

NATIVE STRUGGLES IN CANADA

The history of the Native people in Canada has long been obscured and distorted by the bourgeoisie. Most Canadian history books make only passing reference to the Native people and studiously avoid any mention of their struggle against oppression and colonial domination. Yet, the Native people in Canada have a rich heritage of militant struggle. This is the very fact which the bourgeoisie tries so hard to deny, hoping that by denying the Native people's militant past they can prevent new expressions and developments of this militancy in the future. This scheme has not met success in the past, nor will it meet success in the future.

Oppression breeds resistance. The militant resistance of the Native people in Canada is a response to their oppression by the state. As long as there is oppression it will be met by resistance, in the form of both armed and unarmed struggle.

It is estimated that man entered the continental complex of North and South America before the last ice age. Travelling on foot in small groups, these people made their way from Asia across the ice-bound corridor connecting Siberia with Alaska.

The earliest date of contact between the Native people and Europeans is uncertain. Some accounts suggest that short-lived attempts at settlement occurred in about 1000 A.D. on the northeast coast of Canada after Leif Ericsson's expeditions from Iceland. The earliest continuous contact between Europeans and Native people occurred on the shores of the fishing banks off eastern Canada. The Native people met seamen engaged in the drying of fish. Attempts at establishing permanent settlements in this area as fishing outposts date from 1518.

In 1541 the French geographer, Cartier, attempted to found a colony of settlement on the St. Lawrence. This attempt ended in failure.

By the close of the 16th century there was a growing market for beaver pelts in Europe. This was the result of progress in the technique of felting beaver hats and an increase in the demand for furs on the part of merchants. So the Europeans began to concentrate more efforts on the settlement of North America.

In 1608 Samuel de Champlain, a French geographer, directed the founding of a successful outpost of settlement on the St. Lawrence at Quebec. Throughout the early years of the 1600s, traders and missionaries extended the area of French occupation westward.

The main labour force of the trade in furs was made up of thousands of Native people who hunted and trapped, prepared the pelts, and carried them hundreds of miles to the trading posts. This involvement in the fur trade meant a substantial change in the economic base which supported the Native people. In itself, this was not a detrimental thing. The exploitative relations of production involved in the fur trade did, however, have drastic negative effects on the Native people.

The European merchants were committed to maximizing their profits. In order to do this they worked hard to force the price of furs down. Buying furs at a low cost from the Native people, they sold them at exorbitant prices in France and so made huge profits. To reduce the price of furs from the Native people the French worked to develop a situation where more furs were available than were actually needed. In this way the French nurtured a situation of competition between the Native tribes for sale of furs. The French went so far as to actually foment fratricidal wars among the various tribes of Native people. In 1609, for example, Champlain led a party of Algonquins into Iroquois territory where they attacked an encampment of Mohawks on the shores of Lake Champlain.

By the early 1630s the supply of beaver was dwindling rapidly. At this time the Algonquins and Hurons were close trading partners with the French. The Iroquois, however, were trading with the Dutch at Albany. During the 1620s and 1630s, the Iroquois tried repeatedly to come to an agreement with the Hurons. They wanted



peace and a sharing of the remaining beaver. The French were afraid that such an agreement would benefit the Dutch since the Iroquois would induce the Hurons to trade with the Dutch and divert trade from Quebec which was more distant. So the French worked at blocking any such agreements.

Faced with an immediate threat to their survival through depletion of the beaver in their territory, the Iroquois turned on the French and the tribes who traded with them. From the mid-1630s to the 1660s the Iroquois waged a major guerrilla offensive against the French. By 1644 the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers were under blockade by the Iroquois as far as Quebec. The offensive continued and by 1653 the whole French trading system in what is now southern Ontario, had been wrecked. French settlements were under siege by the Iroquois in the early 1660s and the whole French colony was on the verge of collapse. Only by sending in a large force of troops in 1663 did the French manage to retain colonial rule and break the Iroquois blockade. The Iroquois were viciously suppressed following the French onslaught. Their villages were burned and their people massacred. The flame of militant resistance was not, however, doused.

In 1686 the Iroquois again attacked the scattered settlements of New France. Although this offensive was again viciously crushed the Iroquois kept fighting. Far from being deterred by the brutality of the French, the Iroquois fought back with even more spirit and determination than before. The Iroquois laid siege to Fort Frontenac and attacked Fort Chamby. Then, in the summer of 1689, they raided La Chine on the outskirts of Montreal, killing over 20 inhabitants. For months afterwards the whole district lived in terror.

