

## DOCUMENTS

These documents relate to the origins of Indian organizations in Saskatchewan. They consist of two letters decrying attempts by Premier Tommy Douglas and his Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) government to meld Saskatchewan Indians into a single provincial organization.

Douglas, who had been made an honorary chief of the Assiniboines and named Red Eagle, wanted the fourteen thousand Indians in Saskatchewan to speak with one voice in demanding from the federal government citizenship rights and social reforms aimed at improving conditions on Saskatchewan reserves. To that end, on January 4th 1946, the Premier convened a conference held in the Legislative Building in Regina. It was attended principally by Indian groups from the southern portion of the province and in the end it produced a draft proposal for a new organization known as the Saskatchewan Indian Federation (SIF).

The SIF was almost immediately disavowed by various Indian groups, especially in the north. Indian leaders were naturally suspicious of any organization closely associated with a political party and with non-Native leadership and there was also a widely expressed fear that Douglas' campaign to extend the vote to Indians was little more than a thinly veiled attempt to enfranchise the Indian community. Moreover, it was felt that the creation of provincial organizations would fracture and fragment the existing pan-Indian organization, the North American Indian Brotherhood (NAIB)--the only organization recognized by the federal government.

Indicative of the opposition to a provincial organization was an all-chiefs meeting held in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, six days after the Regina conference. The main proponents of the SIF draft proposal were G.H. Castleden, MP for Yorkton, and Max Campbell, MP for Battleford, who appeared at the meeting as representatives of the CCF government. The meeting was presided over by John Tootosis, an executive member of NAIB from Poundmaker Reserve, and contained a large contingent of northern chiefs. Castleden and Campbell were allowed to address the assembly, but almost as soon as they had finished their remarks, a prominent chief rose and insisted that the meeting not be further interfered with by outsiders and that it be restricted to Indians only; and from there, the chiefs went on not only to endorse overwhelmingly the NAIB but also to reject the SIF draft proposal by a vote of 80 to 3.

The following letters, edited for publication, are taken from the T.C. Douglas Papers found in the Saskatchewan Archives Board [Files of the Premier, R-33-1, file XLV.864 a (49)]. They are expressions of the resentment often felt by Indian people toward governments, no matter how well meaning, which seek to preempt



Indian leadership. They also serve as a reminder that present demands for Indian self-government stem from a long-standing determination by Indian peoples to control their own affairs. The first letter was written by E.A. Boden, a CCF party member from Cut Knife, Saskatchewan; the Second was penned by Andrew Paull, a Squamish Indian well known for his leadership in Indian organizations in British Columbia.

F. Laurie Barron

### Document One

Cut Knife, Saskatchewan,  
June 24th. 1946

Premier T.C. Douglas  
Legislative Buildings  
Regina, Saskatchewan

Dear Mr. Douglas:

I am writing you at this time because of a discussion I had recently with John Tootoosis our Indian friend who was recently made chairman of the Saskatchewan Indian organization that was formed at Saskatoon this last winter. . . .

Our talk recently centered around the recent development in the attempt to better the conditions of the Indian. John was rather reluctant in giving much credit to our Saskatchewan government in being interested or helping to solve the problem. I finally found out what the trouble was. The Indian is still very suspicious of the white mans [sic] motives in anything that has any connection with the Indian affairs. John said that he thoroughly understood everything and was not greatly worried but that so many of his people did not understand as yet and were very much opposed to the whiteman telling him what to do or even to suggest a remedy. This is the impression that they have after last winters [sic] sessions. John himself said that he was surprised that Castleden was so determined to take over and run the meetings when according to John Tootoosis the Indians themselves were to handle their own meetings. I believe Max Campbell scented this at the Duck Lake meeting and promptly left.



John also mentioned that the Indians were very much disgusted with what was in the press concerning the Indians and the action taken by the Saskatchewan government on their behalf. I asked him to show me the press reports that he apparently has kept. I would like to see what has upset them so. John told me that just recently he had to warn Schumiatcher who apparently was attending one of the meetings lately of the danger in being a little too ready to offer advice to the Indian.

