provides cohesion through which individuals experience themselves to be part of a collectivity with distinct boundaries which separate them from "others" (1986:1). Geertz provides an interpretation for the "intangible dynamics of ethnicity or ethnonationalism" (Stack, 1986:1). His emphasis is on the strength and persistence of these primordial ties which he suggests stem from "the assumed 'givens' - of social existence" such as kinship ties, being part of a religious community and a language group with its accompanying social practices. One is not only tied to a collective, a culture and ethnic identity by the relationships to kin, neighbour, fellow believer, or "personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself" (Geertz 1973:259). It is however, paradoxical that, today "primordial" identities which are pre-modern in origin have become the hallmark of contemporary political movements (Kellas, 1991:53).

In his discussion of new social movements, Melucci (1989) characterizes recent forms of collective action as being not necessarily distinct from traditional class conflicts but emerging as new responses to complex contemporary social systems. He states that:



Contemporary movements operate as signs, in the sense that they translate their actions into symbolic challenges to the dominant codes. ... Collective action affects the dominant institutions by modernizing their cultural outlook and procedures, as well as by selecting new elites (1989:12).

Melucci suggests two types of change produced by collective action. The first is a "molecular" change which takes place at the cultural level and affects ways of life, and the formation of both personal and social relationships. The second type of change is one which influences the development of institutions and political systems (1989:77).

Parallel macro and micro manifestations of ethnicity also exist. Ethnicity is primarily a label which describes the process whereby social actors use symbols to provide an image of "us" in relation to "them" as a means of identifying oneself and organizing a social group (Wallman, 1979:3). Micro-scale ethnicity is expressed through interpersonal interactions which the Innu have when they encounter Whites while going to the store, post office or taking a taxi in Northwest River or Goose Bay, whereas macro-scale ethnicity is "a strategic manipulation of symbolic resources by ethnic elites .... it assumes an organized political form, and is directed energetically at states and other collectivities" (Armitage, 1991b:3).

Traits which have come to characterize Innu ethnicity are canvas tents, country life, religious practices such as the

ritual sharing of the makushan feast, drumming, respect for animals and the environment, and the use of snowshoes and traditional clothing (Armitage 1991b:7). While these images serve as symbols for the expression of Innu identity through the mass media, other aspects of Innu culture are left out of the description. The unacknowledged aspects of Innu life today include activities like bingo, dances, rock music, watching television, skidooing, skating, playing hockey, broomball, going to school, attending A.A. meetings or services at the Pentecostal Church. There is a dissonance between Innu life in the community and the symbols employed to represent Innu identity in the media. It is upon this dissonance that political opponents of the Innu in Goose Bay focus their energies. But the dissonance has also become a mild irritant in the consciousness of many Innu who are questioning what it really means to be Innu.

In the winter and fall of 1993, a series of community meetings were held by the Innu Nation in Sheshatshit to address concerns expressed by community members on the growing dichotomy between the country and community. Broadly speaking, the community members who are closest to the land and the traditional lifestyle tend to have the least political input. Yet country life is consistently held up with reverence by political leaders as a symbol of Innu-ness. A few community members are now challenging some employees of the Innu Nation



who seldom go into the country and are therefore accused of losing their connection to the land; the essence of "traditional" culture. The Innu Nation as a political body may be out of touch with country life and there are several leaders who do not spend time in the country; however the president of the Innu Nation and several other leaders do go into the country for several months every year.

This dilemma is a perennial one for leaders of many social movements who are confronted by the need to seek political recognition and legal guarantees which then force them to participate in government administrations and bureaucratic systems, which in turn threaten their very autonomy and survival (Keane and Mier in Melucci 1989:9). The process of becoming institutionalized as a result of trying to bring about social change presents a real challenge for Innu leaders. Though it is an ongoing struggle to avoid the entrenchment of bureaucratization, the difficulties in doing so are reflected in the degree to which the language and organizational structures of the government administration have been adopted by the Innu leaders (see also Dyck, 1991:119-120).

The Labrador Innu have developed a more pronounced and forceful indigenous nationalist ideology than many Aboriginal groups elsewhere in Canada. Tanner suggests several contributing factors.

