

Canadian Council of Churches

1944-1997

Indian Residential Schools and First Nations Affairs

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Second Annual Meeting 1945

32. Indians

The Commission realizes that much excellent work has been done by government authorities in caring for the American Indians, and recognizes that schools and missions have for many years been carried on with great devotion and considerable success by the Churches. They wish, however, to raise the question whether the time is not now ripe to reconsider more carefully our attitude and treatment of the Indians and to see whether action can be taken with a view to bringing to an end within a period of years the whole system of reservations and integrating the Indian population into the fabric of Canadian society. This would undoubtedly be a project with many difficulties, but it is hard to think that its realization would not be to the benefit of the Indians at present living, and greatly to the benefit of their descendants.

This excerpt was part of the larger report by the Christian Social Council of Canada, a council made up by representatives of the churches and board of Social services. The report presented information in view of the collaboration between the Christian Social Council and the Council of Churches. It also contained sections on race relations, the role of Jews and Japanese in Canada, and French-English tensions. No actions were taken as the report was merely a collection of information.

**Fifteenth Meeting (Sixth Biennial)
1964**

COMMITTEE ON HOME MISSIONS

The Executive Committee of The Canadian Council of Churches, meeting on February 25, 1963, authorized the establishment of a Standing Committee on Home Missions, under a By-Law, as attached.

The Committee has met five times.

Its principal project has been a Consultation on Indian Work, held in St. John's Anglican Church, Ottawa, April 28-29, 1964, under the chairmanship of the Rev. Maurice Wilkinson and the executive direction of the Rev. Fred N. Poulton. Some thirty official church delegates attended. Reports were given about the Indian Work of eight Churches. Representative Indians spoke, and there was valuable and free discussion. In addition, representatives from the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, and the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada made valuable contributions to the two-day gathering.

A leaflet for common use by the Churches in welcoming immigrants is in preparation, and will soon be printed.

Information about Services of Worship in National and Provincial Parks is being collected and collated.

The methods of informing the Churches about the arrival of immigrants by air have been reviewed from time to time.

Dixon A. Burns,
Chairman.

Wilfred F. Butcher,
Secretary.

The standing Committee on Home Missions was created in 1963 to facilitate the coordination and cooperation among the members in matters of common interest. Those included evangelization and education among First Nations. The committee served as a forum for dialogue between Churches, government and Aboriginal associations concerning residential schools and other programs led by members at the time.

**Sixteenth Meeting (Seventh Biennial)
The Ecumenical Task in a Revolutionary World
1966**

UNION OF ONTARIO INDIANS

Dr. Butcher read the following letter which had been received from the Union of Ontario Indians:

October 3, 1966

"Dear Sir:

Enclosed for the consideration of your organization are copies of a brief which the Union of Ontario Indians plans to present to the Canadian government some time during the early part of 1967 (hopefully in January). You will note that the brief calls for the restoration of our treaty rights to hunt and fish at any time for food on Indian reserves and unoccupied Crown lands. A recent decision of the Supreme Court of Canada held that the Migratory Birds Convention Act was drafted in such a way that it took precedence over our treaty rights. Although the Government of Canada probably did not intend this result, the Indian people of this country have been, nevertheless, deprived of these treaty rights.

Accordingly, the Union of Ontario Indians plans to go to Ottawa to present the enclosed brief in the hope that it will persuade the

Government to correct this situation. It would be very helpful if a number of non-Indian organizations sent delegates to support our submissions at the meeting with the Government.

Would you be good enough to consider the brief and let us know at your earliest convenience whether your organization endorses it and whether you will send representatives to the delegation? Of course, as soon as we learn of the date for the meeting, we will let you know immediately.

Should you have any questions or comments, you might reach me at the above address or you might wish to contact our counsel, Mr. A. Alan Borovoy, Director, Labour Committee for Human Rights, 11½ Spadina Road, Toronto, Tel: 921-5861.

An early reply would be very much appreciated.

Very truly yours,
Simpson Brigham,
Secretary-Treasurer."

Dr. Butcher moved, seconded by Fred Haslam, and it was AGREED:

THAT the council receive this letter with sympathy and concern and refer it with the accompanying Brief to the Department of Social Relations for immediate action.

Dr. Wilfred Butcher, General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, presented the letter along with the rest of the report with the Department of Social Relations. This Department was in charge with issues relating to First Nations.

