

UBCIC Newsletter Articles: Constitution Expresses 1978-1982

Constitution Express to Ottawa and New York

UBCIC News

“Editorial” / Summer Editor: Linda Day. June 1978. p. 2.

Discussion of the potential impact of rewriting the Canadian Constitution on Status Indians.

“Constitutional Rights for Indian People: the National Indian Brotherhood Meets.” September, 1978. p. 8-9.

Report on the National Indian Brotherhood’s 9th Annual General Assembly which included discussion of upcoming changes to the Canadian Constitution.

“CYI/Dene Position Repatriation of Constitution.” March 1979. p. 12.

Report on March 15, 1979 joint position statements released by representatives from the northern Indian organisations expressing concerns over the Constitutional developments and their rights of Indian people to participate in the constitutional debate.

“Chiefs Enlighten British Parliament.” July 1979. p. 18-19.

Article about delegation of chiefs that traveled to England in an attempt to return the Canadian constitution (B.N.A. Act) to Canada from Westminster, London where it has been since July 1, 1867. As the original inhabitants of the land, the chiefs expressed their opinion that they should have a say in the return and rewriting of the Constitution.

“Constitutional Talks: Indian “Participation” Promised” / Robert Manuel. August 1979. p. 17.

Short article reporting on June 30, 1979 meeting where Indian, non-status, Metis and Inuit people were invited to participate in the discussions related to rewriting the Canadian Constitution. Mentions that the final adoption of the “Aboriginal Rights Position Paper” will give direction to take into future constitutional discussions.

“Control: an Indian Government Perspective.” December 1979. p. 20-21

Outlines the relationship between the British North America Act and the Indian Act and what constitutional revisions will mean to the Indian Act.

Our Indian World: the Choice is Ours

“Constitutional Changes: March to Demand Full Participation.” April 1980. Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 4.

In response to Prime Minister Trudeau's speech on April 29, 1980 that showed lack of commitment regarding Indian participation on the constitutional changes, a march to parliament hill took place on May 1, 1980. About 250 delegates, prompted in large part by George Manuel, reinforced the conference (not stated but thinking it's the First Nations Constitutional Conference) theme of, “The Future of our Children.”

“First Nations Constitutional Conference.” April 1980. Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 5-6.

About 380 Chiefs met in Ottawa April 28, to May 1, 1980. UBCIC presented their “Aboriginal Rights Position Paper”, or Resolution #2 for the conference. Talks were not primarily focused on constitutional changes, or participation, but on “bread and butter issues at home”. UBCIC took position that government promises were empty rhetoric regarding Constitutional Changes and Indian participation, where it was felt ‘observer’ status would be the status quo during the constitutional discussions.

“Special Supplement: Aboriginal Rights Position and Indian Government Manifesto.” August 1980. Vol. 3, No. 5, p. 19-26.

A comprehensive overview of the two documents demanding more Indian government control and representation.

“State of Emergency: Trudeau’s Constitution would wipe out Aboriginal Rights.” October, 1980. Vol. 3, No. 7. p 4-6.

This article defines the position of which the Constitution Express finds itself on, that in the process of patriation from the British Crown, “All the Proclamations, Agreements, Treaties and contracts which ensure that our Aboriginal rights are written into the most powerful laws of the land stand to be wiped out in the edited version of the Constitution”. The Constitution Express was born out of the desire to derail Trudeau’s “railroading his Constitution through, a steam locomotive that won’t stop until it reaches its final destination.” The fact that “only another locomotive can stop this ruthless machine” is what created the Canada wide Constitution Express protest. Announcement that George Manuel and nine Chiefs and their bands launched an action, “declaring that the Canadian parliament does not have the authority to alter the unique relationship of Indian Nations and the Imperial Crown.”

“Resolutions.” October, 1980. Vol. 3, No. 7, p. 19.

Moved by Chief Bob Wilson, seconded by Chief Tom Sampson resolutions making UBCIC the central organization for the uniting the Indian people of British Columbia. Another resolution moved by Chief Howard Wale and seconded by Chief Bob Wilson, giving UBCIC a full mandate to take the necessary steps to ensure Aboriginal and Treaty rights are entrenched in the Canadian Constitution.

“A Journey to Nationhood.” Nov./Dec., 1980, Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 4-6.

