



Canadian Labour Congress

Congrès du travail du Canada

CLC Statement in Support of National Aboriginal Day – June 21, 2011

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) representing 3.2 million workers knows that Aboriginal communities will play a prominent role in the future of the labour movement. It is appropriate on National Aboriginal Day to celebrate and acknowledge Aboriginal peoples in their growing numbers; their unique cultures; and to recognize the lasting contributions they make to our workplaces and country.

There are many prominent individuals worth noting on this day, such as: Harold Cardinal, a Cree writer, political leader, teacher, negotiator and lawyer, who demanded on behalf of all First Nation peoples the right to be "the red tile" in the Canadian mosaic; Ellen Gabriel, chosen by the People of the Longhouse and then by her community to be a spokesperson during the 1990 Oka crisis; the band Kashtin, or actors such as Graham Greene, Adam Beach, Tantoo Cardinal or Susan Aglukark who are all accomplished Aboriginal workers in the arts and entertainment field.

In addition to the well-known are many Aboriginal activists like: Sharon McIvor who fights for the legal recognition of Aboriginal women and their children; and, Clayton Thomas-Muller who works tirelessly in promotion of the Indigenous Environmental Network. Alongside these individuals are Aboriginal union members like Deb St. Amant (ETFO) who works for greater inclusion of Aboriginal culture in our educational system; Ron Rousseau (CUPW) who urges employers to seriously diversify our workforce; and union staff like those at the Canadian Media Guild who actively support a dynamic new generation of media workers.

From well-known to well-intentioned, the CLC recognizes that Aboriginal people are going to continue making important contributions; in particular will be their contribution to the labour force. Whether they are First Nations, Métis or Inuit, the Canadian labour movement will see many more younger Aboriginal workers in workplaces and communities across the country in the years ahead.

This population is one to two decades younger than the non-Aboriginal population and they are entering the workforce sooner than some other communities. Additionally, the Aboriginal population has the potential to contribute nearly double the number of workers to the labour force than the non-Aboriginal population.

This youthful and eager group of workers stands in stark comparison to the legions of older workers who are fast approaching retirement.

While modest improvements are being made to redress the injurious impacts of colonialism such as improving access to education and skills training for Aboriginal workers; at the current rate of policy change, it will take over sixty years to erase the income gap that persists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers.

We can't afford to wait that long. Justice, equity and solidarity must be realized much sooner.

An important step towards bringing this day of justice closer will begin when the federal government takes genuine measures to implement the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Although initially opposed by the Harper government at the United Nations, the federal government acquiesced to growing pressure and finally endorsed this historic document in November 2010.

Today on National Aboriginal Day, the CLC calls on this government to advance real actions in important areas, such as: education; skills development; economic development; employment; health care; housing; the right to cultural conservation or restoration; ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls; and, access to safe drinking water.

Developing a plan of work with Aboriginal communities and leadership that address these critical issues will provide reason to celebrate this day for a long time to come.