Although they have always been in Labrador, they have effectively been ignored and have become marginalized. They are a people who are, in the eyes of the majority society that surrounds them, 'hidden in plain sight'. This social marginality can be seen in their relations with governments and other groups in the wider Canadian society, but also and especially within Labrador society which has virtually grown up around them, but which has failed to find for them a satisfactory place. To convey their concerns from within this perceived situation of isolation has led them to adopt more and more strident and extreme forms of communication in their attempt to be listened to and to be taken seriously (Tanner, 1993:94).

Tanner suggests that the recent and rapid loss of autonomy amongst the Labrador Innu as well as social isolation from the surrounding Settler and Euro-Canadian communities have contributed to the emergence of Innu nationalism.

Nationalism may provide the Innu with a new forum for the establishment of an Innu identity and autonomy in tune with the values of the modern world of which they are now inextricably a part. The only means for survival and relatively peaceful existence for the Innu as a distinct group now appears to be through the legitimate assertion of political boundaries. And, as Anderson points out, "nationness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (1991:3).

Despite the political and cultural validity of the nationalist agenda of the Innu Nation, the leaders nevertheless have to deal with a dramatic contradiction. At



the political level, they overtly advertise Indian identity: language, culture and Indian-ness are displayed with strength and pride. But subconsciously it is still believed that the way to achieve social status is through either being born into or marrying into more acculturated family groups who are "less Indian" (Mailhot, 1993:119-138). Early Innu political leaders who in the late seventies began challenging the legitimacy of the state and asserting an ethnic nationalist ideology were actually the first generation of Innu to have been raised primarily in the community. These early leaders were educated in the community, and some later finished high school in St. John's. Many confessed to not having spent time in the country and yet they are able espouse the interests of the Innu who do remain close to the land and traditions. Another paradox of nationalism is that the cultural symbols that are used in the rhetoric to serve political agendas overshadow the acknowledgment of new cultural practices, like dances, bingo, shopping and television which are also an important part of life in Sheshatshit today. Thus ethnic symbols which seek to define Innu-ness on a collective level undermine the validity of an individual's life experience which are not accurately reflected in the ethnic rhetoric.

#### **4.3 The Innu Nation and the Community**

The Innu Nation's overall purpose, stated in their constitution, is to work towards the fulfilment of sovereignty

and self-determination. The President and most of the administrative staff are based in Sheshatshit. The staff is made up of approximately fifteen people working in the areas of finance, health, social services, education, territorial rights, the environment, communications and administration. The Board of Directors is made up of six representatives from each community, half of whom are male and half female. Gender equity on the Board of Directors is now written into the constitution.

The president of the Innu Nation is in his second term of office. The term of office for the president has recently been extended from two to three years. The 1992 elections for the president and board of directors of the Innu Nation took place about six weeks after my arrival in Sheshatshit. This is an event which is charged with tension. For over a week prior to the vote everyone is preoccupied with the election. A lot of heavy drinking occurs in the period leading up to, during, and after the election. Due to the degree of patronage practised, different family groups have vested interests in who is elected as president and members of the board of directors.

There are complaints of too many 'Whites' working as consultants for the Innu Nation and taking away Innu jobs. Some people are concerned that as the Innu Nation brings the community closer to self-government the Innu Nation will assume too much control over community institutions, creating



a new structure of centralized authority. This is perceived as a problem for many people regarding the Innu Nation's takeover of the school.

The leaders are caught in a double bind. While attempting to revitalize the culture and economy by taking control of local institutions, the leaders often take on roles of tutelage and control previously associated with outside government agents or missionaries thus creating divisions, and giving rise to suspicions and resistance between community members.

Though Innu society did have traditional figures of authority in the context of hunting, this position was not static; and everyone had a strong sense of his or her own personal autonomy. People seldom asserted dominance over one another. A person would be free to speak his or her own mind despite the fact that the rest of the group may or may not be in agreement. If people disagreed they could move their camp elsewhere. (Tanner, 1993:82). The existence of distinct and established positions of leadership continues to be difficult to accept for many individuals who themselves are without access to political power. In order for individuals to maintain their leadership positions it is crucial that they continue to recognize and treat everyone in the community as leaders in their own right. This approach, however, is hard to maintain as Innu leaders today are confronted with the

bureaucratic structures, deadlines and pressures that reinforce a tendency to emulate the somewhat authoritarian practices of leaders elsewhere. Traditional models of leadership continue to determine the way in which leaders are evaluated by community members. However, in the public domain, Innu politicians are evaluated by a different set of standards corresponding with Western political values. Innu leaders are forced to negotiate between an internal leadership style which reflects their Innu-ness and a public style which reflects the degree to which they have mastered the language and form essential in their dealings with provincial and federal bureaucrats. The latter form tends to dominate as Innu leaders spend more and more time in their offices and travelling to meetings in other parts of the country.

