

**THE STRUGGLE OF INDIGENOUS
PEOPLE IN CANADA AGAINST
CANADIAN CAPITALIST
OPPRESSION AND GENOCIDE**

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The Struggle of Indigenous People in Canada Against Canadian Capitalist Oppression and Genocide

(This pamphlet is based on a resolution adopted unanimously by the May 2018 convention of SA/LAS. It reflects our current understanding and presents our main line of march as revolutionary socialists in the Canadian state on this vital issue. As we gain more experience in this area of struggle, we will further develop our analysis and program.)

Settler Invasion

At the time of first contact there were an estimated 2,000,000 indigenous people in Canada, and as many as 75,000,000 in the western hemisphere. White settlers brought with them diseases such as smallpox, bubonic plague, malaria and others for which native people had no immunity. No one knows how many died, perhaps 60 percent of the indigenous population, perhaps more. Enervated by such devastation and facing an enemy with superior technology, the long and desperate struggle against settler invasion and conquest resulted in the indigenous peoples in Canada and the entire hemisphere being pushed back, relocated, purposely starved by destruction of crops and game, and forced at gunpoint to sign treaties ceding the bulk of their territory to the racist settler enemy.

Indigenous Resistance

The indigenous struggle here echoed the struggles of indigenous people around the world faced with European mercantile capital and then imperialist conquest. The indigenous peoples of the Americas have a long history of resistance to these colonial policies, beginning with resistance to Columbus, a resistance which is ongoing. In response to this resistance came brutal settler repression in the form of imprisonment of activists, selected assassination of Mapuche activists in Argentina and Chile, the hanging Louis Riel, and the mass murders of 300,000 indigenous people in the highland communities of Guatemala. But the resistance never ceases, from the armed stand taken at Oka in Quebec and Wounded Knee in South Dakota, to the creation of indigenous armies like the Zapatistas in Mexico and in the Cuzco area of Peru, to the Water Keepers fighting pipelines and the forest protectors of the Amazon in Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador.



The international nature of indigenous struggles is reflected in the extensive

development of contacts among indigenous groups, quickly learning and sharing tactics among indigenous groups and the development and adoption of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This declaration is being used as both an authoritative support and for traction by indigenous peoples everywhere to support their struggles for land, rights, and dignity. It is well known and strongly advocated the indigenous leaders in Canada.

Demands for self determination, self-government and control over their lands and resources are democratic demands for sovereignty and national rights. Nevertheless, they have revolutionary implications because of the implacable hostility of imperialism to acceptance of indigenous control over what is often valuable land and resources and the penchant for indigenous peoples to develop these lands and resources by means of consensus and with a healthy regard for the people and animals thereon.

Indigenous people and the fight for human survival

The deep connection between indigenous peoples and the lands they live on, makes them natural leaders in the struggle against environmental destruction and human annihilation at the hands of the capitalist class which places profit literally before the survival of our species and all others. The indigenous

peoples of Canada are thrust into a role of keepers of the land, the water and the creatures of nature by virtue of their integration with nature and their non-destructive outlook towards their use of nature's resources in order to live.

We all have to move towards the indigenous way of understanding our planet in order to survive.

The Nature of Settler Indigenous relations

Since first contact the history of European settler/invader relations with indigenous Canadians has been one of colonization, brutality, exploitation, murder, rape, forcible removal of children to "residential schools" where they were often maltreated, sexually assaulted, undernourished and overworked and punished for speaking their native languages.



The lands were stolen and transferred to colonists and the colonial state for little or no compensation, and the resources thereon used to enrich the settler capitalist class without royalties

or other compensation to indigenous peoples.

Treaties negotiated between the settler capitalist state and indigenous peoples were craftily drafted, written in English and often the written treaties did not include verbal promises. Further, the treaties were interpreted narrowly by the capitalist government and the courts, or simply abrogated to the benefit of the state and capitalist corporations. In other cases title over vast tracts of native land was never ceded by the indigenous people, but such unceded land was used by the settlers, their governments and corporations nonetheless.

Native peoples did not believe they were giving up mineral and mining rights over resources under the surface when they accepted reserves. But large mining corporations have been allowed to steal these resources with little or no compensation.

Systemic exclusion, discrimination, impoverishment and destitution has been the policy of the federal government towards indigenous people, with resources allocated to health, education and welfare at levels commensurate to only half the allocation for settler Canadians.

