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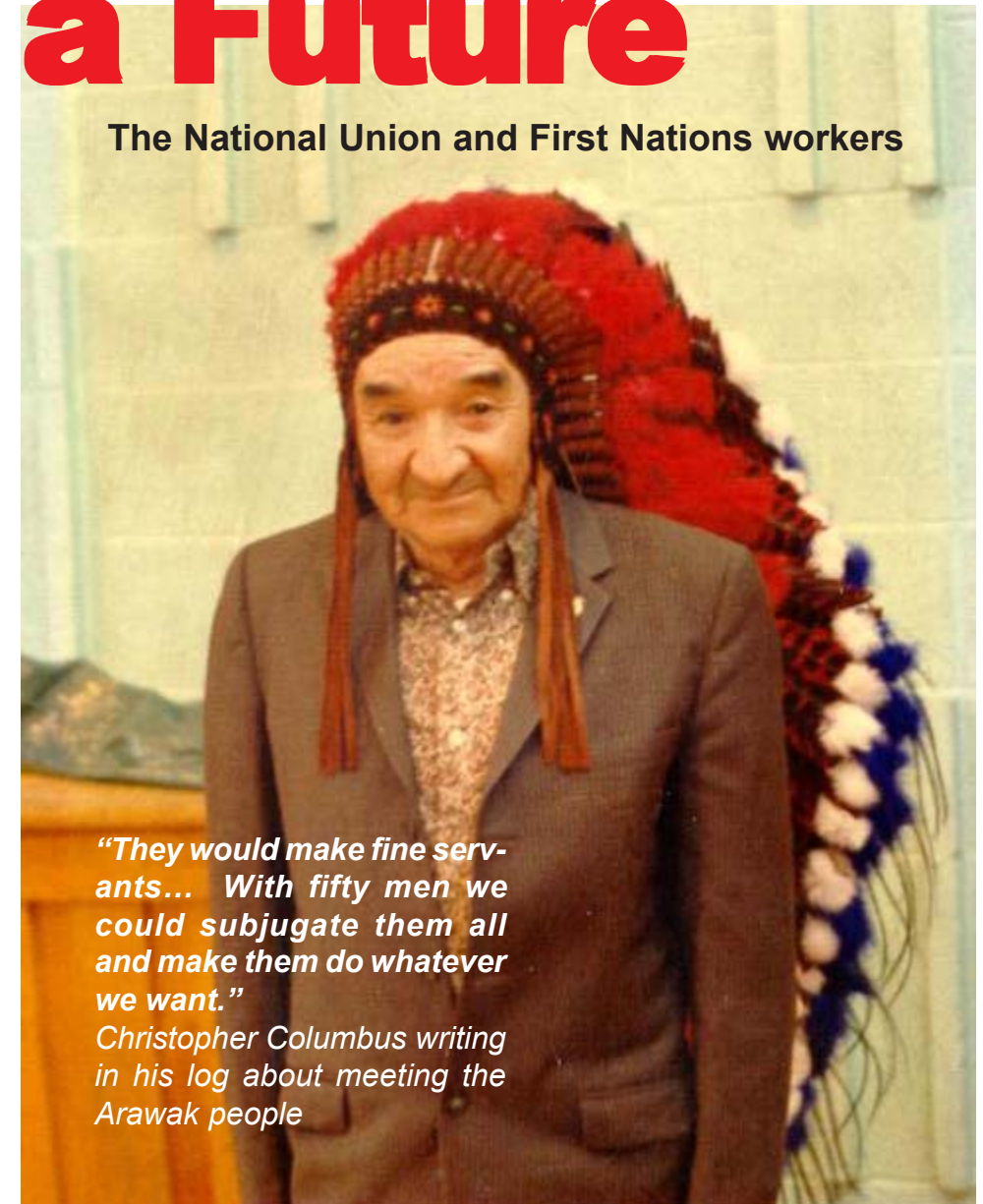
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The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the  
Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services International



# Recognizing the Past and Building a Future

The National Union and First Nations workers



*"They would make fine serv-  
ants... With fifty men we  
could subjugate them all  
and make them do whatever  
we want."*

*Christopher Columbus writing  
in his log about meeting the  
Arawak people*

## Canada's first peoples are often accused of living in the past



Politicians and others say that while “perhaps” they were mistreated in the past it is time they “got over it” and “moved on.” But we all know the past is still with us – shaping who we are and how we interact with each other. It is also through looking at the past that we can learn about how to struggle together in the future.