A summary of the Constitutional Express leading to a meeting with then, Governor General Edward Shreyer, who advised the delegation committee that they would have to deal with Canada and not the crown. As a result of this meeting, plans were continued to go to New York and present before the United Nations, where a team had been sent earlier to establish meetings with UN delegates, and plan for the possible arrival of the Canadian team.

“President’s Message” / George Manuel. Nov./Dec., 1980. Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 7.

George Manuel references UBCIC 12th Annual General Assembly “State of Emergency” declaration. Stating further that the Constitution Express arrived in Ottawa on Friday, November 28, 1980. George Manuel makes the statement, “I cannot stress enough the threat posed by Trudeau’s Constitutional Resolution to totally destroy our hereditary ties with our homeland and to our survival as the original people in Canada.”

“First Nations Declare Nationhood.” Nov./Dec., 1980. Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 8-10.

The new “First Nations Assembly” adopted the “Declaration of the First Nations” and presented it to Governor General Ed Schreyer, requesting that it be forwarded to the Queen. Remarks on the assembly include non-consensus on issues of Indian involvement in the Constitution. Working within the Federal government versus going to an international arena divided the delegates. Chief Wayne Christian, Chairman of the Constitution Express, refused to meet within the established time frame with the joint-senate committee on the Constitution.

“National Congress of American Indians Supports our Constitutional Action.” No./Dec. 1980, Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 11.

During the Nation Congress of American Indians 37th Annual convention between the 26th to the 31st of October, 1980, and following a one day presentation by George Manuel, President of the UBCIC, and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, unanimously carried a resolution supporting the efforts during the constitutional development in Canada.

“Documenting Land Claims: 300 Years of Living Memory” / Beth Cuthand. Nov./Dec., 1980. Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 28-30.

This article is regarding the Teme-Augama Anishnabai of the Lake Temegami Region of Northeast Ontario, however, how Trudeau's Constitution could affect their land rights is mentioned on p. 30.

“Sovereign Nations” / Louise Mandell. Nov./Dec., 1980. Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 28-30.

Legal arguments made in Rotterdam, England, Ottawa and New York, as part of the Constitutional Express. One of the main points being that Canada mismanaged the trust of the Indian population, excluding the nations from basic human rights and right to an Indian government. The arguments would be made to promote the Indian Nations in Canada as a people who have been denied the status of Nationhood.

“The Constitution Express.” Nov./Dec., 1980. Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 35.

Statements made from four different people who were on the Constitution Express: Chief Nathan Spinks, Lytton Band; Mike Peters, Mount Currie Band; Joyce Willard, Neskainlith Band; and L. Adrian, Cranbrook.

“Indian Nations Seek World Support” / Sharon Venne. January, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 4-5.

Message delivered to the United Nations in December, 1980 that Canada is attempting to sever the protection the crown has offered through denial of the Indian people within the new Constitution. Seeking support from an International arena such as the United Nations exposed a century long attack which the Indian Nations have been surviving from the Canadian state.

“Constitutional Express Re-awakened Our Nations” / George Manuel. January, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 6-7.

George Manuel states the position of the intent behind the Constitution Express, including the reason why an invitation from “The House of Commons and Senate Constitutional Committee, which had invited the Constitutional Express to come before their committee to provide evidence on the resolution of the federal government to patriate the Canadian Constitution.” The reason being, that it would have jeopardized their legal evidence that “we are clearly recognized by the British Crown as a people.” A list of successes, as a result of the Constitution Express is listed.

“Patriation Illegal Without Indian Consent says Tribunal.” January, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 8.

In the last week of November, 1980, the Russell Tribunal found Canada had breached International obligations with specific reference to claims UBCIC made regarding the patriation of Canada from the British Crown without consent from the Indian people in Canada. Another reference was made regarding Treaty 9, which this tribunal said was Canada taking away lands from the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation illegally.

“Constitutional Amendments: Government Says We May Exist” January, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 9.

An amendment on January 12th, 1981, marked only as (a) and (b), which can be interpreted as rights which, “acknowledges that Indian people may have rights which if proved, the federal government would not deny.”

“Inuit Critical of Constitutional Amendments.” January, 1981, Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 9.

“Eric Togoona, Chairman of the Inuit Committee on National Issues, expressed reservations about the constitutional amendments present by Jean Chretien.”

“Buffy St. Marie.” January, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 11.

Advertisement and announcement that Buffy St. Marie will play the Orpheum theatre with all proceeds going to the Indian Constitutional Express.

