

CHAPTER EIGHT

*“in the same position as they
were before enlisting”¹*

Exclusionary Liberalism in World War I and Beyond

FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN WESTERN CANADA, DISCIPLINARY surveillance and exclusionary liberalism, operating to restrict the rights and benefits granted to others and to appropriate First Nations' lands and resources were intensified in the years in and around World War I, even as Indigenous people participated in Canada's war effort in a variety of ways. Although First Nations men were specifically exempted from the *Military Service Act* by an Order in Council of January 1918, approximately 4,000 people defined as Indians, or 35 percent of all male reserve residents of military age, enlisted.² When the *Military Service Act* was introduced in 1917, records of Indigenous enlistments were compiled and it was found for example, that even though exempt, every member of the Okanagan Head of the Lake Band who could have been conscripted in the first call had already volunteered.³

Not only were Indigenous people employed directly in the war effort of the British Empire as soldiers, but also their lands and resources, finances, and labour were brought into service. Even before the war had officially begun, militia units sought pieces of reserves at Kamloops, Salmon Arm, and various locations in the Okanagan for rifle ranges and military camps.⁴ As these demands for land for military purposes grew over the course of the

war, they became yet another duty for Indian agents whose capacities were already stretched thin.⁵ Indigenous people were also expected to support the war effort by increasing agricultural production on their reserves. In 1918, for example, the *Kamloops Standard* reported that on the reserves near Shuswap Lake, “The Indians are going about their work enthusiastically, realizing the need that exists for food to help the Allies carry the war to a successful conclusion.”⁶ With limited agricultural land available, and with the Province’s claim to reversionary interest in reserves still not resolved, the federal government primarily restricted itself to applying pressure to secure surrenders and leases to reserves in the railway belt.

In the Treaty 7 region, though, and throughout the prairie west, the pressure was much more widespread and grew in intensity. In the early years of the war, agents and inspectors were directed by Scott and DIA headquarters to encourage Indigenous people in their areas to increase production, reduce consumption, and contribute financially, but this was more or less voluntary.⁷ Beginning in 1918, though, DIA encouragement of Indigenous participation in the war effort on the home front included far more coercive elements. In 1918, the federal government embarked on the Greater Production scheme and appointed Inspector W.M. Graham as commissioner for Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta to oversee the project. The plan was meant to make use of “vacant Indian lands” to increase the production of grain and livestock, and to this end Graham was given extensive authority, and the department was advanced \$300,000 from the war appropriation. The strategy had three basic components. First, the DIA would establish and run Greater Production Farms on reserves, which would take advantage of the labour of local Indigenous people. Second, individual reserve residents were, under Graham’s supervision, encouraged to increase their own agricultural production. Third, Graham was authorized to lease reserve lands to non-Indigenous farmers for agricultural or grazing purposes. Further, Graham was given authority to organize and direct both reserve residents and DIA employees, including hiring or dismissing as he saw fit, and to make any purchases necessary to facilitate it. He was responsible not to Scott as DSGIA, but had “sole management of this work” and reported directly to Superintendent General Arthur Meighen.⁸ In addition to all of this, Graham reported that “many bands of Indians have large sums of money practical [sic] idle, which I think could be used in furthering this big scheme.”⁹

A few days after the Privy Council approved the Greater Production scheme, Scott informed Graham that while he hoped that Indigenous

residents would consent to the use of their lands to further the department's plans, he had secured the opinion of the Justice Department that the *War Measures Act* was sufficient to enable the DIA to appropriate any reserve lands required without the necessity of obtaining the residents' consent.¹⁰ Even with this authority already in place, the department moved to amend Section 90 of the *Indian Act* to empower the Superintendent General to not only grant a lease on any reserve without the necessity of surrender or consent, but also to relieve any band of its funds, similarly without requiring their consent. Minister of the Interior and SGIA Meighen considered this necessary to counter "the power of what one may call reactionary or recalcitrant Indian bands to check their own progress by refusing consent to the utilization of their funds or vacant lands for their own advantage" or in case a band council "through some delusion, misapprehension or hostility" refused to abide by what the department thought necessary to increase production on reserves, which Meighen felt were "far in excess of what they are utilizing now for productive purposes."¹¹ Additionally, as Sarah Carter has argued, the focus on reserves diverted attention away from unproductive land held for speculation by corporations like the Canadian Pacific Railway and Hudson's Bay Company. Meighen admitted that reserve land "over which we have a system and machinery of direct supervision" was especially attractive.¹²