Shortly after this attack on La Chine the first French-British war broke out in Canada. The Iroquois signed a peace treaty with the French at this point because a continuation of war with the French did not serve their purposes. The Iroquois were concerned simply with peacefully continuing in their own way of life. As long as the French fought the British they had no time to harass the Iroquois.

It is interesting to look at why the Iroquois were successful in standing against the colonial oppression of the French whereas other tribes, such as the Hurons, were almost decimated in numbers during these years. By looking at the case of the Hurons it is clear that colonial oppressors do not serve well as "allies". The Hurons united with the French rather than the Iroquois and found themselves in an untenable situation. The result of their allegiance with the French was almost complete annihilation of their people.

The Iroquois stood successfully because they had developed beyond the stage of simple tribal organization. The Iroquois were formed of a confederation of five tribes: Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, and Mohawks. This confederacy was formed between 1400 and 1450 and was reputedly the most advanced social organization found among the Native people. The Iroquois

confederacy provided a unifying force between a number of tribes which would otherwise have acted as independent units. This gave the Iroquois a strength which other groups lacked. It is interesting to note that two tribes, the Neutrals and the Eries, both became extinct after refusing an Iroquois offer to join the confederacy.

The importance of such unified action was illustrated again in 1763 when a widespread uprising of the Native people against the British colonialist occurred under the leadership of the Ottawa chief, Pontiac. The success of this uprising lay in the fact that Native people from tribes throughout the western fur country rose simultaneously, dealing a forceful blow against the British. The Pontiac uprising was not a spontaneous action. It was painstakingly organized for months before it began. Pontiac himself travelled over miles of territory, talking to Native people and encouraging them to join the rebellion. Pontiac told the Native people: "As for these English — these dogs dressed in red, who have come to rob you of your hunting grounds, and drive away the game — you must lift the hatchet against them. Wipe them from the face of the earth."

When the uprising was finally called in May, 1763 it met with widespread immediate success. In a few weeks 9 British forts fell to the Native people in surprise guerrilla attacks. The tactics employed at Michillimackinac were particularly ingenious. On the chosen day a number of women entered the fort to trade as usual while the men began to play a friendly game of lacrosse outside. The soldiers in the garrison watched the game with interest from the walls. Suddenly the ball "accidentally" flew over the stockade. The pursuing players dashed into the fort. Once inside they dropped their sticks and were handed weapons which had been concealed in the women's clothing. The British, taken completely by surprise, were slaughtered in large numbers by the Native people.

Detroit was the only fort west of Niagara which proved too strong for Pontiac's forces. It was besieged from May until November, but it did not fall.

After the initial series of attacks on British forts the Native people under Pontiac continued guerrilla warfare for almost two years, harassing the British constantly.

At the end of the 1700s European settlements began to spread westward once more. On the west coast of Canada, settlement also began. Here the Native people were ruthlessly exploited as labour in the sea otter pelt trade. As in other places, the traders frequently met with vigorous resistance.

The push westward by European traders was principally carried in the name of the Northwest Company. This company drew its huge profits primarily from the exploitation of Native labour. Active resistance to this oppressive system was a frequent occurrence. In 1780, for example, a band in the Eagle Hills, in northern Saskatchewan, revolted and attacked the traders, putting them to flight. This particular act of resistance was in retaliation for the

poisoning of a Native person by the traders who then stole his furs. In the same year, two trading posts on the Assiniboine were attacked.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, the Native people in the east were slowly dispossessed of their lands by a colossal operation of fraud, misrepresentation and legalized theft. With the development of capitalism in Canada, built on the wealth plundered from the fur trade, the needs of the colonialists changed. Previously they had needed the Native people as a source of cheap labour for the fur trade. Now, however, they had access to a large source of labour in the form of immigrants from Europe. The Native people still held the land. This was now a block to the development of capitalism. So the British began to concentrate their efforts on uprooting the Native people from their land, taking over the land of value to themselves, and confining the Native people to small, often barren areas, called reservations.

Throughout the 19th century the British worked to gain control of the Native people's land. They used a facade of fine-sounding words to try to cover the grim reality of the situation. A Royal Proclamation of 1763 stated: "And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our interest and the security of our colonies, that several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom we are connected, or who live under our protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the possession of such parts of our dominions and territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by us, are reserved to them or any of them as their hunting grounds." The Proclamation goes on to forbid any more private purchases and sets down the procedure by which the Crown would acquire lands so reserved as and when it was needed for settlement.