“Chiefs Council: If We're A Nation We Have To Act Like One.” January, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 30.

Reference made to the Constitution Express by Bob Manuel and also presented a draft declaration of the Constitution Express.

“Constitution Express Potlatch.” February, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 10, p. 10.

Advertisement for feast, pow-wow and talent show.

“Special Edition: Constitution Express.” February, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 10, p. 10.

A call out for stories, pictures, ideas, and interviews with people who were on the Constitution Express for the creation of a special edition regarding that trip.

“UBCIC Has To Reject Patriation: No Protection for B.C. Nations.” March, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 11, p. 10-11.

Outlines the reasons patriation promotes no inherent rights for B.C. Nations, where it states that in as little as two years after patriation, Indians will have no rights. Three issues need to be agreed to prior to negotiations with the Federal Government: 1) Royal Proclamation applies to all across the country. 2) Indians have a say in the Amending formula as it affects us. 3) Aboriginal Rights entrenched in the Constitution are those defined in our Aboriginal Rights Position Paper.

“We Are Still In A State of Emergency: Constitution Express Potlatch.” March, 1981. Vol. 3, No. 10, p. 12-13.

About 900 gathered at the Kamloops Band Residential School March 27-29, 1981, where the decision to send a contingency of B.C. Indians to England to protest patriation of the Canadian Constitution. This was the Indian people of B.C. Backing up the Chiefs position on the Constitution. “The people saw the connection between every part of their lives and how the constitution, as it's now worded, would affect them.” George Manuel spoke to the gathering along with Wayne Christian who said, “I strongly believe that this may be our last battle with the Canadian government.” Chief Nation Spinks suggested a seat at the United Nations as recognition as a Nation.

“A Great Indian Power is Created.” / Chief Wayne Christian. April, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 12-13.

Chief Wayne Christian discusses both the Child Caravan, and the Constitution Express. He offers three main points: 1) Standing up with the leaders, the people won our first victory – here he discusses the Indian Child Caravan of October 1980. 2) The Constitution Express showed the people have the power of victory – here he discusses the Constitution Express and remarks on the danger each person had in leaving the non-Indian government to decide Indian fate. 3) The people's movement takes the Indian Constitution Express on to England – stating that the people want to continue the fight to England.

“Constitution Express to Ottawa.” April, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 13.

Randy James, Seton Lake Band, Lila Peters, Sto:lo Nation, Archie Pootlax share constitution express stories.

[Advertisements for Constitution Express fundraisers]. April, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 14-15.

“Indian Laws: The Constitution wouldn't recognize them” / Sharon Venne. April, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 26.

There is nothing in the proposed Constitution that states that Indians can be governed by Indian laws, where it does state that laws must be made by the Federal and Provincial governments. The point being that Indians would not have jurisdiction over their own nationhood, or at least a recognized ability to do so. Only the Federal and Provincial governments would have this power.

“Story of the British Trust.” April, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 26-27.

Historic outline of legislation; a brief summary of its limitations with regards to patriation, ending with the statement that 'We reject their constitution.' “In December, 1980, Indian Nations presented Bills of Particulars” to the Canadian Government, the British Government and to the United Nations, seeking internationally supervised discussions between Britain, Canada and ourselves.” The response was that neither the British nor the Canadian governments responded.

“Ruthlessly Determined to Assimilate Us Patriation Would Crush Our Nations Forever.” April, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 28-29.

June of 1978, the intent to patriate from Britain announced by the Federal Government of Canada. A delegation of Chiefs and Elders were decided to go to England, and plead the case against patriation with the Queen. The Prime Minister of Canada refused this to happen. A quote from a confidential letter after October 1980, stating that Canada's image would suffer if questioned about Indians standards being different from other Canadians. Various documents highlighted include, the 1947, “A Plan for Liquidating Canada's Indian Problem within 25 years”, and Document #408-79 entitled, “Native Claims Policy,” and The Canada Oil & Gas Act of 1981.

Constitution Express to Europe

Our Indian World: the Choice is Ours

“Constitution Express.” May-June, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 10.

The need for going international on the issue of patriation, is about enforcing the nationhood status for Indians. This article outlines the plans on going to Europe, slated to leave Montreal for Germany on August 29th, 1981. As a follow up action to the previous year, going to Europe, rather than staying within the boundaries of Canada, puts Indian claims to a Nationhood in a better position. The plans are to go to Germany, England and France.

“Special General Assembly.” May-June, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 11.