The indigenous peoples, nevertheless have struggled consistently to protect and preserve their own lands, rights, resources, languages, cultures, philosophies and way of life against all odds

Indigenous struggle and Socialism

For revolutionary socialists, the struggle of oppressed people for independence and freedom from the capitalist oppressors and exploiters makes them allies of the struggle by the working class to overthrow and replace capitalism with public ownership and workers' power. This includes indigenous people in Canada. We are all fighting the same enemy.

Further, no gain by the indigenous people will ever be secure so long as capitalism remains in control. The rights of indigenous people will always be under threat from the drive for profit by Canadian capitalists and their state henchmen. Only in a post capitalist society can the Indigenous in Canada hope, finally and securely, to win their goals.



Indigenous peoples in Canada have based their struggles on the preservation and restoration of their treaty lands and on the application of the treaties between them and the settler state. In

fact it has been the existence of treaty lands (reserves) that allowed the Indigenous people to survive the settler capitalist unceasing efforts to abolish their separate existence as

indigenous peoples. Their struggle to preserve their lands, languages, cultures and control over their resources is a form of national liberation struggle by an oppressed people against the capitalist class and their state for survival and dignity as a people. Their diversity of languages and cultures does not detract from this characterization. Indigenous leaders have developed strong affinity for their common struggles, including Canadian state-wide organizations, representations and actions.

This does not always mean that indigenous people will be united on every issue. How could it? For example, starved for funds for health and education, housing and infrastructure, not to mention job-creating projects and fair wages, some indigenous bands have signed deals with Kinder Morgan regarding the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion. This is a two step dance. The federal government starves indigenous people for funds. Then Kinder Morgan comes along and waves a few million dollars in their faces. Of course some accepted. It says more about continued settler colonialism than the bands who sign such deals.

When Jean Chretien was Minister of Indian Affairs under the government of Pierre Trudeau, he had an aptly named “white paper” produced that proposed to turn the common lands of the reserves into private property that could be bought and sold by individuals, to end all treaty obligations unilaterally and

“integrate” (forcibly assimilate) all indigenous peoples into white society. Indigenous resistance has staved off that threat for the time being. Harold Cardinal a member of the Cree nation in a book called *The Unjust Society* made the case against Chretien’s bare faced racist policy.



Whether integration of indigenous people is a viable policy is already clear. The truth is that the 50 percent of indigenous people not on

reserves are all too often marginalized by white society. They are often excluded from jobs. Many are homeless and indigent. Settler racism runs deep in Canada and white society simply does not accept the indigenous people in our own midst. Integration is a cruel joke and is merely a cover to enable seizure of the 2,000 reserves, many with valuable resources and many near settler cities where real estate developers covet the land.

The small but increasing numbers who defy all obstacles and succeed in white society to become doctors, lawyers, artists and skilled workers highlight the tenacity, ability and courage to be found among the indigenous people. But the large majority

remain excluded. The rare professionals often return home to help their people.

But there is an additional important and growing component of the indigenous population. Indigenous people are part of the international working class. In Mexico, Central America and South America they are an overwhelming proportion of the workers' movement. The people of these areas proudly self-identify as native, except for the *crillo* bourgeoisie who identify as being of Spanish descent.

In Canada and the United States, where racist attitudes form a systemic barrier to employment, Indigenous workers are primarily found within the construction sector, both union and non-union, in the west coast fisheries and logging sectors, and in the east coast fisheries and related industries, primarily employed by band-owned co-ops. In Northern Saskatchewan, and Northern Alberta, the uranium and tar sands industries are the major indigenous employers.



As revolutionary socialists, Socialist Action fights for the right of all indigenous people in Canada to preserve their treaty lands and to have

their land claims quickly and fully adjudicated by panels, at least half of which must be indigenous appointees, and to exercise the right of self-determination over these lands.

Sovereignty includes the right to exercise their own legal sovereignty over all aspects of these lands including all rights to natural resources thereon, the right to determine what, if any energy is transmitted through their lands, the right to exclude the authority of Canadian, police, military and legal authority and to operate their own constabulary, courts and legal system.

Socialist Action demands that the current badly flawed Commission on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls be disbanded forthwith and that a new commission be established to investigate missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, composed primarily of indigenous women, with adequate funding and access to legal, investigative and forensic expertise, and with full power to compel testimony from any person in Canada, including police and military and politicians and to recommend charges be laid under the criminal code against persons they find responsible for death and injury to Indigenous women and girls.

We demand that Canada provide funds equal to those provided by the provinces for their citizens for education, health, housing, and all other services as partial compensation for the genocidal policies and expropriations of the past. Ample funds can be readily found by expropriation of the trillions of dollars amassed

by the energy and mineral resource corporate giants. No
Conciliation Without Restitution of Indigenous Peoples!