The reality of the situation was very different from this fine-sounding exposition of British colonialism's policy. In fact Native people were forced to accept glaringly unequal treaties under threat of starvation and extinction. Many Native people tried to hold out against signing such treaties and moving onto government reservations. Faced with starvation they were then pressured into signing by empty promises of plentiful food, their own agricultural base, and a chance for real self-determination. The situation for the Native people on the reservations was actually no improvement over their previous situation. They continued to starve and were crowded into substandard housing with no possibility of improving their living conditions. The economic base of their society had been destroyed by the colonialists and they were placed in a situation in which they had no chance to develop a new economic base.

On Manitoulin Island in the summer of 1863 a demonstration of defiance by 300 Native people confronted a police expedition sent from Toronto to impose a treaty for surrender of their lands. A number of Native leaders were arrested. The resistance led to a portion of the island being left in the hands of the Native people.

TEMPERED AND PRECIOUS

So stirring, the image from this Filipino poet,
so precious, a rice seedling in her country,
the fruit of a peasant's labour,
satisfying hunger, giving source to future food,
— the food of this and further generations.
She likens a comrade to this in precious image,
evoking my thoughts of our comrades.
The wind batters, the whirlpool threatens to engulf
but these comrades stay on their feet,
stay afloat in the struggle, persist.

Weathering storms, wading through the mire,
determined to defeat injustice,
fearless in face of adversity,
hell bent courageous, comrades meet the challenge.
Tempered in struggles' rages, comrades,
your preciousness to us is that expressed
by the image in Clarita Roja's poem.
Comrades, you are as precious to us
as the seedling is to the peasant.
You are as precious to Canada as a sapling
destined to tower as a proud redwood fir.

Marie Roberts

In 1873 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was formed. The force was originally called the North West Mounted Police and was founded for the specific purpose of policing the removal of the Native people onto reservations in the west of Canada. Force of arms was often necessary to get the Native people to move.

Resistance by the Native people increased as the burden of oppression grew heavier. Finally in 1885 a full scale armed rebellion of the Native people and their Metis brothers took place in the west led by Louis Riel. (See *Alive* 116 and 117.) Fifteen years earlier Louis Riel had led a similar rebellion of the Metis in the Red River Settlement against the colonialists' seizure of their land. The Saskatchewan rebellion of 1885 still stands as a glowing beacon to the Native people's militant determination and fighting spirit.

As capitalism developed in Canada the value of land rose. By the early 1900s the state once more turned its greedy eyes towards the land occupied by the Native people. In British Columbia the government was particularly anxious to seize this land which was rich in minerals and timber. The government's anxiety grew as the Native people began to actively organize to protect their land rights. In 1906 a Squamish delegation went to London, England to petition the king for recognition of the Native people's land claims. In this same year there were numerous instances of Native people refusing to obey summonses from bourgeois courts on the grounds that they had no jurisdiction over the Native people.

The contradiction developed through the early years of the 1900s. The Native people were laying claim to large areas of land. The government, however, intended to reduce the amount of land controlled by the Native people rather than increase it.

In 1912 the McKenna-McBride Commission was set up by the government in British Columbia to deal with this land question. The Commission "legalized" the theft of over 37,000 acres of land from the Native people in British Columbia. 23 reservations lost large areas of their territory. The struggle against this theft has continued since 1916. During the 1970s a high point in this struggle was achieved in conjunction with a nationwide upsurge in the resistance of the Native people.

Other important issues in the Native people's struggle have been opposition to "elected" band councils and to intrusions onto the reservations by the armed forces of the state. According to the Indian Act of 1876 and the various treaties signed by the government, the Native people were to have self-determination on their own lands. They were guaranteed the right to set up their own tribal councils to lead the people. The Native people's land could not be bought or sold. The Indian Act also gave Native people special legal status and the reservations were not to be subject to the armed force of the capitalist state. Since 1876 the state has done everything in its power to further erode these small concessions granted to the Native people.

In the 1920s, with the assistance of the RCMP, the Canadian government decided it would no longer recognize the hereditary tribal councils as the genuine representatives of the Native people. They replaced these hereditary tribal councils with "elected" councils. These councils were "elected" by the RCMP.

