

National Executive Board Statement on June 21 - National Aboriginal Peoples Day

The CAW joins Aboriginal Peoples in celebration of June 21, National Aboriginal Peoples' Day. In commemorating this day, we pay tribute to the unparalleled contributions of Aboriginal peoples in the development of Canada and their ongoing contributions as First People. We also recognize the strength and determination of our Aboriginal sisters and brothers working in solidarity with the labour movement.

June 21st is the summer solstice, marked for centuries by many Aboriginal communities as a day to celebrate their heritage. In 1996, the Parliament of Canada proclaimed June 21 as National Aboriginal Peoples Day. For us, it is a day to express our solidarity with aboriginal people as well as a day to recognize and educate ourselves on diverse Aboriginal cultures.

The last century saw an increasing militancy amongst Aboriginal people as their frustration grew over the land claim issues, poverty and cultural devastation faced by their communities.

To solve problems faced by our Aboriginal People, we must recognize that their rights are inalienable. The treaties signed should not be dismissed as ancient pieces of paper, but must be the basis of any relationship between our First People and the rest of Canada. The treaties represented a commitment to protect the economic self-sufficiency and cultural independence of Aboriginal Peoples and hopefully an end to conflict and an end to second class status.

The fundamental collective human rights of Aboriginal Peoples as People, including their right to a self-government, right to economic development and right to negotiate with all levels of government, must be recognized and respected in accordance with the law.

The economic development for Aboriginal communities must be a priority for us. The economic gap between aboriginal communities and the rest of the country has been continuously widening. The tragedy of the unemployment rate, especially amongst youth and the increasing suicide rate points to the despair. Most Aboriginal people are at or below the poverty line. In major western cities, four times as many Aboriginal people as other citizens are below the poverty line.

Canadians collectively need to acknowledge that years of oppression being inflicted on Aboriginal People have resulted in the systematic destruction of communities, where they have little or poor access to housing, health care and social services. We also have to address the issues surrounding the tragedy of the Canadian Native "residential Schools" and the legacy it left, and pain it inflicted then and continues to inflict now on aboriginal people.

In order to address the above challenges, the CAW is committed to working together with organizations who represent voices of Aboriginal communities to address systemic racism in all aspects of society. The CAW will continue to work with organizations who represent voices of the Aboriginal communities, in support of the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality for First People.

We in the labour movement must raise our voices louder in partnership with Aboriginal people calling for solutions and demanding increased efforts on the part of the federal government to address the legitimate claims of the Aboriginal peoples and the desperate need for access to jobs, housing, healthcare, childcare and education.