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Repression and Resistance

Chapter Outline

The major themes of this chapter are the continued suppression of First Nations after 1885, the issues of Métis scrip, development of residential schools, the pressure to surrender reserve lands and the development of First Nations political organizations. Following the imprisonment or death of their key leaders, Cree people found themselves subject to ongoing attacks on their leadership and their freedoms. Ottawa wanted to depose any chief who had not given unwavering support in the events of 1885. In addition to that, the government increased the numbers of NWMP, impounded Cree horses and introduced the Pass system to keep First Nations on reserves. For the Métis, while the 1870 Manitoba Act acknowledged Métis entitlement to land, in 1874, the concept of scrip was introduced. Scrip provided for either a specific amount of land or its equivalent in cash, typically at one dollar per acre. Many Métis ended up selling their scrip to speculators for as little as half the face value and fortunes were made at the expense of the Métis.

Within this time period, the government continued its push toward assimilation, and began focusing on education as a means of achieving it. There were already precedents for missionary-run boarding schools in the east; however, these ultimately failed due to resistance to practices of hiring students out as cheap labour or funding issues. In spite of the general lack of success in the east, officials went ahead with the idea of partnering with churches to develop already existing schools for the west, but these were immediately plagued by a lack of funding also. Indigenous leadership certainly was not opposed to schools for their children, as many of them negotiated for its inclusion in their treaties. However, it is unlikely that any of these leaders envisioned the residential schools that would come to dominate the Canadian West. Parents disliked the schools because they represented loss of traditional customs; the schools were also culturally disrespectful and both parents and children protested and also participated in various forms of resistance to the schools. As costs began to rise, the government became more unwilling to pay for the schools and blamed Indigenous peoples for not having the same physical or mental get up as non-Indigenous people to succeed alongside them. By 1923, industrial schools were phased out, leaving only one type of boarding school in operation, that of the “residential school.”

The turn of the century also saw strong Indigenous resistance to the imposition of elective forms of government and this resulted in four different systems of band governance being in place by 1900. Similarly, there was intensified pressure by governments and settlers to gain access to Indian reserve lands that, in their view, were surplus lands. As a result of the pressure, and the ongoing resistance by First Nations, the government gave greater powers to the superintendent-general to allot reserve lands without band consent. And when band councils resisted, the superintendent-general’s power

was increased further. The Indian Act was also amended to allow for further appropriation of Indigenous lands.

In B.C., the conflict between the province and Ottawa over Indigenous lands gave rise to various Commissions as well as petitions by First Nations. In response to the Royal Commission of 1916 and its recommendation to cut off specified reserve lands, First Nations organized themselves into the Allied Tribes of British Columbia. This organization would later become the North American Indian Brotherhood.

The First World War also saw renewed pressure on Indigenous lands and the Indian Act was again amended to allow for the leasing of land without permission of the band. During his time serving in the war, Kanienkehaka officer, Frederick Ogilvie Loft, met other First Nations from across the country and decided to found the League of Indians to fight for the betterment of First Nations overall. With conflicting agendas by its diverse membership group, the League dissipated but the need for a pan-Indian organization had been recognized.

Learning Objectives

- To understand the repressive policies of the Canadian government during the first half of the twentieth century in relation to land issues, Métis scrip and the development of residential schools.
- To recognize Indigenous strategies of resistance to the repression they were facing during the first half of the twentieth century
- To recognize key Indigenous leaders and their contributions in overcoming the repression they were facing
- To understand the legal positioning of Métis people compared to First Nations

Key Terms, Figures or Sites

Allied Tribes of British Columbia The first province-wide coalition of BC First Nations formed in 1916 to pursue land claims; declared illegal following 1927 amendments to the Indian Act (p. 255).

day schools Schools on reserves that students attended while living with their families (p. 247).

File Hills Colony Model village established on the Peepeekisis Reserve near Indian Head, Saskatchewan, and the last of such government experiments (p. 251).

League of Indians One of the first attempts at national organization by Indigenous people founded in 1919 by F.O. Loft, a Kanienkehaka leader from Brantford, Ontario, to fight treaty violations. Following Loft's death in 1934, the League split into regional organizations (p. 256).

Loft, Frank Ogilvie (1861–1934) Kanienkehaka leader from Brantford, Ontario, and officer in the Forestry Corps who served in the First World War; founder of the League of Indians in 1919 (p. 247).