To sum it all up they are not in a mood to have anyone tell them how they should run their affairs. They seem to think that the government or those that were representing the government were trying to lay down all the by-laws and regulations instead of letting them handle that part of the organizing. John said that he appreciates very much [the interest] that you and others are taking in the problems of the Indian but as he said do not make it more difficult for him to get the Indians to co-operate by not properly understanding the Indian, suspicious as he still is of the whiteman. God only knows that he has every reason to be suspicious of the whitemans [sic] ways.

It is going to take a little patience and especially tact in helping the Indians. Once you have the Indian for a friend he will stay by you. But you must prove it to him in black and white terms. John Tootoosis told me that he would like to have a talk with you personally. Probably he has done so by now as he said he had to go to Winnipeg and I told [him] to try and see you by all means when on his way. I explained that I knew you would be very much interested in having a talk with him on this question. I consider Tootoosis very alert and intelligent, much more by the way than many of our own people who are called citizens and are voting.

I wish you all the success in your work in trying to bring about ways and means of lifting the Indian out of the mess that we so called Christians have pushed them into. . . .

Yours sincerely,

E.A. Boden



Document Two

Hon. T.C. Douglas  
 Premier for Saskatchewan  
 Legislative Buildings  
PERSONAL  
 Regina, Saskatchewan  
 Canada

October 2nd, 1946

Dear Chief:

It is with a great deal of reluctance and after much serious consideration that I feel compelled to ask you to instruct Dr. Morris Shumatcher [sic]<sup>1</sup> and other members of your group to stop calling meetings, and attending meetings of Indians where they attempt to force the Indians to adopt their policies, and who advise the Indians NOT to co-operate in one Canadian organization. . . .

Recently [Dr. Shumiatcher] instigated the calling of a meeting last month which had to be cancelled by the president John Tootoosis, because it was impossible to get a representative meeting.

Now I am told he and others intend to attend a proposed meeting on the 28th of this month, when it is feared he and others whom he has invited will advise the Indians not to co-operate in one Canadian organization, that he explicitly means our organization.

We have been advised by right thinking people, who have no ulterior motives, that the success of the Canadian Indians now, before the government of Canada depends largely on their unity of action.

We have tried to bring about this unity, we are an oppressed people, who have been persecuted, and we are now struggling against great odds to bring about a more intensified unity of action.

Now CHIEF, I say to you, that it is too bad, that members of a political group who are pledged to help under-privileged



minority groups, should be working contrary to the securing of a unity of action by the Indians.

We want to see Indians organize provincially, but these must work together in a Dominion organization, and our organization is the one that has been formed by the Indians to give leadership to them Dominion wide.

I have received letters from the Indians of the plains, which compels me, to ask you to allow the Indians to formulate their own policies without the help of any political group, especially Dr. Schumatcher [sic].

We welcome any help that the white people can give us to attain our objectives, but the Indians feel competent to design their own objectives. Many Honorary Chiefs in the Cabinet and in the House of Commons have shown true greatness and statemanship, by the dignified manner in which they have contributed to the Indian cause.

I ask that you make your contribution by laying down a strict rule that no whitemen shall attend the meetings. They have forced themselves into former meetings and have given direction to their deliberations. Once they were told to get out. Your contribution would be worth while if you did this. Now if men acted like your Minister of Resources Mr. Phelps,<sup>2</sup> who showed he was a real man of dignity there would be no objection. So please let me know your decision by return mail, and thanking you. I have spoken.

Yours for the Indian Cause

Andrew Paull  
President (Grand Chief)  
North American Indian Brotherhood

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Shumiatcher was a legal advisor to the CCF cabinet.

<sup>2</sup>Phelps has been described as an unorthodox socialist. See Murray Dobbin, The One and a Half Men (Vancouver: New Star Books Ltd., 1981), pp. 169-170.