

Kathleen Buddle, Associate Professor of Anthropology
University of Manitoba
Kathleen.buddle@umanitoba.ca

Bio: My current research investigates the ways criminality is understood and experienced by members of Aboriginal street gangs in Canada. My publications span urban Aboriginal legal, political and social health issues including: participatory action research among urban Aboriginal youth, the social history of Aboriginal media activism, the cultural production of Aboriginal women's film and radio, Aboriginal women and community development, and First Nations cultural politics.

Abstract: The Inter-National roots of the Indigenous Nationalist Movement in Canada

By the turn of the 20th century, Aboriginal peoples in Canada had been pushed to the margins of every conceivable Canadian domain. They were secluded on remote reserves and subjected to a totalizing regulatory regime. In addition to managing other aspects of everyday life, colonial legislation prohibited the pursuit of Indigenous political and economic practices and Indigenous participation in Canadian affairs, while ensuring that settler commerce would be unfairly subsidized. The effect was to render Indigenous economies non-competitive and Indigenous polities impotent.

Enlisting for service in the World Wars provided segments of the Indigenous population with a temporary escape from the degenerating social and material conditions that colonial government policies produced on reserves. While abroad, Aboriginal soldiers developed a consciousness of the common and systematic means by which Indigenous peoples from Canada were subjugated at home. Many of the returning veterans resolved to politically mobilize a national "Indianness," (as opposed to Creeness, for example), toward particular strategic ends. The articulation of this oppositional discourse signaled the beginnings of the intertribal or "pan-Indian" movement. The Canadian public, moreover, when provided with images of communist and Nazi villains against which to measure the virtues of liberal democracy (and Canadian identity), became increasingly interested in these formerly vilified Indigenous compatriots.

Indigenous political organizers use the mainstream newspapers and Indigenous media to de-emphasize regional and socio-historical particularities, along with cultural, gender, age and class distinctions in and between tribal groups in order to promote the interests of a nation-wide Aboriginal citizenry. Ultimately, this nascent nationalism found its expression in the creation of the first national Aboriginal organization in Canada - The League of Indians. The League employed the English language and the common elements of an Aboriginal identity in the pursuit of explicit political objectives – namely, Aboriginal political and civil rights. This paper examines some of the reasons this collectivizing project would ultimately fail at this historical moment, drawing attention to the divergent interests that were produced by the uneven governing strategies of the Indian Department and to the particularized experiences of diversely articulated Aboriginal reserve communities.

The Inter-National roots of the Indigenous Nationalist Movement in Canada

By the turn of the 20th century, Aboriginal peoples in Canada had been pushed to the margins of every conceivable Canadian domain. They were secluded on remote reserves and subjected to a totalizing regulatory regime. In addition to managing other aspects of everyday life, colonial legislation prohibited the pursuit of Indigenous political and economic practices and Indigenous participation in Canadian affairs, while ensuring that settler commerce would be unfairly subsidized. The effect was to render Indigenous economies non-competitive and Indigenous polities impotent.

At the time of the First World War, the Indian Department was forced to concede that the reserve policy, which promoted segregation, had outlived its usefulness. Isolation began to be apprehended as an obstacle to national unity and cultural distinctiveness as a threat to the principle of national sovereignty. Employing the rhetoric of “equality,” the Indian administration set about to apply new policies of assimilation for western bands through such measures as allotment in severalty, forced enfranchisement, mandatory residential schooling, and the leasing of “surplus lands” among other governing techniques. It was by means of such measures that the administration sought the dissolution of reserve boundaries, and the absorption of Indigenous peoples into the lower echelons of the Canadian “ethnoscape” (cf Appadurai 1996:48).

State and Church reformation projects among Indigenous peoples, while not necessarily concerted, often worked toward this same goal of assimilation through cultural replacement. When the government passed compulsory education legislation in 1921, for example, considerable control over matters of Indigenous children’s primary socialization was placed in the hands of priests and residential school administrators. For their part, the churches obliged the Indian department by discouraging Aboriginal political activities.¹ The Indian administration’s policies, however, were not consistent over time, nor were they evenly applied across regions. The cultural and political terrain into which administration policies were introduced was differentiated enough within reserve communities to contribute more to local factionalism rather than to any sense of national sovereignty among reserve communities.

The Indian administration persisted in using legislative means as its weapon of choice to quell Aboriginal collective action. The 1885 *Criminal Code* legislation banning potlaches and later, gatherings among Native peoples on the prairies, for instance, would be reinforced by amendments to the *Indian Act* in 1914. The *Indian Act*, in an earlier incarnation, included a clause prohibiting Native peoples from attending dances outside the boundary of their reserve and from appearing in Aboriginal outfits at fairs or exhibitions (Titley 1986:175). According to Tobias, this section was later amended to prohibit participation in these dances in any type of dress, unless the Department of

¹ In 1933 at the government’s request, for example, a Catholic bishop commanded Edward Ahenakew, who served as the League’s Saskatchewan President, to desist from all political involvement with the League of Saskatchewan Indians and to concentrate solely on religious matters (Cuthand 1995: xviii).