While Meighen continued to publicly support the Greater Production scheme, at one point proudly stating in the House of Commons that "the Dominion Government is the largest farmer in the Dominion," the scheme was much less successful than its promoters hoped.¹³ By April 1919, Graham recommended to the Minister that the department cease "grain-growing independently of the Indians" and turn over all "unused land" and all "machinery, equipment, buildings and so forth" not to Indigenous people, but to the Soldier Settlement Board. Rather than allowing leases on reserve land, Graham argued that the department should secure surrenders, a position that Scott supported as well, and in early 1922 the Greater Production effort came to an end.¹⁴

At least some Indigenous people and church representatives had already expressed their concerns regarding the Greater Production activities long before they were eventually shut down. When their land was returned to them, following the demise of the program, Kainai leaders complained in a nineteen-page memorial to SGIA Charles Stewart in December 1922: "Having seen the Greater Production weeds we think that 'decreased' would be more correct. Much of this G.P. land was returned to our Indians in such

a foul condition that its possession was a misfortune to the Indians who received it.” Reserve lands, they said, were so badly broken that “the Commissioner’s men” were required to burn large areas so that they would look like they had been ploughed from a distance. Shot on Both Sides and other chiefs complained further of incompetent management, priority given to the Greater Production farm in the use of equipment, resources, and supplies needed by reserve residents, Graham’s imperious attitude and disinterest in their concerns, and a variety of other issues.¹⁵

J.A. Newnham, the Bishop for Saskatchewan stated what might have been obvious if the desire of the department had been to actually assist Indigenous farmers and their communities rather than simply turn over their land to benefit settlers.

Surely to seize all the best of the farming land in one reserve after another is not the way to encourage them to be farmers? But this seems to be Mr. Graham’s method lately; and I fear he has somehow gained the ear and the favour of the I.D. at [sic] Ottawa.... It is easy to make a reputation for success in one particular line of work if you determine to sacrifice all other lines for that one. Mr Graham may get the praise for ‘Greater Production’ but it is the poor Indians who make the sacrifice.¹⁶

While the supporters of the Greater Production effort promoted the scheme as a benefit to everyone in the country, Indigenous and not, in the end it was of little benefit to anyone.¹⁷

With the exigencies of war over, one might expect the pressure on Indigenous people to part with their lands and resources to diminish. Yet to the contrary, demands increased with the return of soldiers looking for land. In response, the 1917 *Soldier Settlement Act* created a three-person board that was authorized to make grants of up to 160 acres of crown land and loans of up to \$2,500 to returning soldiers.¹⁸ Inevitably, many looked to Indigenous lands to once again fulfill the requirements of settler society, but there were obstacles.

Late in 1918, Scott wrote to Meighen and stated that the issue of opening reserves for soldier settlement had been considered, but the problem was that this would require coming to some financial agreement with the resident First Nation. In regard to the Kamloops reserve Scott said, “These Indians are aware of the value of their reserve and will not part with it without proper

compensation.”¹⁹ Within a few months, the department was actively working with the Soldier Settlement Board to acquire reserve land for returning non-Indigenous soldiers.²⁰ While neither the board nor the DIA had the power to expropriate reserve land for the purposes of soldier settlement, Meighen announced that such power might be considered in the future if First Nations “should become recalcitrant, or if there should be anything in the nature of mere obstinacy as against their own interests and the interests of the State.”²¹ In the meantime, the department significantly increased its efforts to secure as much remaining Indigenous land as possible by obtaining surrenders.

In the prairie west, W.M. Graham was particularly successful in securing reserve surrenders and arranging for previously surrendered land to be turned over for soldier settlement. In their enthusiasm, he and his colleagues in some cases even attained land that held no interest for the Soldier Settlement Board. Like pre-war surrenders, there is evidence that at least some cases considerable, at times dishonest and extra-legal, pressure was employed to convince Indigenous people to give up their land.²²

In British Columbia, where reserves were already small, Indigenous people also faced demands from settlers and the DIA that they restrict themselves further to make room for returned soldiers.²³ Applications to take over reserve land near Kamloops were presented from as far away as New Brunswick.²⁴ Kamloops reserve one, large by British Columbia standards, was sought in order to construct a “model town” for “invalided returned soldiers.”²⁵ A supporter of this scheme, H.T. Dennison, Secretary of the Kamloops Board of Trade when it appeared before the McKenna-McBride Commission, suggested predictably that the Secwepemc should be removed from “where they are now squatted so unpleasantly for all parties concerned.” In anticipation of complaints regarding the desecration of a cemetery on the reserve, Dennison argued that the government could care for it “and with a small park around it, could even be made a point of attraction. This I beleive [sic] would please the Indians.”²⁶ Inspector Megraw, recommended only that “care be taken to prevent a repetition of allowing them to crowd together again in a village.”²⁷