We demand that the cases of the massive numbers of indigenous peoples in Canadian prisons be turned over to the indigenous nations for review and that their decisions on these prisoners by native legal authorities be immediately and fully implemented by Canadian authorities

We call on the NDP, the trade unions, and other allies of working people to support the struggles of indigenous people in Canada for sovereignty, justice and compensation and to mobilize in support where these struggles manifest themselves. We urge the NDP and unions to fight for indigenous men and women to be hired, trained and promoted on an equitable and non-racist basis and for the provision of affordable housing, education and welfare including treatment for addiction arising from the systematic exclusion, marginalization and racism of settler society toward indigenous men, women and children.

We urge the NDP, trade unions and others to invite the participation and input of indigenous people of Canada in all struggles for economic and social justice in Canada and for the establishment of a workers government.

Indigenous Leaders and the Leninist Vanguard

We urge revolutionary socialist militants to support and work for truth and reconciliation regarding the residential schools, and the current seizure by state social services of indigenous children based often of hearsay evidence without any effort to solve the real problems these children and their parents face, such as joblessness, bad housing, a grossly underfunded education system, assistance with addictions and often even safe drinking water.



We encourage indigenous militants to work with and join Socialist Action for our mutual benefit. The revolutionary vanguard needs the voices of indigenous

militants inside our organization to facilitate beneficial cooperation and coordination between indigenous and working class struggles. Indigenous leaders need the benefit of the knowledge gained in our historic struggles against the very same enemy by the workers and their other allies.

Appendix

The following appendix provides two lists of demands developed by indigenous groups in Canada. The first, developed in 1969 was heavily influenced by the radicalization of the 1960s and by the black power movement.

The Idle No More Manifesto concentrates on specific issues of the day and is less comprehensive in its challenge to white settler capitalist authority. Perhaps this reflects the ebb of the entire 1960s radicalization from the 1980s until recently and the rise of neoliberal right wing attacks on all fronts. Only now are we seeing the first signs of a reemergence of broad struggles for labour rights, defence of the environment, and against repression.

Demands of The National Association for Red Power 1969

1. We will not be free until we are able to **determine our own destiny**. Therefore, we want power to determine the destiny of our reservations and communities.
Gaining power in our reservations and communities, and power over our lives will entail the abolishment of the "Indian Act," and the **destruction of the colonial office**(Indian Affairs Branch).
2. This racist government has robbed, cheated and brutalized us, and is responsible for the deaths of untold numbers of our people. We feel under no obligation to support this government in the form of **taxation**. Therefore, we want an end to the collection of money from us in the form of taxes.
3. The history of Canada was written by the oppressors, the invaders of this land. Their lies are perpetuated in the **educational system** of today. By failing to expose the true history of this decadent Canadian society, the schools facilitate our continued oppression. Therefore, we want an education that teaches us our true history and exposes the racist values of this society.
4. In this country, Indian and Métis represent three percent of the population, yet we constitute approximately 60 percent of the inmates in prisons and jails. Therefore, we

want an immediate end to the unjust arrests and harassment of our people by the racist **police**.

5. When brought before the **courts** of this country, the red man cannot hope to get a fair hearing from white judges, jurors and court officials. Therefore, we want natives to be tried by a jury of people chosen from native communities or people of their racial heritage. Also, we want freedom for those of our brothers and sisters now being unjustly held in the prisons of this country.



6. The **treaties** pertaining to fishing, hunting, trapping and property rights and special privileges have been broken by this government. In

some cases, our people did not engage in treaties with the government and have not been compensated for their loss of land. Therefore, for those of our people we want fair **compensation**. Also, we want the government to honor the statutes, as laid down in these treaties, as being supreme and not to be infringed upon by any legislation whatsoever.

7. The large industrial companies and corporations that have raped the natural resources of this country are responsible, along with their government, for the

extermination of the resources upon which we depend for food, clothing and shelter. Therefore, we want an immediate end to this exploitation, and compensation from these thieves. We want the government to give **foreign aid** to the areas comprising the Indian Nation, so that we can start desperately needed programs concerning housing, agricultural and industrial cooperatives. **We want to develop our remaining resources in the interests of the red man, not in the interests of the white corporate elite.**

8. The white power structure has used every possible method to destroy our spirit, and the will to resist. They have divided us into status and nonstatus, American and Canadian, Métis and Indian. We are fully aware of their "divide and rule" tactic, and its effect on our people.