The Native people at Ohsweken, near Brantford, Ontario, have waged a long struggle on this very issue since 1924. That year the RCMP, acting on orders from Ottawa, forcibly invaded the Council House, and prevented the Confederacy Council from entering. There was a violent confrontation between the RCMP and the angry Native people. The RCMP brought forward a few lackeys who presented themselves for the 12 positions on the "elected" council. The Confederacy of the Six Nations had 9,000 members and just 15 of them voted in the RCMP's "election".

In 1959 the Ohsweken warriors seized back the Council House and tried to reinstate the Confederacy Council. They were viciously attacked by the RCMP late that night. On June 24, 1970, the Native people once again seized control of their Council House, expelled the traitors and declared their fundamental right to look after their own affairs.

In 1969 the Canadian state launched a new attack on the Native people in the July 25 "Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy". This Statement recommended that Native affairs should be made a provincial rather than a federal responsibility. This would have caused massive confusion and reduced the rights of the Native people since most of the treaties were signed with the federal government. The Statement also recommended that it should be permissible to sell or mortgage Native land. This was presented as a new "freedom" but would in fact simply open this land to speculators. This is precisely what the government had in mind. Much of the land held by the Native people is very valuable because of its proximity to a large city or else its wealth in mineral resources.

This same year Prime Minister Trudeau clearly stated that the Canadian government does not recognize the aboriginal rights of the Native people.

As repression grew so did resistance. By the mid-1970s there was a massive wave of militant resistance by the Native people sweeping the country.

On October 15, 1973 Native militants on the Caughnawaga reserve, south of Montreal, rose up and demanded their rights to control over their own treaty lands. They also called for the removal of the "elected chief" who was responsible for allowing land speculators onto the reserve. They also protested the fact that the "elected chief" persistently called the provincial police onto the reservation. In support of these demands the Native people occupied the house of the "elected chief". Police were called onto the reservation and arrested several of the protesters.

A few hours later over 200 Native people marched on the police station demanding release of their detained comrades. They overturned several police cars and fought back vigorously against police harassment.

By the summer of 1974 Native people began to take up arms in defence of their demands. On July 11, the Native people of Cache Creek, British Columbia took up guns to defend their blockade of Highway 12. This highway runs through the Bonaparte reserve.



The action was taken to back up demands for the return of Native lands to their rightful owners, and for negotiations with the Department of Indian Affairs on improving housing conditions on the reserve. 3,400 new houses were needed just to satisfy immediate needs on the reservation. This militant armed struggle, one of the first waged by the Native people since 1885, was a success. The next day the Department of Indian Affairs agreed to enter negotiations.

Eleven days later, on July 23, 150 Native people led by the Ojibway Warrior Society began an armed occupation of Anicinabe Park in the northwestern Ontario town of Kenora. The Native people were demanding settlement of their land claims and also abolition of the repressive Indian Affairs Department. For 39 days the Native people, armed with shotguns, rifles, knives, baseball bats, and Molotov cocktails, kept 150 armed agents of the state at

bay. (See *Alive* 124.)

In the fall of 1974 the Native people organized a Caravan across the country to publicize their demands. The Caravan left Vancouver on September 15 and arrived in Ottawa on September 30. The Native people's Caravan made 7 basic demands: respect for treaty and aboriginal rights; an end to the Indian Act; dissolution of the Department of Indian Affairs; just settlement of land claims; decent housing; economic development for the "reserves"; and, adequate health care and education for Native people.

On September 30, over 1,000 people demonstrated on Parliament Hill in support of these demands. The demonstrators were viciously attacked by riot police armed with shields, clubs and full riot gear. A number of people were injured and arrested but the spirit of militancy and determination was not crushed. Throughout 1975 the struggle continued.

On April 26, 1975 the MicMac people of Nova Scotia took up the gun in order to force the state to deal with their land claims. This struggle was on the question of the ownership of Mules Island in Merrigonish harbour. The government had consistently refused to deal with the Native people's just demands and had stalled on an official decision for 2 years. The armed occupation of the island forced the government to recognize the band's title to Mules Island.

In British Columbia a series of militant struggles were also waged in 1975. April 1, 1975 was the deadline given to the British Columbia government by the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs to agree to begin negotiations for return of lands cut off the reserves of 23 bands by the McKenna-McBride Commission in 1916. From April 20-25, 1975 the Chilliwack Conference of UBCIC was held. Here a resolution was passed to concentrate on the struggle for land claims and reject federal Department of Indian Affairs' attempts to buy off and divert the Native people from their struggle.