While First Nations were expected to give up portions of what remained of their lands for returning non-Indigenous soldiers, their own sons and daughters who served found that little had changed in their favour while they were away. As DIA secretary J.D. Maclean explained in 1922: “These returned Indian soldiers are subject to the provisions of the Indian Act and are in the same position as they were before enlisting.”²⁸ While their lives and their land were threatened, military service by Indigenous people of

western Canada did not guarantee that they would be treated equally to their non-Indigenous comrades-at-arms when they returned home. Despite their sacrifices and regardless of their relative worthiness or that of their relatives, all continued to be judged on a plane reserved for those defined as Indians.

Land was not provided for First Nations veterans as it was for non-Indigenous soldiers, rather they were provided merely with usufructuary rights to land on reserves through the issuance of location tickets. An amendment to the *Indian Act* in 1919 empowered the deputy superintendent general to acquire reserve land for this purpose without the necessity of securing band council consent.²⁹ In this way, the DIA could advance its objective of further wresting reserves from collective control, while giving the appearance of equal treatment for Indigenous veterans. Neither Indigenous veterans nor their families, though, were treated with a great deal of respect as is evident in the case of George McLean, an Okanagan resident of the Head of the Lake reserve.

McLean joined the 172nd battalion, the same unit as Agent J.F. Smith's son, and left his children in the care of friends on the reserve with instructions that they be sent to the Kamloops Indian Residential School as soon as there was room for them. Since the school regularly exceeded the number of pupils for which it received grant money, and with its costs escalating as a result of the war, the school refused to accept further admissions.³⁰ In order to find a place for McLean's children, Agent Smith wrote to the principal of the Kuper Island Industrial School near Victoria. Principal Lemmens agreed to "take the children of one who is doing his duty for his country. Their presence here will be a lesson to our children." The department, though, would have to make a special funding grant.³¹

By the end of 1917, McLean had been wounded twice. Duncan Campbell Scott acknowledged in his published report that the Okanagan soldier had "single-handed destroyed nineteen of the enemy with bombs and captured fourteen more." He received the Distinguished Conduct Medal and was sent to a convalescent home at Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island.³² A year later he was back in the interior, working for the Douglas Lake Cattle Company and had decided to put up a house. In order to pay for construction materials he requested that the DIA send him any money remaining from his military earnings that were assigned to pay for his children's support. While the total amount held to McLean's credit was \$775, the DIA secretary McLean sent \$200 to Inspector Megraw and claimed there was "no means of knowing how much this man requires."³³ To determine the "most desirable disposition

of the funds in hand,” Megraw sought information from the manager of the Douglas Lake Cattle Company, McLean’s employer, not the ex-soldier himself.³⁴ Soon, McLean requested more money, gave an accounting of how it would be spent, and asked that the balance be invested in a Victory Bond. The DIA sent a cheque and the bond to Inspector Megraw and advised: “You should warn him [McLean] to place it in safe keeping.”³⁵ It is likely that the department based its decision to release the money on McLean’s decision to volunteer to defend his country, his request that his children be sent to the residential school, his willingness and ability, despite his injuries, to hold a steady job at a large established company, his responsible accounting of how the money would be spent, and his patriotic request that the balance due to him be invested in a Victory Bond. But even after experiencing the horrors of World War I and fulfilling DIA criteria for “advancement” in every way possible, the department felt he might still harbour some dangerous lingering “Indianness” and required additional disciplinary surveillance. A non-Indigenous veteran with McLean’s accomplishments and sacrifice would be given status as a hero. George McLean was excluded from such accolades by liberal Canada and warned not to be careless.

While Indigenous veterans could apply for location tickets on reserves as mentioned above, even to qualify for this benefit, much inferior to that offered to other vets, an Indigenous ex-soldier had to satisfactorily demonstrate the “desire of making farming his life work.”³⁶ When Alexander George applied to his Indian agent for a piece of land on the Kamloops reserve, Agent John Smith advised the department that George “before enlisting was very unsteady and frivolous, practically worthless, as far as working on the land was concerned.”³⁷ On the basis of Smith’s appraisal, without consideration of George’s war record, the DIA ruled that the latter would have “to prove his ability to work faithfully.”³⁸

The following year George applied formally to the DIA for land. In addition to his application for a loan, and Smith’s confidential report, George’s wife Mary had to sign a declaration:

I believe that my husband is sincere in his intention of making farming his life work, and that he is aware of the responsibility resting on those who would engage successfully in the farming business. I am willing to live on a farm, am in favour of my husband engaging in farming, and will co-operate with him, and assist him in every way possible.³⁹

Clearly, if Indigenous men were to be transformed into peasant farmers, Indigenous women would be molded into their subordinate help-mates.