Indian Affairs provided prior written approval (1991:138). Far from prohibiting merely social or ceremonial events, the legislation caught in its web almost any form concerted political action. Potlatches, Thirst and Sun Dance gatherings served as important intertribal political gatherings where polities convened to organize strategies that would affect reserve life across wide regions. Many prairie Native polities opposed these restrictive policies by sending petitions to Indian Department officials or by holding covert gatherings, directly protesting by taking these activities underground (Pettipas 1994).

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, The Indian Department managed to discourage both traditional Aboriginal *and* so-called 'progressive' Canadian endeavours among Indigenous people. Rather than by assimilating or even integrating the Aboriginal population, the North-west government aimed to arrest Aboriginal economic development entirely. The department shelved the model farming project, for example, which dispatched farm instructors to western reserves, when non-Native farmers complained that the program ran counter to Canadian interests and was too expensive.

Settlers in the North-west, who were indignant that such programs gave an unfair advantage to Native farmers, voiced their dissent in the prairie presses. Frank Oliver employed his newspaper, *The Edmonton Bulletin*, and his political position to press the point that any efforts to educate Indian people posed a threat to the public interest. During the 14 June 1897 parliamentary debates, Oliver insisted, "we are educating these Indians to compete industrially with our own people, which seems to me a very undesirable use of public money, or else we are not able to educate them to compete, in which case our money is thrown away" (in Hall 1977:134). The model farm program was discontinued in 1884 due to administrative problems, increasing criticism from the non-Native residents of the North-west, and an increasing concern for economy in the Indian department.

By 1883, Frank Oliver, along with Hayter Reed, occupied a seat on the North-west Council. He used his status as a politician and a newspaperman to promote settlement and the expansion of agriculture in the area. His paper served as a convenient forum for publicizing his personal visions for regional progress. The *Edmonton Bulletin* generally reserved its most scathing moral indictments for the "half-breeds," whose mixed racial constitution was itself interpreted as an affront to Oliver's notions of racial purity. In one editorial entitled "Indians?" Métis people are characterized as having integrated the worst of both worlds, "having the grasping nature of the whiteman and the indolence of the Indian" (15 April 1882). Oliver's editorial asserts moreover, that the distribution of free rations was merely "putting a premium on laziness," and that granting the band reserve lands close to Edmonton would most certainly prove injurious to the "public benefit," which, he argues, should naturally outweigh Métis concerns.² In

² For Métis political activism during the interwar years, see: Bell 1994, 1999; Driben 1985; Sawchuk 1981.

service of the “public benefit” in 1889 Hayter Reed introduced a new program which had as its intended goal the exclusion of Native farmers from competition in the commercial farming industry. Hayter Reed’s Peasant Farming program was designed to deliberately arrest Aboriginal agricultural development, and to hasten Native enfranchisement. It was hoped that these measures would appease settlers and attract new immigrants to the North-West.³

Enlisting for service in the World Wars provided segments of the Indigenous population with a temporary escape from the degenerating social and material conditions that colonial legislation and policy applications produced on reserves. Approximately 3,500 First Nations soldiers served overseas, all of them volunteers (Sheffield & Foster 1999:60). While abroad, Aboriginal soldiers developed a consciousness of the common and systematic means by which Indigenous peoples from Canada were subjugated at home.

Although participation in the war effort successfully raised public awareness of the national plight of Indigenous peoples, there was a tragic outbreak of influenza across Canada brought on by the soldiers returning from Europe at the conclusion of WW1. The disease decimated the Aboriginal population which was at its lowest during the 1920s. According to the Indian Department’s Annual Report March 31, 1923, there were “about 105,000 for the whole Dominion.” (Ahenakew 1995:xii). In addition to this numerical disadvantage, which rendered Native peoples statistically less significant, politicians outside the Indian Department had tended to ignore the socio-economic crises experienced by reserve populations because they were excluded from the electorate, and therefore could provide no votes in return for political support.

In 1905 Frank Oliver would replace Clifford Sifton as the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs and as Minister of the Interior. Oliver championed amendments to the Immigration Act between 1906 and 1910 the cumulative effect of which was to curtail the number of Eastern Europeans immigrants and to virtually bar Black, Asian and East Indian immigration. Oliver, and other likeminded settlers to the North-west, “...feared

³ The program called for the subdivision of reserves into individual farms, a reduction in the acreage of crops under cultivation and of herds held, a prohibition on the use of labour-saving technology, a focus on production for self-sufficiency rather than for profit. Rather than communally owned cattle herds, for instance, the program allowed for one or two cows per household. Joseph Dion writes:

The large herds of band cattle and horses soon disappeared. Our own stock were reduced in numbers to practically nil and for the second time the Crees saw their meat supply vanish into thin air (1979:132).