**Seventeenth Meeting (First Triennial)
Count Us In! Christians in the Radical Seventies
1969**

6. Re: Native Peoples:

- a) That the Canadian Council of Churches recognize the critical importance of issues affecting the Native People of Canada at this time, and
- b) That the Council and member churches act in appropriate ways to provide "no strings attached" grants to Native Peoples organizations that will help ensure:
 - i) Funds so that Indians may be brought together to prepare an alternative proposal to the "statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969";
 - ii) Liaison workers in each Province, paid for by the churches, but selected by Provincial native organizations and responsible to them, to help such organizations tap and use existing resources.
 - iii) A national Communications Worker, with offset equipment and other necessary materials, who will work out of the National Indian Brotherhood Office;
 - iv) Assistance in financing the National Office of the National Indian Brotherhood;
 - v) Consultant services in economic development. (It is suggested that the various churches have within their organizations persons expert in matters of finance and economic development whose services might be made available to native peoples to help them use their own resources for the development of their own communities;)
- c) That this Council endorse and will fully support the efforts of the National Indian Brotherhood to secure federal and provincial "no strings attached" grants to provide for the program outlined in 'b)' above, and
- d) That the Council urge member churches to set an example by involving the leaders of national and provincial native peoples organizations in their decision-making committees.

CARRIED.

The council expressed support for aboriginal organizations, mainly the National Indian Brotherhood, an umbrella group that was later replaced by the Assembly of First Nations. The National Indian Brotherhood strongly rejected the 1969 White Paper, which is mentioned in the

resolution above. The paper recommended the abolition of the Indian Act, the rejection of land claims and the assimilation of First Nations.

Eighteenth Meeting (Second Triennial)
Salvation Today
1972

8. Re: Aboriginal Title:

The resolution was presented by Dr. Brisbin:

It was moved by Mrs. Wilson, seconded by Archdeacon Guthand:

"Be it resolved that this Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches endorse the National Indian Brotherhood's definition of Aboriginal Title and request the Government of Canada to recognize the Aboriginal Title of the Indian peoples of Canada as defined by the National Indian Brotherhood."

CARRIED.

Mrs. Wilson explained the meaning of Aboriginal Title as defined by the National Indian Brotherhood.

Through this resolution the Council supported the National Indian Brotherhood's definition of Aboriginal Title. This meant recognition of the obligations to deal with Indian claims in non-treaty areas of the country where Indian people have lost the use of their land. It guaranteed the use and control of Indian lands by Indian people without unauthorized encroachment. It also ensures that treaties meet standards of fairness and that Indians are compensated in case of a loss of their specific rights.

9. Re: Northern Development:

Presented by Dr. Brisbin.

It was moved by Mrs. Wilson, seconded by Archdeacon Cuthand:

"Encouraged by the action of the Government of Canada in making a grant of \$2 million to assist the Government of Quebec in pursuing further studies concerning the ecological and sociological implications of the proposed hydro-electric development of the James Bay area:

Be it resolved that this Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches commend the churches and groups presently involved in assisting Native Peoples in the James Bay area and in the Territories in their common struggle for recognition of their aboriginal rights; and further that we request the federal, provincial and territorial governments to take immediate steps to stop or delay the James Bay Power Project in Quebec, the diversion of the Churchill into the Nelson River in Manitoba, the construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway and Mackenzie River Pipeline Project in the North-West Territories, now underway or being planned, until competent impartial studies have been completed, published and publicly discussed, providing clear proof that completion of the project will not create unacceptable social, cultural or environmental damage."

CARRIED.

The council joins aboriginal rights in rejecting the development of the James Bay Power Project. The project threatened the livelihood of many Cree in Northern Quebec. It caused displacement and a total break down of many communities.

10. Re: International Aboriginal Peoples' Conference:

Presented by Dr. Brisbin.

It was moved by Mrs. Wilson, seconded by Archdeacon Cuthand:

"Be it resolved that this Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches endorse the National Indian Brotherhood's proposal for an International Aboriginal Peoples' Conference, and request its member organizations to commit funds and resources to the National Indian Brotherhood for the purpose of this conference."

CARRIED.

The members Churches were encouraged to support the National Indian Brotherhood in their goal of organizing a conference of aboriginal peoples. Acts like this made 1972 a year of much discussion and support for First Nations.