The families of soldiers who either did not return from combat or succumbed to war-related injuries were treated no better. The Mountain Horse Kainai family provided three sons to the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The youngest of the three, Albert (Flying Star), was gassed three times early in the war and contracted consumption as a result. He died in Montreal on his way home in November 1915.⁴⁰ Albert's older brothers, Joe and Mike, who had previously been employed as a DIA interpreter and RNWMP scout respectively both enlisted as well and both were subsequently wounded.⁴¹ Albert's pension benefit was awarded to his mother Sikski, but sometimes she had to remind the department to send her monthly stipend along.⁴² When Joe applied through his agent for an advance of \$400 to purchase horses under the *Soldier Settlement Act*, Commissioner W.M. Graham replied simply "I do not think it well to make any purchase of this nature just now, but later the matter will be looked into."⁴³



Kainai recruits, 191st Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, Fort Macleod, Alberta. Back row, left to right: George Coming Singer; Joe Crow Chief; Dave Mills; George Strangling Wolf; Mike Foxhead. Front row, left to right: Nick King; Harold Chief Moon; Sergeant Major Bryan; Joe Mountain Horse; Mike Mountain Horse, 1916. George Coming Singer and Mike Foxhead died overseas. Joe and Mike Mountain Horse were both wounded while their brother, Albert, died of consumption after being gassed. (Glenbow Archives, NA-2164-1).

The treatment of Indigenous soldiers, their families, and all reserve residents during World War I marks a dark chapter in Canadian history and the development of Canadian liberalism. In 1919, though, DSGIA Duncan Campbell Scott wrote:

It is in this year of peace the Indians of Canada may look with just pride upon the part played by them in the great war both at home and on the field of battle. They have well and nobly upheld the loyal traditions of their gallant ancestors who rendered invaluable service to the British cause in 1776 and 1812, and have added thereto a heritage of deathless honour which is an example and an inspiration to their descendants.⁴⁴

Despite Scott's sentiments, Indigenous people remained at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder and excluded from many of the rights that others took for granted.

Conclusion

On March 26, 1920, SGIA and Minister of the Interior Arthur Meighen, who would be prime minister in less than four months, rose triumphantly in the House of Commons and boasted that “[s]carcely a week passes without a surrender being made in some province of a portion of a reserve.”⁴⁵ Liberal Canada was successful, it seemed, at promoting settler interests, while refusing to recognize the legitimacy of Indigenous grievances in southern Alberta, in British Columbia, or in the rest of Canada. Still, several years later D.C. Scott stated publicly that the “treaties have been fulfilled and the Government has in fact gone far beyond their terms in its efforts to care for the Indians and advance their welfare. As a result the aborigines of the Prairie Provinces are now self supporting.”⁴⁶ They were self-supporting perhaps, but not beyond the reach or discipline of the surveying eye of the DIA nor others bent on de-Indianizing Indigenous people. Nor were they freed from the inferior economic and political status that Canadian liberalism had bestowed on them.

The situation faced by the First Nations of the interior of British Columbia differed from that of those in the Treaty 7 region. Even within these areas, the process was not monolithic. Farmers, businessmen, missionaries, police officers from various forces, DIA officials at different levels in the hierarchy, and others who considered themselves part of settler society acted in support

of their own cultural understandings, but in their own ways. Similarly, Indigenous people prepared for the future, within and irrespective of colonialism, in ways that they deemed appropriate, but that were not necessarily shared by all, even within their own communities. Some chose to work with the instruments of the state in the hope of being granted some of the benefits held out by liberal capitalism, while others chose to resist the will of liberal Canada in various ways.

As the result of circumstances specific to each of the interior of British Columbia and southern Alberta in the period between 1877 and 1927, the forces that coalesced in support of liberal Canada's western expansion differed in intensity and composition. This, in turn, ensured the development of discrete contours and timing in the extension of Anglo-Canadian rule into these two regions.