Presently, the Innu Nation has a president who, in the opinion of outside observers and some community members, is a very responsible and visionary leader with a commitment to improving conditions in the community. However, as one informant pointed out, if a less competent person is voted in, all the financial resources for the entire community become vulnerable to mismanagement. Some people in Sheshatshit are bothered by the issue of accountability in the context of self-government. However, the problem of centralized financial accountability is one that every democratically elected government must face. While there is a distinct fear



amongst community members of having too much responsibility placed in the hands of one person or family group, at the same time the majority of people do not want to take too much responsibility for fear of making mistakes, being held accountable, and criticized. Thus the person in a position of leadership is covertly admired, but overtly criticized.

Sheshatshit, like communities elsewhere in North America, is a social and political terrain in which the very concept of community is shifting and contested (Fortmann and Roe, 1993:141). Community solidarity is produced in response to issues like school control, but quickly breaks down upon consideration of what an Innu-run institution would involve. School control represents the institution of a new group of Innu elites; the Innu principal and teachers will be faced with the problem of how to manage and delegate authority and control, as will the Innu Nation, which will be in charge of hiring an Innu staff team for the school, thus falling prey to accusations of patronage and nepotism.

The school as a symbol of Innu colonization has long been a source of discontent for the Sheshatshit Innu. Historically criticism has been expressed towards the school for its inappropriate curriculum, the disciplinary measures previously used by priests, sisters and teachers, and the pressure the school traditionally put on parents to remain in the community. Though these conditions have changed, the legacy of

school traditionally put on parents to remain in the community. Though these conditions have changed, the legacy of the school as a form of colonization has remained. Earlier research contracted by the NMIA (see for example Tyrnauer, 1983) documented some of the problems in the Sheshatshit school and the intention to change the system has been a seed in the minds of Innu leaders for many years. Native groups elsewhere in Canada have for several decades been struggling to set up band operated schools (see Barman et. al., 1986, 1987; Canadian Education Association, 1984; Dyck, 1983, 1991; Kirkness, 1992; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Ponting, 1989). The long-term aspiration of Innu leaders to take control of the school eventually came to fruition in 1991.

The catalyst for the Innu Nation to begin the fight for school control was provided by Innu teachers. In 1991, a few high school students were asked to read a political statement to a group of visiting politicians. A non-Innu teacher objected to the Innu Nation involving students in the pursuit of their political agendas. An Innu teacher argued that non-Innu teachers should stay out of Innu affairs. The rest of the Innu teachers then complained to the Innu Nation that it was time control of the school be handed over to the Innu. They were tired of being told what to do by the Whites. This event was followed by the Innu Nation bolting the school doors and the entire community participated in a boycott which lasted



about six weeks before the provincial government entered into negotiations for the transfer of school control. The Innu Education Management Committee (IEMC) submitted a proposal to the provincial Minister of Education for the transfer of school control which advocated that "education is the most vital component in preparation for self-determination and for the survival of Aboriginal people" (IEMC, 1992).

Despite the general support for self-government, some people have voiced their concerns about the ability of the community to effectively run local institutions and make self-government work. As long as school control is conceptualized by the community as an issue of control in the context of attaining Innu self-government, three problems remain:

1. The issue of centralized leadership and control and the implications for self-government within the community remains unresolved and continues to be a source of dissent.
2. The attempt to have the community participate in redesigning and restructuring the concept of education will yield questionable results as long as the current structure remains.
3. The very process of the Innu Nation attempting to involve the community will become quite political and possibly will undermine the potential of effectively involving the community in creative and inventive approaches to transpose Innu cultural values onto a formal educational system.