The cultivation moreover, of root crops as opposed to wheat was encouraged, as root crops required weeding by hand at the time of year Native people would have been away hunting. Wheat farming on the other hand, was carried out with machinery, and required no special efforts during the hunting season (Carter 1990:211).

that the small, homogeneous, ethnically British population of the North-west Territories could not assimilate the growing numbers of culturally alien immigrants primarily from southeastern Europe” (Hollihan 1992:94).

Frank Oliver harboured little faith that the Indigenous population could be assimilated either, and consistently used the editorial section of the *Edmonton Bulletin* and the parliament to champion the idea that reserves ought to be thrown open for settlement, with or without Native peoples’ consent. Oliver asserted that Native people were not making practical use of their land, which he believed, they held far in excess of their needs (Carter 1990:447). In the *Edmonton Bulletin*, he asserted that British-Canadians were naturally superior, and would exploit the full potential of arable lands. Oliver portrayed Indigenous people as miserably failing at progress due to innate Aboriginal inabilities to adapt to progressive influences. He failed to take into account those policies that were designed to deliberately impede Aboriginal agricultural productivity.

Oliver’s promotion from the press to the Parliament heralded a new era in which attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples and to appropriate First Nations’ lands would reach unprecedented levels (Hall 1977:146). In 1906, Oliver would introduce an amendment to the *Indian Act* that would facilitate the alienation of uncultivated, “undeveloped” or so-called “surplus” reserved land. This provided his ministry with the power to lease unceded First nations’ land for mineral exploration, to expropriate lands for highways and railways, and to lease farm lands that were “not in use” by Native peoples (Tobias 1991:137).

By 1911, Oliver would introduce the controversial *Oliver Act*, which permitted the removal of Indigenous peoples from reserves that were next to, or partly within, a white community with a population of eight thousand inhabitants or more with the permission of the Exchequer Court of Canada (Titley 1986:21, Hollihan 1992). Three years later, the *Indian Act* was amended to make available, without Aboriginal peoples’ consent, “idle band funds” for investment in agriculture intensification schemes (Titley 1986:41). This legislation, which threatened to further erode the Indigenous land base would inspire outrage among Aboriginal peoples from all parts of the dominion.

Consequently, in the years following the First World War, organized Indigenous people’s responses to bureaucratic affronts began to mount. Three Native land rights organizations for instance, formed in BC prior to 1920. The organizations were: the Nisga’a Land Committee, the Interior Tribes and the Indian Rights Association (Galois 1992:14). The latter two organizations would unite at the end of the First World War, in opposition to the McKenna-McBride Commission -- a Royal Commission that was tasked with assessing the size of reserves in BC. The sixteen BC First Nations involved formed the Allied Tribes of BC.

Many of the returning veterans, who were seized by a nationalizing impulse, actively suspended their sense of local or cultural particularity in order to focus on their common predicament as an oppressed or colonized people – “the Red Man,” deploying a

measure of strategic essentialism (cf. Prins 1997). In the past Aboriginal activists had fought the homogenizing discursive tendencies that had facilitated their dismissal as racial inferiors. Now, pitted against an emergent Canadian nationalism, many activists strategically activated an identity politics that was implicitly premised on the very categories they had earlier rejected as essentialist or homogenizing. Activists mobilized “Indianness,” as opposed to Salishness or Creeness, for example, toward particular strategic ends.

The articulation of this oppositional discourse signaled the beginnings of the intertribal or “pan-Indian” movement. Ultimately, this nascent nationalism found its expression in the creation of the first national Indian organization in Canada. It was the intent of this organization to promote and channel an Aboriginal identity into the explicit pursuit of political objectives and to do so in the, now increasingly common, English language.

Fredrik Ogilvie Loft (1861-1934), a Mohawk accountant from the Six Nations reserve in Southern Ontario, made an unsuccessful attempt to form a union of Iroquoian and Ojibwe peoples in the late 1890’s. He outlined his rationale for such an organization in a letter to the *Toronto Globe* (7 November 1896). In it, he charged the Indian Department with failing to listen to the representatives of Native councils. His admonitions were ignored. Nonetheless, he persisted in writing for the newspapers about issues concerning Aboriginal peoples. National, religious and political schismatic divisions were ongoing complications of Six Nations political life. Internal cleavages between Traditionalists in the hereditary councils and Progressives in the elected band council, systems had been at odds for some time. This conflict came to a head the end of WW1 when Chief Levi General (Deskeheh) and his traditionalist supporters took their assertion of sovereignty to the international media, to the courts, to Britain and finally to the League of Nations in Geneva (Lackenbauer 2004:191).