Following this conference a wave of demonstrations, occupations and blockades roared across British Columbia. One tactic used by the Native people was to blockade access roads to timber and mineral resource operations on land cut off from the 23 reserves. Wherever this was done the workers refused to cross picket lines, so demonstrating their solidarity with the struggle of the Native people. Blockades were defended by force of arms in a number of places. Another tactic used was occupation and picketing of Department of Indian Affairs offices, which the Native people were demanding be closed down.

On April 28, 1975 the Stuart-Trembleur band began a blockade of the Dease lake extension of the British Columbia railway in support of their demand for compensation for the land seized by the railway.

Native people of the Mount Currie band, near Pemberton, militantly defended their hereditary fishing and land rights from the attacks of the Canadian state. The band blockaded a road to prevent federal fisheries officers from attacking their people for exercising hereditary fishing rights. The state attempted to deny the Native people their fishing rights by imposing on them an arbitrary system of permits and closures. Their actions were justified under the hoax of "conservation of fish stocks". The Native people firmly stated that they had no intention of bearing the burden of conservation programs so that the monopoly

capitalists can make maximum profits. The Native people have a right to fish freely on their own land. On July 18, more than 15 federal fisheries officers converged on the band's fishing grounds and confiscated several nets, damaging them in the process. This incident was timed to try to disrupt a planned "Independence Celebration" at the reservation. The attempt failed. The celebration went ahead as planned and was attended by over 1,000 people. Further disruptions by the state were prevented by the blockading of the road leading to the reservation.

Militant actions also occurred in Kamloops, Vernon, Vancouver, Victoria, Vancouver Island and numerous other places across British Columbia.

Since 1975 the Native people have continued their struggle across Canada.

Over the years the Native people have been deprived of an economic base. Without this base their culture is under threat of extinction. No culture, no matter how rich, can survive in the abstract, isolated from the economic struggle.

Some groups and individuals stress the need for the Native people to return to their roots, to take up their ancient societal structure and to return to their old economic system based on subsistence fishing and hunting. This is senseless. The ancient tribal structure of the Native people was objectively doomed to destruction as society progressed just as primitive structures in other societies were destroyed to be replaced by more progressive structures. Analyzing the societal structure of North American Native people in "The Origin Of The Family, Private Property And The State", Engels stated: "The gentile constitution in its best days, as we saw it in America, presupposed an extremely undeveloped state of production and therefore an extremely sparse population over a wide area. People were therefore almost completely dominated by nature as an external, alien, hostile and incomprehensible power, as is reflected in their childlike religious conceptions. People were bounded by the tribe, both in relation to outsiders and to themselves: the tribe, the gens and their institutions were sacred and inviolable, a higher power established in nature, to which the individual remained unconditionally subject in feeling, thought and deed. However impressive the people of this epoch appear to us, they are completely undifferentiated from one another; as Marx says, they are still attached to the umbilical cord of the primitive community."

While not striving to move backwards, neither can the Native people be satisfied with attaining the same level of achievement as the Canadian working class people of other heritage. The working class itself is dissatisfied with the oppression it suffers under capitalism.

Side by side, shoulder to shoulder, the Canadian working class and the Native people must strive to overthrow U.S. imperialist domination of Canada. Then, the united peoples of Canada will be able to construct a society more advanced in terms of the existence of the Native people either in primitive or present times, certainly, but also more advanced in terms of the existence of the majority of other Canadians. The Native people's struggle for national liberation is an integral part of this whole struggle. The Native people have a long history of determination, spirit and militancy which provides an inspiration to the whole Canadian people in their struggle.

ALIVE MAGAZINE

Published by: ALIVE PRODUCTION COLLECTIVE
Editor: Pete Jones
P.O. Box 1331, Guelph, Ontario, Canada
2nd Class Mail Number: 2458 — Postage Paid
at Guelph, Ontario
Subscription rates for 52 issues:
General — \$11.00
Libraries — \$30.00
Prisoners — free

Pinyin In This Issue

Beijing:	Peking
Guangxi:	Kwangsi
Hua Guofeng:	Hua Kuo-feng
Lu Xun:	Lu Hsun
Mao Zedong:	Mao Tsetung
Zhou Enlai:	Chou En-lai
Qing:	Ching
Xinhua:	Hsinhua