REPORT FROM ISSUE GROUP (V)

NATIVE PEOPLES OF CANADA

What is Salvation Today for the native peoples of Canada? How can the church break out of the cultural "closed-ness" of our present society? What commitments are we prepared to make to end institutionalized racism?

If salvation means to be fully free and wholly human then the CCC through its member churches must provide an opportunity for open self expression on the part of the native peoples. The right of self determination must be made available to persons whose destiny now resides in the hands of a colonial type of government. The encroachment upon Indian and Eskimo lands by developers from the south must be terminated. Renewal of non renewable resources for short term financial gain must be re-examined in the light of permanent damage to the land and ultimately to the people.

Resolutions supporting the N.I.B. in its seeking of aboriginal rights and of establishing an international secretariat for such rights have been approved. In addition the churches are being asked to support the native peoples in their plea to have their own economic development planned by the indigenous people of the areas concerned. We urge that the government deal directly with the residents and their organizations in seeking information rather than with consultant firms who are beholden to the government for contracts. The CCC should provide for following up these recommendations through its committees and in consultation with the member churches.

The present educational system which removes children from their homes and prevents participation in planning by the local residents should be re-examined.

The James Bay Hydro development should be stopped until such time as full consultation can be achieved with participation of native peoples. Both the United and Anglican Churches have been involved in this area and are available as resources to the CCC and its member churches. A resolution dealing directly with this potential ecological disaster has been approved and we urge the CCC committees to keep the issue before the public.

The CCC and the member churches can be the catalyst that provides room for Canada's native peoples within their own land. Room to be truly human – to plan their own destiny – to live as those who can find Salvation Today.

This report presented by the Department of Social Relations summarized the many actions and resolutions passed in 1972 in support of the National Indian brotherhood and First Nations in general. It also committed the Canadian Council of Churches to re-examine the residential school system among other issues.

**Nineteenth Meeting (Third Triennial)
Jesus Christ Frees and Unites – Canadians?
1976**

Conference on Development and Native Concerns

At the October, 1975, General Board the following motion was passed:

“That this General Board approves of the co-sponsorship of the Canadian Council of Churches with the Inter-Church Project on Northern Development of the projected Conferences on Development and Native Concerns.”

A further motion was also carried:

“That in the light of the speed with which events are moving in the area of Native concerns, we encourage staff to act quickly as events require.”

At the January 27th, 1976, Executive Committee meeting the Canadian Affairs Commission reported that a Listening Conference, composed of representatives from the National Indian Brotherhood, the Native Council of Canada, and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, in cooperation with Project North and the Canadian Council of Churches, was being planned for May 21 to May 25, 1976, at Geneva Park, Lake Couchiching.

The Canadian Council of Churches sponsors the organization of a Conference on Development and Native Concerns, this in light of the James Bay Project in Northern Quebec and the planned Mackenzie Valley pipeline in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

7. **Berger Commission**

Moved by Mike Bradfield, seconded by David Hardy:

"WHEREAS the Federal Minister of Northern Development has reaffirmed that work on the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline may start before the Berger Commission reports, and

WHEREAS this attitude implies a disregard for the welfare and rights of the Native People by using the Berger process to create the (illusion) that the Native Peoples are having an input into decisions which will have a major impact on their lives while the government is willing to act without knowledge of the consequences or without settlement of Native land claims.

This Assembly fully reaffirms the General Board's April 1975 position, namely, that the Canadian Council of Churches call on the federal and the provincial governments to recognize that we cannot, in good conscience, further violate the fabric of life of the people of the North in order to promote the interests of the rest of our society and others with whom we trade. Further, if the resources of the North are to be developed, it must be done in a manner which is determined by the native peoples to be in their best interest and not in a manner which minimizes the social importance of the northern people in order to increase the profits of corporations or the convenience of the rest of us;

that northern development must be controlled by the people of the North and that no work be done on the pipeline until the Commission is completed, its report studied and widely debated.

FURTHER, we commend the work of our member churches and the Canadian Catholic Conference and urge that they continue to put a major effort into getting their Christian concern discussed and understood by the members of their local congregations so that our Church leaders have their support in this witness. We direct staff to encourage and facilitate this process.

FURTHER, as representatives of the member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches, we delegates commit ourselves to play a prophetic role in our church structures and communities to further this witness."