Special General Assembly, held May 14-15, 1981 at the Vancouver Friendship Center, discussed how the interest in pursuing the opposition to the Constitution, shifted from the Chiefs to the people. Lack of support from the Chiefs noted by speakers, including George Manuel. The question was raised that if patriation occurred, would it mean the end of the fight for international recognition of the Indian Nations.

“Constitutional Express Fundraising.” May-June, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 14.

Article discussing the need to continue fundraising and offering alternatives to get involvement from the people.

“Constitution Express.” Special Fall Issue, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 6.

Constitution Express #2 updated – first advance team left October 8, 1981 at 5:10 pm, bound for London, England, with plans on visiting four European Countries. Soon to follow, will be the main express group, where they will all meet up in Hanover, Germany, and which are slated to leave November 1, 1981 after the UBCIC General Assembly. Travel countries change to include Holland and Belgium. Two ceremonies will be conducted, one for those that died in WWII in Brussels and a potlatch in England.

“Chief Council Meeting.” Special Fall Issue, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 6.

Announcement of meeting held in Vancouver on June 23rd, 1981. Legal tactics had been discussed on the “crisis as it relates to the British Government.”

“President Message” / Saul Terry. Special Fall Issue, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 7.

President Saul Terry clarifies the intent of the Constitution Express, stating “A Canadian Constitution...can accommodate Indian rights, it cannot decrease, alter or eliminate this Indian tradition.” The Constitution is seen as “genocidal doom” for Indian Nations in Canada, and the message must be told to a wider audience to gain support.

“Constitution Express Potlatches.” Special Fall Issue, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 8.

This article details the traditional strength behind the potlatches and the importance of why they are conducted specifically for the Constitution Express. Statements such as, “Indian Law is practiced by having the men take the responsibility of being security and watching the people so that no harm would come to them,” and “What we are fighting for is our Nationhood, our land and ourselves as Indian people,” reaffirm the position behind the Constitution Express.

“Concerned Aboriginal Women's Occupation.” Special Fall Issue, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 8.

The “Concerned Aboriginal Women” take over the Vancouver DIA office in July of 1981. This resulted from a “casual meeting at the Lytton Constitution Express Potlatch.” This article paints a picture of frustration on both sides, replays a story of the ‘bureaucrat’ that had a tug of war over a scotch tape with one of the women, remarks on the women’s position of oppression due to assimilation, and lack of cultural respect.

“To All The Citizens Of All The Indian Nations” Chief Wayne Christian. Special Fall Issue, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 16 (back cover).

Chief Wayne Christian stresses the need to be prepared for the European journey for the Constitution Express. Teaching the European people about the danger of “Trudeau’s plan to legally assimilate our people and to legally steal our land from us” but also that the government will not fix the problems they created in Indian communities. Chief Wayne Christian states “We must demand and assert our rights for we have been fooled long enough and now the people realize that our rights have not been lost but have never been exercised by the Nations of people.” This article speaks to the reader from an “ambassador” which must speak to the world regarding the Indian Nations in Canada, but well aware of the struggle that will follow upon return to the community.

“President's Message” / George Manuel. December, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 5.

Grand Chief George Manuel provides a statement on achieving a “fourth world” in Canada, developed through “integration based on mutual respect and acceptance of each other’s values as valid fro the other.” Manuel’s remarks stem from the ongoing battle during the Constitution Express.

“13th Annual General Assembly.” December, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 8-9.

Two major issues at forefront to this article, one being the Concerned Aboriginal Women's actions in taking over the Vancouver DIA office in July 1981 (no further comment made on this action other than its acknowledgement) and the Constitution Express. The decision to embark on an expensive litigation in England, based on Louise Mandell's actions in Europe, prompted action from the chief's. This paragraph is important: “Several copies of documents belonging to the Federal Government were distributed to the delegates. These documents showed clearly how the government planned to assimilate the Indian people. Any Indian group talking “Indian Government” was to be ignored. This is one reason the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs was so rudely deprived of its funding and proved to be a good example of what would happen to all those bands who bravely declared their nationhood.” It was during this meeting that George Manuel was bestowed with the title, “Grand Chief.”

“Concerned Aboriginal Women Return Home from Europe” / Vera Manuel. December, 1981, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 10-11.