The National Union thinks we must acknowledge this history and then take the steps necessary to help our aboriginal sisters and brothers realize full equality and justice.

### *The past is always with us*

It is a long list of grievances that Canada's First Nations people have with Canadian society.

- Hostilities with settlers resulted in the last known Beothuk dying in 1829
- First Nations people forced off traditional lands onto reserves (which later became a model for South African Apartheid)
- The Indian Act of 1876 assumed absolute control over First Nations affairs. It outlawed cultural activities (the potlach, sun dances and pow wows), severely restricted economic activities (hunting, fishing and trade), and removed status from native women who marry non-native men. Only in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century were many of these provisions revoked
- Amendments to the Act in 1894 allowed for the kidnapping and forced education of tens of thousands of children in residential schools - the last residential school was closed in 1988
- Denied the right to vote until 1960 –1968 in Quebec
- 1990's “Indian Summer” when the military was used to suppress a Mohawk community in Oka, Québec, who were defending a traditional burial ground from the building of a golf course

This history of oppression and racist policies has resulted in communities that are faced with a host of social problems.

- Census data indicates that First Nations people earn little more than half of what non-aboriginals earn
- The jobless rate for First Nations people is nearly 70%
- Infant mortality rates among First Nations people is more than double the Canadian rate (17.2 compared to 7.9 per 100 babies)
- The suicide rate is 3 times higher than the national rate – 7 times higher for youth 17 to 24 years old
- First Nations people make up 3% of the population but more than 10% of those in jails

### *United - the future is ours to build*

We must also remember that this is not entirely a history of poor relations. People came to Canada to escape poverty and oppression at home. Upon arriving in the New World their problems did not disappear. Instead they replaced one set of kings and lords for Canadian bosses and landlords – one type of crushing poverty for another. Some reacted as people under attack always have by lashing out at others. And then there are examples of mutual support and struggle between these people and Canada's First Nations.

- Thousands of First Nations men joined in the fight against fascism during the second world war
- International campaigns involved students, environmentalists, trade union activists, womens organizations fought alongside First Nations for justice in places like Oldham River, James Bay and Oka
- In 1980 the National Union passes a resolution supporting the right to self-determination for First Nations and further created an aboriginal equity seat on its executive board in 1995

Canada, as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is a different place from the country of 100 years ago. We have seen the birth and growth of an aboriginal civil rights movement. Alongside it the trade union movement has grown and developed. Aboriginal workers are seeing unions as allies in their campaigns. All workers are starting to recognize that a monstrous injustice has been done to their First Nations sisters and brothers. Both are beginning to see that Canadian society needs to be fundamentally changed if we are going to see justice for everyone.

The National Union is proud to be working on this challenge. We continue to take the first steps to ensure First Nations issues are brought to every level of the union. We are participating in campaigns and political action in conjunction with aboriginal rights organizations. And we are learning and developing as we struggle alongside our aboriginal sisters and brothers.

### *But every member can help!*

#### *Steps you can take to build this future*

- Distribute this pamphlet in your workplace
- Ask your local executive to invite a First Nations solidarity organization to speak at your next meeting
- Support your components efforts to hold workshops on the issue
- Speak out when governments or corporations start trying to turn back the clock on First Nations rights
- Bring forward First Nations issues to the bargaining table

#### *At the table*

As trade union members we know that a good collective agreement can go a long ways towards addressing problems in the workplace. The following are suggestions that your local can consider when bargaining equity for aboriginal peoples.

- Do an equity audit of the workplace – how representative is the job site
- Implement education programs for employees to dispel myths and misconceptions about aboriginal peoples
- Carry out succession planning to identify upcoming vacancies
- Establish mentoring programs for aboriginal youth
- Ensure recruitment and hiring practices are equitable – advertised in the aboriginal community
- Provide for substituting statutory holiday time for First Nations celebrations and events
- Negotiate collective agreements reflective of tradition and culture