The Berger Inquiry was commissioned by the Federal Government to study the environmental, social and economic impact of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline proposal. Despite the government's threats of starting the project before the findings, the Berger commission was able to give a voice to the aboriginal communities in the area. The Inquiry recommended a moratorium in development to deal with critical issues, such as First Nations land claims.

For too long the churches were content to carry on traditional ministries among Indian and Eskimo people without challenging basically the injustices which have been imposed on them by white society. Indeed the ministries themselves were often negative in their impact because of their paternalistic style and the disruptive influence of denominational competition. It is only in recent years that some of the churches, with notable leadership from the Anglican Church, have begun to change direction. Increasingly too in recent years the Indian and Eskimo people have been speaking up for themselves through their own organizations. The credibility of the churches with the native communities had come so near to being exhausted that we wondered whether these organizations would be interested in working with us. We were gratified therefore when the National Indian Brotherhood agreed to be represented on the Council's Committee on Racism, and when both this organization and the Inuit Tapirisat accepted our invitation to send consultants to the Assembly. I hope the Assembly will take a strong position on such questions as aboriginal and treaty rights and the threat to the way of life and the livelihood of the native peoples posed by what we are pleased to call "*northern development*".

This excerpt is part of the "Challenging Racism" opening statement for the 1976 meeting. It is part of a wider theme of acceptance and embracing of different cultural groups. The same statement also mentions French-English relations, Immigration, and poverty and unemployment among minority groups.

**Twentieth Meeting (Fourth Triennial)
Sharing the Ecumenical Task
1979**

1. Native People's Listening Conference:

In May of 1976, the Human Rights Committee of the Commission on Canadian Affairs sponsored the Native People's Listening Conference.

The need for such Conference was expressed by a number of church leaders including the Rev. Wilbur Howard, the Most Rev. Edward Scott and Rev. Ernest Willie. Planning for it began in the fall of 1975 with a proposal that the Council act as co-ordinator and that sponsorship and staff work be shared with Project North. Planning was eventually placed in the hands of a committee of representatives from the National Indian Brotherhood, the Native Council of Canada and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada with the Council acting as co-ordinator.

The Conference was held in May 1976 at Geneva Park, Lake Couchiching with 150 delegates attending: thirty from each of the Native People's organizations and sixty from the churches.

It was a successful and historic first step. It brought the three national native organizations together for the first time for planning and action together with the churches. The conference recommended that listening conferences be held regionally so that common planning and action could occur locally as well. To that effect a Listening Conference was held in Regina in the fall of 1977, and in Vancouver in the spring of 1978. Other recommendations that were passed at the conference have been carried out by the ongoing work of Project North.

The meetings between the Churches and Native organizations marked the beginning of the long road to reconciliation. The recommendations produced by the conferences were passed to project North, a joint initiative by Churches, native organizations and other civil society for the development of Northern Communities.

Twentieth Third Meeting (Seventh Triennial) 1988

Resolution #15. Aboriginal Rights

THAT a communication be addressed to the Prime Minister of Canada, welcoming the integration of Quebec into the circle of those signing the Constitution.

THAT the Premiers and the Prime Minister be urged to:

- a) delay the process of ratifying the Meech Lake Accord until such time as the Aboriginal nations have come into the circle of those signing the Constitution, emphasizing that it is unconscionable that the second and third founding nations should come to a Constitutional agreement that includes only themselves while the First Nations are left out of the circle, and
- b) to do whatever is necessary to resume Constitutional talks with the Aboriginal people as soon as possible.

Resolution #16. Aboriginal Livelihood

WHEREAS Indigenous Survival International (I.S.I.) represents the Aboriginal people of Canada and Greenland who depend on hunting, fishing and trapping for their livelihood; and

WHEREAS the Aboriginal peoples depend on the income from trade in wild fur to support their continuing life on the land; and

WHEREAS in Canada the Aboriginal peoples consider their right to hunt, fish, and trap, renewable resources, is recognized in the Canadian Constitution; and

WHEREAS Alan Clark the British Minister of Trade is proposing to label all wild furs trapped in leg-hold traps to discourage consumers from purchasing wild fur; and

WHEREAS if this label legislation becomes a regulation, it will destroy the wild fur market with a devastating impact on all Metis and Indian Communities similar to that experienced by the Inuit Communities during the ban on trade in seal skins;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT this Triennial Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) declares its support for the Aboriginal peoples of Canada for whom seal hunting and fur-trapping represent their main source of livelihood, and urges the Government of Canada through Prime Minister Mulroney, External Affairs Minister Joe Clark, to request directly to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to stop the wild fur label legislation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT this Triennial Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) urge Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Sir Geoffrey Howe to rescind Alan Clark's proposal to label wild furs.