When he returned from the war, Loft resolved to organize the “League of Indians of Canada,” the first national Indigenous organization in Canada, despite these and other competing ideologies within Aboriginal polities. Loft had attended both residential and public schools. He worked as a lumberjack and as a reporter for the *Brantford Expositor* in addition to writing articles for *The Globe*, *Saturday Night* and other Toronto newspapers. His principal employment was as an accountant, appointed by the Liberal government of Oliver Mowat, in the bursar’s office of the Asylum for the Insane. In WWI he served as a Lieutenant in the forestry draft.

The first League meeting occurred at the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, Ontario in 1918. The League adopted its constitution, and elected Loft as President at a second meeting, held in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario the following year (Sluman and Goodwill 1982:131). Western bands soon joined The League, and subsequent meetings were held in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta (Cuthand 1978:38). Edward Ahenakew, who later became the League’s president for Saskatchewan, delivered a speech to a women’s auxiliary missionary meeting, which was printed by the Battleford press. He spoke to the motivations behind the organization’s development:

The Indian feels that he has proven that he has done a man's work and he will never again be content to stand aside, giving no voice to matters that affect him. The spirit of unrest has taken hold of him, has stirred up in him desires that he never felt before. He chafes under the circumstances that render him dumb before the public; from the Atlantic to the Pacific a feeling of brotherhood and the need of union has arisen among all the scattered Indian people. Tribes far removed from each other, unknown to each other and uninterested in each other now correspond and exchange opinions (address delivered 16 June 1920, cited in Petrone 1983:150).

Loft plied his skills as a former newspaperman to mobilize support for the organization. His familiarity with, and mastery of, the public relations apparatus enabled him to widely publicize League meetings and to disseminate the organization's mandate via the mainstream press network. Having campaigned for a Liberal Candidate during the first election to include an Indian electorate, and having worked for a Liberal paper in the past, Loft had established connections in the Liberal press network, which he now used to strategic advantage. Liberal papers such as *The Toronto Star Weekly*, *The Toronto Sunday World* and *The Edmonton Journal* praised Loft's efforts, and publicized Loft's cause from coast to coast. Several Conservative papers also added his words to their columns. *The Regina Leader* for instance, quoted Loft as saying if anything is responsible for the backwardness of the Indian today, it is the domineering, dictating, vetoing method of the Indian Department" (11 September 1920). Loft's strategy of contesting Indian Department authority by employing the papers to mediate a Native nationalist discourse was carefully calculated.

The newspapers often served as the settlers' sole source of information on Native peoples' circumstances. For years, the Indian Department had been not only justifying its existence, but propagandizing its achievements, by publishing its annual reports in the newspapers. The annual reports, according to Titley were the Department's "principle vehicle for disseminating the statistics of progress" (1986:91). In this way the department was able to select and prioritize a narrow range of issues, or to represent a hierarchy of "relevant" Aboriginal actualities, which in the absence of an alternative frame of reference, the public often mistook for veracity.

Loft, however, was a highly educated and articulate man, who hailed from what the public considered the "more advanced" eastern Native nations. He was also a newspaperman, a veteran and the founder of the organization. He thus possessed sufficient stores of the sorts of political capital that validated non-Native political candidates' professional competency. He also seemed to possess sufficient amounts of Native cultural capital to validate him as a legitimate representative for the Native political organization. The participation of Aboriginal peoples in the World War One also contributed to the change in perceptions regarding Native capacities. In a 1926 *Canadian Magazine* article entitled, "How Indians Blazed Our Trails," geologist Arthur Coleman writes that:

Indians in Canada have fought side by side with the white man for the glory of Canada and the integrity of the Empire...For all these things how has the Indian been repaid? Has he been recognized as the absolute pioneer? ... Has a place of

honour been given to him in our social life? Has he had a chance to compete in equality for a seat in the councils of the nation? (cited in Haycock 1971:17).

Loft sought to depose the Indian department of its authority over Indigenous peoples. The necessity of Aboriginal self-expression lay at the very core of the League's mandate. In addition to mediating League messages by means of a sympathetic mainstream press, Loft drafted his own circular (dated 26 November 1919) which he disseminated via band channels. In pursuing a nationalist approach, Loft was indeed an innovator. His first circular, for instance, draws attention to the success of the Ontario Farmer's union in influencing the government and Legislature of Ontario. The political organization he envisioned would harness this power of collective action to attain justice for all Indian peoples. He wrote:

Union is the outstanding impulse of men today, because it is the only way by which the individual and collective elements of society can wield a force and power to be heard and their demands recognized by governments. Look at the force and power of all kinds of labour organizations because of their unions...The day is past when one band or a few bands can successfully--if at all--free themselves from the domination of officialdom and from being ever the prey and victims of unfair means of depriving us of our lands, and even deny us of the rights we are entitled to as free men under the British Flag (26 November 1919 in Petrone 1990:100).