Eight women made up part of the advance team which left for Europe to meet up with the main group which left later. The women split up and travelled to different countries. This article is a qualitative piece on the women's experiences, and what impact they feel they had toward projecting the importance of the Constitution Express. It is an important piece, as these women, with their children, traveling a far distance to make international statements of oppression against Indian people in Canada, does add a balanced appeal of all Indian people making this very public plea of the dangers of patriation without Indian consultation.

“Who? Adolph Trudeau or Pierre Hitler?” December, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 12.

This article remarks on Pierre Trudeau's tactics against Indian people, it paints a frustrated picture of Trudeau as a man bent on self serving interests, with little regard for Indian people.

“The Constitution: What Do We Want?” December, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 13.

This article opens with, “Our position on the Constitution is that Crown obligations must be fulfilled.” Three main points are projected: 1) Recognition and affirmation of our Aboriginal and Treaty Rights. 2) Indian consent clause to ensure Provincial and Federal consultation with Indian people must occur regarding the Aboriginal peoples section of the Constitution. 3) the 1763 Royal Proclamation must apply uniformly across Canada. The remarks that pro-Constitution include four nations: Indian Nations, the British Parliament, the Federal parliament and the provincial governments. Post-Constitution would remove the Indian Nations and the British Government. The article ends, leaving the reader with four areas where the fights will continue, maintaining the position of the Constitution Express.

“Indian Nations Unite.” December, 1981. Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 15.

This article gives a general overview of actions taken to date during the battle for Constitution recognition. This article focuses on the people coming together, that the government does not want this, and remarks on the fear resulting from the previous occupation of the DIA office. During an undated demonstration starting at the UBCIC office on Hastings Street – to the Regional Department of Indian Affairs – to the Four Seasons Hotel where a meeting was held by the Social Credit Party – finally to the rallying point where the Concerned Aboriginal Women took over the DIA office – the regional office was conveniently closed during the rally.

“First Nations Assembly.” April, 1982. p. 2 (inside front cover).

Beginning July 1, 1979 and spanning three years, the actions of First Nations in B.C. opposing the patriation of Canada with a Constitution, “unless an agreement was made to recognize our Aboriginal Rights in the Constitution” are detailed. The 10th NIB AGA, the First Nations Constitutional Conference, the demonstration on Parliament Hill, the second First Nations Assembly, the Constitution Express, the “Declaration of the First Nations” and the Third Assembly of First Nations Constitutional Conference are all discussed.

“Patriation.” Herman Thomas. April, 1982, p. 15 (back cover).

Herman Thomas rejects rejoicing in Canada's patriation, as it denies “Indian people of their pride, dignity and self determination and self government.”

“Constitution Opinion.” July, 1982. p. 10-11.

Statement from Alfred Recalma, born August 18, 1903, copied from the Arrowsmith Star, Parksville newspaper, undated. Qualitative, an opinion piece from an elder from the Qualicum Beach Indian Band, on why he thinks the Constitution “stinks.”

“European Reflections.” October, 1982. p.10-11.

Mary Rose Dufrasne, a member of the Belgium Action Committee in Support of North American Indians and a civil servant in the Belgium Court system provided an interview regarding the work she has personally embarked upon after hearing the “Concerned Aboriginal Women's” presentation in Europe. “As a woman-and a feminist, Mary Rose admired the strength of the women who lovingly and patiently brought children along on so difficult a mission, and her appreciation of the commitment and seriousness of the Indian Constitutional Express (ICE) deepened when she discovered the great risks which were taken by the families and individuals who travelled to Europe.” This article speaks of Mary Rose's perception of growing European support for the ICE.

“First Nations International Diplomacy” / Isabelle Deom. October, 1982, p. 13-14.

This article reflects Sylvia Woods experiences on the European journey as part of the Constitution Express. The differences in culture were used as a backdrop to the spiritual teachings given by the elders, “cautioning us to beware taking on non-Indian ways indiscriminately.” Using examples of acid rain, and the complete overtaking of lands for habitation, and the close proximity military force as part of daily existence, a deeper appreciation for the Indian lands and deeper feeling of why they are doing the work of ambassadorship resulted within Sylvia.

“Public Notice from the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation.” October, 1982. p. 15.

A public statement asserting dissatisfaction with the 1981 Canadian Constitution, that “Aboriginal Rights” are only referred to but not defined. The Nishnawbe-Aski, “claim a right to be consulted on the basis of existing nations as defined by the U.N. For the People and Land, aboriginal rights are not negotiable.”