In the midst of the Meech Lake Constitutional debate the Council offered strong support for an inclusion of an aboriginal voice in the negotiations.

In a different resolution the council supported Aboriginals in their call to the British Government to stop the wild fur label legislation that would have put into danger the livelihood of many First Nations.

**Twentieth Fourth Meeting (Eight Triennial)
Creator Spirit/ Esprit Creatur, sois Avec Nous
1991**

Resolution 13: Aboriginal rights

Mavis Gillie/Paul Newman

WHEREAS the Pastoral Statement by the Leaders of the Christian Churches on Aboriginal Rights and the Canadian Constitution (The New Covenant of 1987), following the liberating message of the gospel calls us to rectify the historical injustices by establishing a new covenantal relationship with the first peoples and nations of Canada; and

WHEREAS the New Covenant sets out the fundamental dimensions of Aboriginal rights which need to be recognised and guaranteed in the Canadian Constitution, namely, the right to be distinct peoples, the right to an adequate land-base, and the right to self-determination; and

WHEREAS in spite of the growing acknowledgement of and support for these fundamental Aboriginal rights by the Canadian public, there appears to have been little or no substantial progress on the part of federal or provincial governments towards the establishment of these rights; and

WHEREAS due to increasing frustration among Aboriginal peoples and those who support their aspirations, there is real and growing danger of deepening distrust and conflict between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in Canada; and

WHEREAS mindful of the location of this 8th Triennial Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches, we are particularly aware of the struggle for justice of the Lubicon Cree and other Aboriginal peoples in Alberta;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Eighth Triennial Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches:

1. Invite all delegates to this Assembly to affix their signature to the Pastoral Statement by the Leaders of the Christian Churches on Aboriginal Rights and the Canadian Constitution, entitled "The New Covenant of 1987"; and

2. Send the signed copies of the Statement to the federal government with copies to the provincial governments, calling on all governments in Canada to enter immediately

into a dialogue of good faith with the peoples of the First Nations of Canada with a firm intention of realizing these fundamental Aboriginal Rights and invite member churches to do the same.

Resolution 14: The Federal Government and the ARMX Show

Anne Thomas/Pat Krug

WHEREAS as followers of Jesus, many of us feel called to a life and ministry of peace, reconciliation and love — even for enemies;

WHEREAS the proliferation and promotion of the international arms trade encourages and reinforces the reliance of nations on weapons and the use of force in situations of internal or international conflict;

WHEREAS we are aware of the tragic cost in human lives and suffering that result from military spending at the expense of food, health care and social services, particularly in the world's poorest countries;

WHEREAS Canada has actively sought a growing share of the international arms trade, principally through weapons trade shows such as ARMX, and through federal grants to companies who engage in military production under the Defense Industry Productivity Program (DIPP);

WHEREAS ARMX '91, to be held outside of Ottawa in September, will attract buyers and sellers from an expanding number of countries, some of whom have been identified as gross human rights violators by Amnesty International, and

WHEREAS the Government of Ontario and the City of Ottawa have already disassociated themselves from ARMX;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Eighth Triennial Assembly of the Canadian Council of Churches call upon the federal government of Canada, and the participating provincial governments to withdraw from participation in the ARMX '91 weapons trade show.

In 1991 the Council continued its campaign for the recognition of Aboriginal Rights explicitly in the Canadian Constitution.

We hear much about the plight of our aboriginal peoples in many parts of the world. We in Canada have no cause for smugness, of course, for much of our own zeal on such questions was prompted by the Vancouver Assembly as recently as 1983, and reconciliation between our native population and the children of the settlers has proved both fragmentary and fragile. The churches in Canada must stand for fairness to all, affirming the dignity of every person made in the image of God.

As part of a larger theme of Reconciliation, the Council included the paragraph above in their record of proceedings. It recognizes the need to further work in affirming the dignity of Aboriginals.