Scholars have portrayed Loft's League as representing a clear break with such previous political ideologies as those espoused by the Grand General Indian Council in Ontario (Tittley 1986), or as an unprecedented or revolutionary and reactive strategy to particular Indian department legislation. In some respects, however, Loft's critical discourse is clearly reminiscent of the critical assessments made by Native activists, particularly those of the Ojibwe literati, who had preceded him (see Donald Smith 1987).

In calling for the "absolute control" by Native people over their lands, improved access to education for Native youth, the protection of Native rights, improved conditions on reserves, and for renewed efforts in agriculture as farming represented "the most independent way of living," Loft reiterated sentiments that had been vociferously expressed by Peter Jones et al in Ontario and Henry Bird, Arthur and Samuel Steinhauer – the members of the Ojibwe literati further west. By expressing discontent with current Indian legislation, moreover, Loft, like his forerunners, called attention to the processes by which the Indian department constructed "official knowledge," and concomitantly "subjugated" Native ways of knowing.

Moreover, although the League was successful in attracting defections from the Grand General Indian Council, of which prominent Ojibwe political leader, Peter E. Jones was a member, several of the goals Loft identifies bear a striking resemblance to those earlier proposed by Peter Jones in the pages of *The Indian* (Buddle 2002a, 2000b). Jones' peculiar vision of Native modernity, for instance, finds expression in Loft's plea for "a great national policy of progress and advancement to lift ourselves up by our own effort to better conditions, morally, socially, politically and industrially" (ibid). Loft also

recycled the idea of returning to band councils the power to represent Indian communities in dealings with the government. Loft also emulated the Grand General Council's strategy of using the mainstream presses to print the minutes of meetings.

Aside from its nationalist scope therefore, the League ought to be apprehended as a mechanism for recasting the notions of Native sovereignty that had been transmitted from one generation of Native activists to another. While the strategies, particularly of alliance, differ among these activists, the fundamental issues remain remarkably consistent. Native leaders have consistently used newspapers as a tool for narrowing the gap between dominant representations of Native peoples and Native self-representations and for bypassing the Indian administration and speaking directly to the Canadian public.

Throughout his involvement with the League, Loft carried out extensive correspondence with Native leaders from across the country (Kulchyski 1988:104). To increase membership in the organization, Loft requested that bands pay a five dollar registration fee, and remit to the organization five cents per person annually (Titley 1986:103). This was considered a pre-emptive measure owing to the continuing control over band funds exercised by the Indian department, who could technically refuse to remit funds for travel to League meetings. Loft intended that membership dues would be put toward the purchase of paper, postage and other communication costs.

The government was sufficiently threatened by Loft's activities, which were allegedly brewing discontent among the Indian masses, to attempt to use legislative means to immobilize him. An amendment to the Criminal Code, introduced after the 1919 Winnipeg Strike, forbade participation at meetings of organizations which were deemed to be "subversive" (Titley 1986:109). This clause empowered the RCMP to actively monitor politically active Aboriginal individuals.⁴

Loft's circulars, and his successful use of the mainstream presses caused "considerable unrest" among Indian peoples as well as bad publicity for the government (Kulchisky 1988). Much like sacred prairie dances, the circulars had the effect to inspire "insubordination" among the Indian masses. They worked to directly contravene acceptance, among this second generation of reserve residents, of the mentality of acquiescence to authority that was intended to flow from settlement. Loft circulated narratives of dissent to awaken political consciousness and to incite action. As such, he entrained "movement," by encouraging a transcending of the boundaries of authority the state had laboriously erected to circumscribe the expression of Indian identities. To some extent, the constraints placed on Native peoples' capacities for physical mobility influenced Loft's strategy of deploying letters, circulars and newspaper columns, which were capable of circumventing barriers to communication that Indian individuals, physically, could not.

⁴ According to Dobbin, RCMP officers regularly followed, harassed, and arrested John Tootoosis, Saskatchewan League leader (1981:148), but were unsuccessful in deterring his activism.

It was his failure to concede authority to the Indian department, however, that most annoyed Duncan Campbell Scott, who had succeeded Frank Oliver as Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. Scott tended to treat Loft's alleged transgressions as a personal affront. In an effort to curtail the power of his public campaign and to discredit him in the eyes of fellow Indian peoples, therefore, Duncan Campbell Scott attempted to forcibly enfranchise Loft. By 1920 Scott had introduced Bill 14, amending the Indian Act to permit department officials to enfranchise Native individuals without their consent (Tennet 1990:100). Although Duncan Campbell Scott failed to have Loft enfranchised, he continued to attack Loft's credibility by insisting that requesting membership fees was exploitative, and that Loft was a mere opportunist.

