**Alan Cairns: Citizens Plus (2000)**

**Thesis:**

The growing emphasis on nation-to-nation relationships with First Nations is problematic. It neglects urban Aboriginals, suggests unrealistic expectations with regards to what governing responsibilities First Nations can sustain, and neglects considering the costs of a lack of citizenship shared between Native and non-Native peoples. The more appropriate model is “citizens plus”, which recognizes First Nations as Canadian citizens with additional differentiated rights.

**Main Arguments:**

Cairns is particularly concerned with the report of Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which he expects to radically transform the position of Aboriginal peoples and nations in Canada. He feels that RCAP has excluded urban Aboriginals, ignored non-identifying Aboriginals, and prioritized cultural survival (focused upon territory) over economic opportunities. All points underscore the central organizing principle of the ‘nation’, rather than the individual. ‘Nation-to-nation’ relationships overwhelm citizen-to-state relationships. This is the modern version of compact theory. Cairns wonders if nation-to-nation is possible given economic interdependence and the contemporary distribution of power. He also worries that unlike other theories of federalism, there is no consideration of shared rule at the centre, or of common citizenship. He asks, “What will sustain our feelings of responsibility to each other?” He also notes that it is problematic to conceive of Aboriginal-state relations in terms of diplomatic encounters between mutually distinct parties, as Aboriginal people are also citizens of Canada.

As an alternative, he proposes “citizens plus”. The idea first emerged from the Hawthorn Report (1966). This is a form of shared but differentiated citizenship. He argues it better accounts of the growing urban Aboriginal population, it reflects the fact that Aboriginal peoples are active in both their nations and the Canadian state, and will sustain citizenship links between Natives and non-Natives.

**Method/Approach:**

Cairns' work is grounded in a normative embrace of the ideal of equality (much like Macklem, below), a repudiation of assimilation, and a concern for Canada as a community. This latter concern is reflected in most of Cairns' writing on the constitution and federalism as well. Also like much of his other output, he gives preeminence to the institution of citizenship as a vertical mediator between state and citizen as well as a horizontal mediator between citizens. As ever, Cairns is an institutionalist.

**Contributions:**

Cairns offers a counterpoint to what he regards as a growing orthodoxy of regarding Aboriginal-state relations as ‘nation-to-nation’. He challenges the notion of treaty federalism as lacking key components required by federal theory. He also suggests that the literature on Aboriginal relations fails to consider ‘the ties that bind’. Like Flanagan, he is chiefly responding to the report of RCAP. Unlike Flanagan, he believes that a differentiated or 'special' status is appropriate, and that priority in time is meaningful.

Dialogues between Cairns and Flanagan subsequent to publishing their texts are interesting given that they both published at roughly the same time and with similar intent (to critique RCAP). Flanagan responds to Cairns by complaining that benefits accruing to special status tend to grow over time, benefit the least needy of the targeted group, and result in inter-group polarization. Citizens plus would only serve to expand the already ubiquitous presence of government on reserves, and will encourage Aboriginals to remain on reserve where there are no prospects for genuine economic development.

Cairns responds that the orthodoxy Flanagan decries is the inevitable result of a people emerging from an extended period of abuse and degradation, and that altering the orthodoxy would do nothing to erase the grievance that would remain. Further, positive policy action in response to Indigenous demands can be positive. Regardless, the sense of difference is real, and returning to a White Paper type policy agenda is simply unworkable.

**\***For an exchange between Flanagan and Cairns that highlights where they agree and differ, see Inroads 10 (2001).