Longhouse religion Synthesis of traditional beliefs and ceremonies combined with the teachings of nineteenth-century Onondowaga prophet Shanyadariyoh (Handsome Lake, d. 1815) that combined elements of the Christian religion and the traditional Haudenosaunee belief system (p. 247).

New England Company Non-sectarian Protestant missionary organization that founded a school for Indigenous people at Sussex Vale, New Brunswick, in 1787 (p. 246).

Nickawa, Frances Cree woman from Split Lake, Manitoba who was adopted by a sewing teacher from the residential school at Norway House. After moving to Vancouver, Frances began performing in churches as a soloist and an elocutionist. She gained international acclaim as she travelled throughout Canada, Britain and Australia where she performed with songs and stories about the Cree people. Her mission was to raise interest and awareness of her people at home and abroad (p. 250).

pass system Regulation introduced after the Northwest Rebellion that required First Nations people in the West to obtain permission from the Indian agent to leave their reserves. Although not based in any legislation, the policy was later extended to Indigenous people throughout Canada and was enforced until the mid-1940s (p. 242).

residential schools Boarding schools for Indigenous children usually run as joint government–church enterprises with the purpose of assimilating these children into the dominant society (p. 247).

Study Questions

1. What was the pass system and why was it implemented?
2. What was scrip and how was it issued?
3. Why did some Métis not want to take treaty?
4. What is the significance of the Daniels decision?
5. Why were earlier schools, such as those run by the New England Company, not successful?
6. Why did the Canadian government prefer residential schools to day schools?
7. What was the Longhouse religion?
8. What were the key reasons behind the failure of industrial schools?
9. What types of resistance did parents and students participate in?

10. How did the right to choose a chief evolve as a policy?
11. How did officials get around rules restricting Indigenous land surrenders?
12. Why was the Joint Commission for the Settlement of Indian Reserves in the Province of British Columbia established and what was the result of this Commission?
13. Why did World War I result in a push for the surrender of Indian reserve lands?
14. What was the League of Indians and who was the founder of this organization?
15. What improvements were proposed by Loft and what was the result of his efforts?

Essay Questions

1. Who was Frances Nickawa and why was she important?

Frances Nickawa (1891–1927) was a Cree storyteller and orator who became famous in the early twentieth century. A native of Split Lake, Manitoba, she was taken to the Norway House Residential School where she was adopted by the school's sewing teacher. They moved to Vancouver, where Frances started her performance career as a soloist and elocutionist. Her renditions of Cree stories garnered increasingly large audiences, which led her to widespread fame. Her western Canadian rail tour in 1919 was well received. The following year, she toured full time, performing throughout Canada and as far as Britain and Australia. She played an important role in raising awareness of Indigenous Peoples, especially the Cree (p. 250).

2. What important contributions did Indigenous Peoples make during World War I?

Indigenous Peoples throughout the country contributed to the war effort. One specific example is the raising of substantial amounts for the Red Cross by the Blood people in Western Canada. Despite the poverty on reserves, First Peoples still gave generously. By the same token, approximately 4,000 First Nations soldiers served even though they were not treated equally as veterans (p. 256).

3. What were the legal implications of assuming a Métis identity?

Métis people are not considered status Indians in the same sense as First Nations. And, even though Métis are recognized as Aboriginal people in the Constitution Act of 1982, it was not until the Daniels decision of the Supreme Court that they too were recognized as having the same legal distinction as Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, their legal position was no different than any other Canadian citizen. However, this decision means that the government now has the same responsibility to Métis (and non-status Indians) people that they have to status Indians (pp. 243-244).

Additional Resources

Further Readings

Brass, Eleanor. *I Walk in Two Worlds*. Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1987.

Carter, Sarah A. *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Chute, Janet E. *The Legacy of Shingvaukonse: A Century of Native Leadership*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

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Winegard, Timothy. *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012.

Websites

University of Saskatchewan Archives – Our Legacy – Métis Scrip

- http://scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/exhibit_scrip

University of British Columbia – First Nations and Indigenous Studies – The Residential School System

- https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/

University of Toronto – Dictionary of Canadian Biography – Loft, Frederick Ogilvie

- http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/loft_frederick_ogilvie_16E.html

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada – The CAP/*Daniels Decision* – Frequently Asked Questions

- <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1460635873455/1460635946946>