In 1927, owing to Scott's urging, section 141 was added to the *Indian Act* which made it illegal to solicit funds from Native bands or individuals (Kulchyski 1988:111) or from outside sources (Dickason 1997:298) without the express permission of the Indian Department. The original clause appeared by way of an amendment in the 1924 *Indian Act*, and had initially been designed to prohibit Native people from using band funds for land claim actions without the Department's consent. The effect of this legislation was to effectively prohibit the use of subscriber funding not only for the pursuit of land claims and for Native political organizing, but also for Native media development.⁵

The legislation applied to any person, Native or not, who raised funds from registered Indians for such things as research or travel expenses, postage or printing supplies--all of which were essential to newspaper production--if any connection could be drawn by the Indian Department between said activities and the possibility of pursuing a legal claim. Tennant submits that section 141 was not restricted to land claims. He writes, "except with the minister's approval, no chief or band council could now use funds contributed by band members to pursue claims of the everyday sort that might arise against persons harming band property, persons doing business with the band, or the department itself" (1990:258, fn62). Therefore, while the legislation did not legally ban political organizing as Ponting and Gibbins (1980) have suggested, nor did it outlaw creating newspapers as such, it criminalized the collection of subscription fees from or for Native peoples--the only means of carrying out these activities--for virtually any purpose the Indian Department could link with legal claims related activities.

That discretionary power to veto requests to collect subscriber funding was vested in a body that had very little to gain, and much to lose by approving Native media development, meant that the phrase "for the prosecution of any claim" was open to wide interpretation. The department, for instance, was not likely to approve fund raising for projects or activities which would cause further embarrassment for itself, whether or not they were directly related to the pursuit of legal claims. The direct effect of this

⁵ The Allied Tribes of BC would dissolve in 1927 when it too was officially prohibited from fundraising owing to this amendment. Duncan Campbell Scott claimed the legislations was necessary to protect Indigenous peoples from lawyers and "agitators." (RCAP 1996:25).

legislation, therefore, was not to criminalize, but to discourage the development of self-supporting, politically and religiously independent forums for free Aboriginal expression.

With section 141, the Indian Department vociferously reiterated its exclusive right to produce and validate knowledge about Indian people and to control the mediation of Indian identities. It was not simply from mediating their own cultural expressions that Indian persons were prohibited, but from accessing the documentary evidence compiled about them by others.

Just as legislation had been adopted to deprive bands of farm machinery to curtail Native agricultural productivity when Native farmers proved competitive with settlers; Indian administration inspired legislation, combined with other officially erected roadblocks functioned to undermine not only the authority, but the very existence of Native political organizations and other forums for Native self-representation, when their influence challenged that of Indian Department to direct reserve affairs.

By the time of the World Wars Native English literacy had grown substantially, syllabic literacy had been widely diffused, and instruction in print technologies was available at several residential schools. Printing presses were to be found in all major towns and perhaps most importantly, Native peoples had expressed a desire for a Native controlled organ with which to combat, as Ahenakew put it, “the circumstances that render [Indian people] dumb before the public” (1995:84). Despite all this, no independent Native newspapers were created.

Throughout this time, moreover, League members were not only deprived of an organ with which to express their views to the public, but were prohibited both from exchanging information with each other and from accessing the very information that would have enabled them to counteract these silencing measures. The Indian Department channeled all information through Indian Agents and refused to deal with League leaders directly. Petitions and letters written to the department bearing the League leaders’ names moreover, were treated as their personal requests and grievances rather than as the collective voice of the organization (Dobbin 1981:148).

Augustine Steinhauer, President of the Alberta chapter, chaired the League’s Saddle Lake meeting in 1932 (Sluman and Goodwill 1982:155). Following the council, Steinhauer wrote a letter to the Deputy Superintendent General, which outlined the resolutions adopted by the participants and requested that a meeting take place between members of the Department and representatives of the three western branches of the League. Steinhauer also asked for a permit to visit reserves throughout Alberta in order to discuss League matters. Via the Indian agent, Steinhauer received the vague reply of “sometime” to his first question and no reply to his second (Sluman and Goodwill 1982:157).

At Saddle Lake, the League had resolved, among other things to call for the abolishment of section 45 of the Indian Act concerning permits. Despite their efforts, the permit system continued to serve as a powerful impediment to intertribal communication

and freedom of action, so much so that in combination with the prohibition on subscriber funding, Native prairie polities were confronted with nothing less than an official ban on political organizing. Both sections would not be officially excised from the Act until 1951. The re-enactment of compulsory enfranchisement by means of the 1933 *Enfranchisement Bill* also contributed to the ambient fear and intimidation on western reserves. The threat of losing one's Indian status served as a further disincentive to active politicizing and public vocalizing for school educated band members in the western provinces at this time.