RED POWER IS THE SPIRIT TO RESIST.

RED POWER IS PRIDE IN WHAT WE ARE.

RED POWER IS LOVE FOR OUR PEOPLE.

RED POWER IS OUR COMING TOGETHER TO FIGHT FOR LIBERATION.

RED POWER IS NOW!

Idle No More Calls for Change

Idle No More and Defenders of the Land, a network of Indigenous communities in land struggle, have joined together to issue this common call for escalating action. Our message is clear and in accordance with the principles of coexistence and mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. We call for Canada, the provinces and the territories to:

1. Repeal provisions of Bill C-45 (including changes to the Indian Act and Navigable Waters Act, which infringe on environmental protections, Aboriginal and Treaty rights) and abandon all pending legislation which does the same.
2. Deepen democracy in Canada through practices such as proportional representation and consultation on all legislation concerning collective rights and environmental protections, and include legislation which restricts corporate interests.
3. In accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' principle of free, prior, and informed consent, respect the right of Indigenous peoples to say no to development on their territory.
4. Cease its policy of extinguishment of Aboriginal Title and recognize and affirm Aboriginal Title and Rights, as set out in Section 35 of Canada's Constitution, and

recommended by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

5. Honour the spirit and intent of the historic Treaties. Officially repudiate the racist Doctrine of Discovery and the Doctrine of Terra Nullius, and abandon their use to justify the seizure of Indigenous Nations lands and wealth.
6. Actively resist violence against women and hold a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and involve Indigenous women in the design, decision-making, process and implementation of this inquiry, as a step toward initiating a comprehensive and coordinated national action plan.



Facts About Aboriginal Peoples in Canada from Statistics Canada based on 2011 surveys

1.4 million indigenous people in Canada, composed of 860,000 First Nations, 450,000 Metis, 60,000 Inuit, 30,000 others who identified as aboriginal. Of these 323,000 lived on the 2000 reserves. 30% of those living on reserves live in overcrowded housing (more than 1 person per room) and 43% on reserves lived in homes requiring major repairs 46% of indigenous people are under 25 years of age. For non aboriginals the number is 30%

30% of aboriginal people have no post secondary education (12% for settlers) less than 10% of aboriginals have university degrees (26% for settlers). Life expectancy for all Canadians is 79 for men and 83 for women. Life expectancy for First nations and Metis is 73 years for men and 78 years for women. For Inuit men the life expectancy is 64 and for women 73. In Canada the number of infant deaths per 1000 live births is 4.3. The indigenous infant mortality is twice that much. Indigenous adults are twice as likely as settler adults to smoke regularly.

Key Presentation Point For Socialist Action Convention

1. The long fight against settler invasion, their common experience and common oppressed situation together with their many connections, national struggles, structures and leadership have forged an oppressed people. Concentrated on 2000 reservations, they have territory and common enemies above all the capitalist governments in Canada and their instruments of economic, social and physical oppression. We support the right of oppressed people to the democratic right of self determination and control over their own communities against control by capitalists and their states. This set out in detail and with key specifics in the resolution. We understand the full self determination and full control over their own communities requires a continuous process through to a works government. It requires the overthrow of capitalism to complete.
2. While indigenous people in Canada have been involved almost continuously in struggle since settle arrival, and are in the forefront today on both their own independence, environmental issues and poverty issues, they need powerful

allies to win. In fact like the struggles of all the specially oppressed groups they must ally with the workers and support the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers government. The working class are the only people to have their hands on the levers of economic power and the ability to lead an overthrow of capitalism.

3. Many Indigenous men and women are members of the working class. Often in underpaid and precarious jobs, but workers nonetheless. Increasingly we see indigenous people in more skilled jobs and increasing numbers graduating from colleges and universities as semi and full professionals. This growing overlap between indigenous peoples and the working class should be promoted by trade unions and efforts made to ensure their participation in the leadership
4. In addition to our support of indigenous rights and struggles, we need to bring the best indigenous leaders into the vanguard so that indigenous issues can be more effectively supported by workers and indigenous fighters can be educated to support workers struggles.

Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste is an organization of revolutionary socialists across the Canadian state, active in the labour movement, social justice, international solidarity, feminist and environmental campaigns. SA/LAS supporters work to build the NDP Socialist Caucus, Quebec Solidaire, support for indigenous peoples' struggles, as well as anti-war, anti-poverty and human rights movements. SA/LAS is in solidarity with the Fourth International worldwide.

Drop us a line if you'd like to get in touch with us, or to find out how you can join!

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