The existence of an already established settler government in British Columbia with its own ideas of what tactics should be employed, and when they should be used, caused adjustments in the advance and operation of Canadian liberalism, how it ensconced itself in First Nations territory, and the ways it encroached on Indigenous lifeways. Local settlers and their political representatives were particularly covetous of First Nations territory, but were relatively candid about their objectives. Canada was legally responsible for protecting the interests of First Nations people, but in practice it was far more interested in appeasing British Columbia. When Indigenous voices rose to challenge policy, legislation, or the management of their affairs, so that relations between the two orders of government might be jeopardized, they were uniformly ignored, circumvented, labeled irrational, or regarded as being the product of outside agitation. Nonetheless, because of the looser weave in the surveillance web in the interior of British Columbia, Indigenous people there were less subject to the day-to-day intrusions into their lives than those in southern Alberta during this period.

In southern Alberta there was no established local settler government to interfere with implementation of Canada's liberal objectives. Yet the First Nations party to Treaty 7 fared little better at retaining control of fragments of their territory, which they had been guaranteed by their treaty with Canada, than those in the interior of British Columbia who had no treaty protections. Though together the Treaty 7 First Nations survived the territorial seizures of this period with more reserve land per capita than those in the combined Kamloops and Okanagan areas, the daily intrusion on their lives and the disruption of political, economic, social, and all other cultural systems was more dramatic.

In both regions, reserves were established on fragments of Indigenous territory which were themselves further reduced by a variety of means. In British Columbia, already-reserved lands were appropriated by a series of commissions formed to offer the pretense of gaining Indigenous consent. Ultimately, though, each of these was charged with alienating as much agriculturally-valuable land as possible regardless of whether or not meaningful consent was offered. Treaty 7 appeared to offer protection for reserved lands, but here too, questionable DIA practices and changes to the *Indian Act* allowed for further alienation where consent was similarly dubious at best. While in both regions there was the appearance of consultation, this was limited and for the most part designed to be of little consequence.

There were differences in the approaches taken by British Columbia and Canada, but these are better seen as the result of tactical differences than inconsistent objectives. Due to Canada's more varied population base and international considerations, it was less careless in applying exclusionary liberalism and more interested in tightly managing the information it released than was British Columbia. As demonstrated throughout the preceding study, Canada was not about to let a consistent application of policy regarding Indigenous title, treaties, or reserved lands stand in the way of the transfer of Indigenous territory and resources to non-Indigenous settlers, especially once they began to arrive in greater numbers in the decades after 1877. Rather, it developed a variety of tactics and rested on an assortment of justifications to facilitate these transfers. As in the British Columbia interior, liberalism in southern Alberta sought to silence, negate, or disallow dissenting voices.

From the study presented here, it is clear that Canada was very selective about upon whom it bestowed any benefits that might be derived from liberal capitalism. In both regions, liberalism operated consistently to exclude Indigenous peoples in various ways from the freedoms, rights, and benefits that others in Canada took for granted. Further, liberal Canada purposefully manipulated those few democratic structures established for Indigenous people and attempted to co-opt or destroy the egalitarian structures that pre-existed the arrival of DIA supervisors. Canadian liberalism did not operate to advance liberty or equality for First Nations people or protect their property, rather it had a markedly debilitating effect on virtually every aspect of their lives from their economic strategies and adaptations, to their spirituality, and from their political structures, to their familial relationships. All the while it functioned to naturalize Anglo-Canadian culture and values.

The examination of the extension of liberal colonial rule in these two regions demonstrates that Canada's effort was indeed a flexible, fluid,

multifaceted, and adaptable project that incorporated an array of strategies and justifications to suit local circumstances and mitigate against, though never completely neutralize, the ability to resist colonial intrusion. In this way it is common to imperial expansion elsewhere as discussed above. Everywhere the same, yet different.

Similar to other colonial adventures as well, liberal expansion in western Canada was facilitated, fashioned, and justified largely with the aid of a disciplinary surveillance network. Between 1877 and 1927, because of the tighter weave in the network, surveillance was far more intensive and dramatic in southern Alberta than in the Kamloops and Okanagan regions of British Columbia. As has been demonstrated throughout this study, the complex associated with the pass system, the presence of the mounted police, and the increased staffing levels of DIA in southern Alberta due in large part to the existence of the treaty, ensured that the impact of the disciplinary surveillance network was felt in the day-to-day lives of First Nations people sooner in the Treaty 7 region than those of Indigenous people in the interior of British Columbia. Further, while Canada more densely masked the exclusionary predisposition of liberalism than did British Columbia, its will to contain and regulate Indigenous people for the benefit of non-Indigenous settlers was more comprehensive, overt, and forcefully extended in southern Alberta than in the Kamloops and Okanagan regions in this period. This is not to say that liberalism and disciplinary surveillance had no impact in the interior of British Columbia, only that, between 1877 and 1927 at least, the supporting structures were not as well-developed or staffed.