In addition to impeding the flow of information between Native polities, maintaining centralized control over reserve affairs in Ottawa required agents in the field to ensure a steady supply of intelligence from, rather than to, the reserves. In 1935, Joe Sampson, the newly elected Alberta League President, requested twelve copies of the Indian Act from the Indian Department. He was concerned that many Native persons had little familiarity with the very regulations by which their lives were governed, and consequently lacked the tools to recognize and resist the methods by which they were subjugated. The reply he received from A.F. Mackenzie, the Secretary of the Department, stated that a wide distribution of the Act was "unnecessary" and that Individuals desirous of clarification as to particular provisions ought to rely on their Indian agent's reading of the Act (Sluman and Goodwill 1982:163). The tight control the Indian Department maintained over such information effectively prohibited the League from achieving its ultimate goal of establishing itself as the official intermediary between Native people and the state.

Like the first Aboriginally owned and operated newspaper in Canada, *The Indian* (see Buddle 2002a), the League's influence would diminish proportionately with the decline in its founder's involvement. After 1931, Loft withdrew from League activities, having been threatened with the charge of fraud for an earlier attempt he had made to raise travel funds to take the matter of game law restrictions to the Privy Council in England (Sluman and Goodwill 1982:138). The drive to form a national entity had been premature. While there was a consensus on the major issues facing most provincial groups, ideological divisions between geographically and culturally distinguished groups motivated the splintering of the League, for instance, the East from the West, (Saskatchewan from Alberta chapters in 1933) as well as Status Indian from Métis organizations within Alberta. Although the League was never resurrected as a national entity, the western branches of the organization remained quite active. These polities formed the organizational foundation for later Aboriginal associations in each of these provinces.

The Alberta Indian Association, which was founded, among others by Henry Bird Steinhauer's great grandson, Ralph Steinhauer, in the early 1940s, would face the same barrage of administrative affronts it had experienced in its former incarnation as the Alberta League of Indians. Indian department officials deprived Association members of travel permits, intimidated them with threats of arrest, denied them access to information and censored them when they attempted to publically express their concerns. The Department justified prohibiting the organization from incorporating on the grounds that

officially recognizing provincial Indian political organizations would not be “in the public interest” (Sluman and Goodwill 1982:176).

In 1944, AIA President, Malcom Norris, drafted a “Memorial” stating that the political organizations representing the prairie Indian nations, which had always been referred to by the Department as “less advanced” than their Ontario and BC counterparts, deserved the same official recognition from the Indian Department. The petition, which Norris sent to MPs and newspapers across the country in addition to the Indian Department, also called for a Royal Commission investigation into socio-economic conditions on reserves (Dobbin 1981:131), for improved health and educational facilities, for an end to forced enfranchisement and for a re-definition of the term “Indian” along lines that were more in keeping with Native sensibilities (Dion 1979:181). The Alberta organization continued to operate outside the officially sanctioned band council system, which depended on the Indian Agent’s ultimate authority. It is quite evident that the challenge to Indian department authority the organization represented, rather than any threat to the public interest, was what motivated efforts to silence this voice of Native political dissent once and for all.

To conclude, whether organized according to the nationalizing impulse of the League of Indians, or the localized efforts of the Allied Tribes of BC and the Longhouse Peoples of Six Nations, Aboriginal activists in the first half of the 20th century, effectively altered of the system of Aboriginal political participation in Canada by employing English--the only common language of the Indigenous nations, and by usurping the role of Indian Agents as intermediaries between Indigenous people and the State. Loft’s efforts to use the mainstream presses bypassed missionaries, humanitarian groups, and non-Native journalists, asserting Aboriginal political organizations as the official point of mediation between Indigenous people and the outside world.

The expansion of Aboriginal political organizations in the years after WW1, and the infiltration of Indigenous individuals into the “privileged sanctums” of the press and the Canadian political system, ought not to be viewed as mere reactive nor defensive maneuvers. Nor do they provide evidence of Aboriginal assimilation within a hegemonic print-capitalist nor liberal democratic system. The development of new platforms for Indigenous cultural mediation suggest instead considerably innovative organizational accomplishments that would pave the way for Native civil rights and national sovereignty movements. These movements were prefigured by the forms of media activism adopted by Loft, Paull, and others before them. These critical cultural mediations would cultivate the terrain for Aboriginal political expansion in the years to come.

References:

Ahenakew, Edward. *Voices of the Plains Cree*. 1973. Ed. Ruth M. Buck. Regina: University of Regina Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1995.

Appadurai, A. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1996.

Bell, Catherine. *Alberta's Métis Settlement Legislation: An Overview of Ownership*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1994.

----. *Contemporary Métis Justice: The Settlement Way*. Saskatoon: Native Law Centre, University of Saskatchewan, 1999.

Buddle, K. 2002 a. Shooting the messenger: Historical impediments to the mediation of modern Aboriginality in Ontario', *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 22: 1, pp. 138–200.

----. From Birchbark Talk to Digital Dreamspeaking: A history of Aboriginal media activism in Canada, Ph.D. thesis, London, ON: Western University. 2002b.

Carter, Sarah. *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990.

Cuthand, Stan. Introduction to the 1995 Edition. In Edward Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree*, ed. Ruth M. Buck, ix-xxii. Regina: University of Regina Canadian Plains Research Centre. 1995.

----. The Native Peoples of the Prairie Provinces in the 1920's and 1930's. In *One Century Later: Western Canadian Reserve Indians since Treaty Seven*, eds. Ian A.L. Getty and Donald B. Smith, 31-42. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press. 1978.

Dickason, Olive. *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, 2nd edition. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1997.

Dion, Joseph. *My Tribe, the Crees*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey. Calgary: Glenbow Museum. 1979.

Dobbin, Murray. "Métis Struggles of the Twentieth Century: The Saskatchewan Métis Society– 1935-1950. Part One: Early Beginnings." *New Breed Magazine*, 1978.

----. *The One-and-a-Half-Men: The Story of Jim Brady & Malcolm Norris Métis Patriots of the 20th Century*. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1981.

Driben, Paul. "The Nature of Métis Claims." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 3 no. 1 (1983): 183-196.

----. *We Are Métis: The Ethnography of a Halfbreed Community in Northern Alberta*. New York: AMS Press, 1985.

Galois, Robert. The Indian Rights Association, Native Protest Activity and the "Land Question" in British Columbia, 1903-1916. *Native Studies Review* 8, no. 2(1992): 1-34.

Gulig, Anthony. "‘We Beg the Government’: Native People and Game Regulation in Northern Saskatchewan, 1900-1940." *Prairie Forum* 28 no. 1 (Spring 2003): 81-98.

----. "Yesterday's Promises: The Negotiation of Treaty Ten." *Saskatchewan History* 50 no. 1(Spring 1998): 25-39.

Hall, D. J. Clifford Sifton and Canadian Indian Administration 1896-1905. *Prairie Forum* 2, no. 2(1977): 127-151.

Haycock, Ronald G. *The Image of the Indian: The Canadian Indian as a subject and a concept in a sampling of the popular national magazines read in Canada 1900-1970*. Waterloo: Waterloo Lutheran University. 1971.

Hollihan, K. Tony. 1992. "A brake upon the wheel": Frank Oliver and the Creation of the Immigration Act of 1906. *Past Imperfect*, 1(1992): 93 – 112.

Kulchyski, Peter. "A Considerable Unrest": F.O. Loft and the League of Indians. *Native Studies Review* 4, no. 1-2(1988): 95-113.

Lackenbauer, Whitney P. The Irony and the Tragedy of Negotiated Space: A Case Study on Narrative Form and Aboriginal-Government Relations during the Second World War. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 15, no. 1 (2004): 177-206.

Meijer-Drees, Laurie. *The Indian Association of Alberta: A History of Political Action*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002.

Patterson II, E. Palmer. "Andrew Paull and the Early History of British Columbia Indian Organizations." In *One Century Later: Western Canadian Reserve Indians Since Treaty 7*. Eds. Ian A.L. Getty and Donald B. Smith. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977, 43-54.

Pettipas, Katherine. *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Practices on the Prairies*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994.

Petrone, Penne. *Native Literature in Canada From the Oral Tradition to the Present*. Toronto: Oxford University Press. 1990.

Prins, Harold. The Paradox of Primitivism: Native Rights and the Problem of Imagery in Cultural Survival Films. *Visual Anthropology* 9, 3-4 (1997): 243-266.

[RCAP] Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Canada. *Looking Forward, Looking Back: The Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 1*. Ottawa: Communication Group, 1996.

Sawchuk, Joe. *Métis Land Rights in Alberta: A Political History*, Métis Association of Alberta. Edmonton: Métis Association of Alberta, 1981.

----. *The Dynamics of Native Politics: The Alberta Métis Experience*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 1998.

Sheffield, Scott. *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004.

Sheffield, Scott & Hamar Foster. Fighting the King's War: Harris Smallfence, Verbal Treaty Promises and the Conscription of Indian Men, 1944. *University of British Columbia Law Review*, Summer, 1999, Vol.33(1): p.53-74

Sluman, Norma and Jean Goodwill. *John Tootosis*. Ottawa: Golden Dog Press. 1982.

Smith, Donald B. *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1987.

Tennant, Paul. *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990.

Titley, Brian E. *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986.

Tobias, John L. "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885." In *Sweet Promises: A Reader On Indian-White Relations in Canada*. Ed. J.R. Miller. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991, 212-240.