In both regions, overt resistance was most often perceived by settler society as originating from non-Indigenous “agitators.” To admit otherwise would not only threaten to expose the actual results of liberalism in Canada, but would also force the admission that Indigenous people were capable of reasoned opposition to unjust legislation and policy that should only be expected from those granted citizen status. If either of these points were conceded, the continued alienation of Indigenous land and resources by questionable means would be much more difficult to justify.

In the southern interior of British Columbia, because they retained a relatively strong economic foundation for a longer period before it was destroyed by liberal colonial rule, First Nations were more able to resist on a number of fronts, both in an organized manner with First Nations from other regions, and in a more localized fashion. In Treaty 7, on the contrary, the surveillance network provided by the presence of the DIA representatives and mounted

policemen in close proximity to Indigenous communities, coupled with a faltering pre-contact economy, was successful in limiting the potential for organized resistance during this time period.

It would be difficult to actually quantify the success of opposition or what the results would have been had there been none. Certainly, those historians looking for a comprehensive revolution would be disappointed with this story. Still, community-based resistance is arguably the most effective, or is at least necessary to provide a foundation on which larger scale opposition can be established. In both regions, localized forms of defiance do seem to have had an effect in at least limiting the impact of avaricious colonialism in Canada. The struggle that Indigenous people and their communities have decided to engage in has not let up in the intervening years despite the array of strategies, tactics, and forces employed to contain it. As Cooper and Stoler suggest: “[o]ne of the central themes of colonial history—elite efforts to reproduce distinction across lines of social and cultural connection and popular investment in those distinctions—is not limited to a remote past or to ‘somewhere else.’”⁴⁷ Rather, liberalism in Canada, continually shifting and adapting to changing circumstance and growing in sophistication, continues to exclude particular groups and individuals from access to its benefits and to deny them the right to choose their own lifeways. As Chickasaw legal scholar James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson points out:

Contemporary liberal society argues that the best Aboriginal people can do is to avoid unnecessary exclusion by fitting in with the Eurocentric version of society. In effect, colonized people are being asked to give up their constitutional rights (that is, their Aboriginal and treaty rights) and to recognize a Eurocentric and individualistic legal tradition that perpetuates the colonial rule of law.⁴⁸

Anishinabeg author Dale Turner advances this point further by arguing that liberal Canada presents the “illusion of listening to Aboriginal people” but it narrowly constructs the basis and extent of rights that Indigenous people can expect.

Aboriginal interpretations of sovereignty, and their rights, do not measure up to the Euro-Canadian legal and political constructions of sovereignty. Aboriginal peoples must translate their views of sovereignty into a language which is largely not their own. This

translating process continues to marginalize and condemn the Aboriginal voice, and more importantly, it continues to justify the oppression of Aboriginal peoples, while maintaining the illusion that Canadian governments are actually listening to our voices.⁴⁹

There is still a tendency in the twenty-first century for liberal Canada to listen only to the Indigenous voices it wants to hear and to construct not only a single Indigenous perspective but to present limited forms of self-governance as the only feasible solution to demands for sovereignty. Any dissenting voices that challenge or problematize the liberal capitalist order or the primacy of individual rights are ignored or diminished.⁵⁰ As Andrew Woolford confirms, “Today it is clear that, in treaty making, the common sense of neoliberal economics has much greater currency than do questions of justice.”⁵¹

While Indigenous peoples saw little justice in southern Alberta or the British Columbia interior in the period between 1877 and 1927, the extent to which it will play a role in the future is yet to be determined. As Foucauldian-influenced scholar Alessandro Pizzorno has argued:

One will know that freedom is alive not when the interests emerging in a society are allowed to express themselves, be represented and be pursued; not even when dissent and heresy are allowed to manifest themselves; not merely when arbitrary decisions are solidly checked; but, rather, when contestation, unruliness, indocility, intractability are not yet abolished, when the recalcitrant is not yet transformed into the dutiful.⁵²

It seems there is still a way to go on a journey that is fundamentally in opposition to Canada’s continued hegemonic liberalism, which an impressive assortment of structures remain focused on maintaining. It is, though, a journey that Indigenous people have no choice but to take.