

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1999-04-17  
Segment 3  
Episode Air Date: 1999-04-17

*Dan Smoke reads a report regarding a partnership created between Indigenous Canadians and Americans, forged in an attempt to garner international attention around the conditions of Indigenous peoples living in Canada. After, Mary Lou Smoke reads an editorial calling for a public inquiry into the murder of Dudley George, after the United Nations Human Rights Committee urged the Canadian government to do so. Dan and Mary Lou also invite listeners to attend a demonstration at Queen's Park in Toronto, intended to draw attention to the need for a public inquiry into the matter.*

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mary Lou Smoke

**DAN SMOKE:** Aanii! Boozhoo! Sge:no, shekoli! I'd like to read to you a story from Mark Bourrie that was on Southam News, and this is about "Indigenous Canadians Join Forces with US Indians." Indigenous leaders in Canada have forged a political link with their counterparts in the United States in the wake of a United Nations report that listed Canada's treatment of Aboriginals as the country's most pressing human rights issue. On Monday, **Phil Fontaine**, head of the **Assembly of First Nations**, which represents over 300 Native communities in Canada, announced a formal partnership with the **National Congress of American Indians** based in the United States. Fontaine said that the two organizations would press for a full self-government and sovereignty for all Native North Americans. He said that the group would also seek partnerships with Aboriginal groups in Mexico. The Geneva-based **United Nations Human Rights Committee** said in a report last week that the Canadian government had failed to implement recommendations of the 1996 **Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples**, proof that Ottawa was not complying with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Royal Commission, made up of eminent Native leaders, lawyers, and academics, recommended full self-government, control over resources, and a separate traditional legal system. It also recommended major improvements to Native healthcare.

The United Nations also called on the Canadian federal government and the administration of the province of Ontario to establish an inquiry into the 1995 police shooting of **Dudley George**, an **Ojibwe** man who died while protesting the seizure of Native land on the shores of Lake Huron. George's death has been the focus of Native protests in Canada despite the conviction of a police officer for criminal negligence causing death. Indigenous leaders claimed that the police attack on the protestors was orchestrated by senior politicians and government officials, and they hailed the UN report as an important blow for Native rights. "This is above our expectations. It's a great day for the rights of all Aboriginal people," said Armand MacKenzie, lawyer for the **Innu Council of Ekuanitshit**, which represents 7500 people on the coast of Labrador, one of the most isolated and inaccessible places on the Earth. There are no roads or railways into the **Innu** territory, and coastal ship traffic is limited to about four months a year. The Innu have fought for years against low-level training flights by NATO fighter pilots. "We will no longer be beggars in our own homeland. We have the right to benefit. This is important because it says the government has to evoke its practice regarding the extinguishment of Aboriginal rights," he said.

Other Native leaders said the UN report could spur the Canadian government into implementing reforms. "This is a very stern rebuke. It's a drubbing," said Andy Orkin, legal advisor to the **Grand Council of the Crees**, which is locked in a battle to keep power companies from damming the rivers in its territory. The 12,000 members of the **Cree** have one of the country's

highest levels of alcoholism and suicide. This is a pretty important development, and a pretty sad one. Canada plays international human rights Boy Scout, but to get a ruling like this in our own backyard demonstrates considerable hypocrisy. Fontaine, whose group has been losing clout with the Canadian government during the current Liberal administration, declared that Canadian Indigenous communities could get the attention of the world by allying itself with Native Americans from the US. "What we're doing is in our recognition that there is strength in numbers. There is strength in organizing ourselves better. There is strength in elevating our issues so there is international attention given to these issues," he said. "Reports such as the one out of Geneva reinforce what we have been saying about our situation in Canada, which is no different from the position in the United States. It's of the utmost importance to us to go where we need to go. I think one thing that has worked against us is that we've restricted and confined ourselves domestically, when it's clear that international attention is what drives efforts internationally. It's just time to do this."

Fontaine said that bringing our considerable resources together will make things better for us. National Congress of American Indians president, Ron Allen, said, "A partnership between the two groups would also help Indigenous people get more attention from the United Nations. Beyond those in North America, we have Indigenous brothers and sisters around the world. They are fighting for sovereignty, for protection of their land bases and their cultural ways of life. As we join forces, that message becomes a common message that is heard both in the capitals of Canada and the United States, but also in international forums such as the United Nations," he said. A Canadian government spokesman said some of the UN's criticisms were being dealt with through new self-government initiatives. And that concludes Mark Bourrie's story in Southam News. And Mary Lou has a story that comes from the newsletter for the Coalition of a Public Inquiry into the Death of Dudley George newsletter.

**MARY LOU SMOKE:** Miigwetch, Dan. Okay, this is from a newsletter that was sent from Anne Pole in Toronto, who is one of the persons in charge of the Coalition. I believe this letter I'm going to read was sent from Pat Redmond of **Walpole Island**. This is taken from the Sarnia Observer on Tuesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1999, and it's an editorial. Ever notice how someone else's problem seems so easy to solve? Whether it's racism in Africa, abuse of police power in China, or political cover-ups in South America, we in Canada can sniff self-righteously at situations that seem black and white simply because they are so far away. But when the problem is inside Lambton County, the matter is infinitely more complicated. Take the killing of Dudley George. We're used to hearing about the United Nations involved in human rights issues in far-off places like South Africa, Nicaragua, or Bosnia, but Sarnia-Lambton residents heard last week that United Nations officials are concerned about a breach of human rights in our community. Think of it, folks. This is not a municipal council concerned about a cat by-law. This is the United Nations—the worldwide organization dedicated to justice in human rights. And the United Nations has good reason to be concerned about allegations of cover-ups inside Lambton County.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee is strongly urging the Canadian government to hold a public inquiry into the shooting death of Native protestor Anthony Dudley George. Surprise, surprise. Now, an international level of officialdom is acknowledging that all is not right in how the province handled Native occupation of **Ipperwash Provincial Park**. Municipal and federal leaders, and now the United Nations, say there must be an inquiry into all aspects of this matter, including the role and responsibility of public officials. The only level of government that hasn't called for an inquiry is the level of government that would be under scrutiny, and that's the province, of course. Premier Mike Harris could certainly call an inquiry now and schedule it for some time after the case goes before the courts, but he refuses. He continually says no

inquiry can be contemplated before the courts are finished with it. What's it going to take? The United Nations Committee says it's deeply concerned that no inquiry has been held since George died in a bloody clash with police. When the United Nations comments on human rights violations in other countries, Canadians tend to have a smug sense that those kinds of things don't happen here, that this country's leaders are accountable. Wrong. We have no right to feel smug when it appears that the rights of a minority group in Ontario are being ignored. Until the Harris government acknowledges that an inquiry is necessary, if only to clear its own name, Canada's international reputation regarding human rights will remain blemished. And that's it.

**DS:** Nya:weh, miigwetch, Mary Lou. And what does it say that the Coalition is planning for next Thursday up at Queen's Park? During the throne speech, I believe it is.

**MLS:** Oh, okay. It says, don't forget—kick off the kickout. It's a throne speech demo on April 22<sup>nd</sup> at Queen's Park, and that's at the university, north of College, at noon. So, they're inviting you to come out on your lunch hour and if you're not fully employed, just come out anyway. And they're going to cordon off a scene of the crime with a very long strip saying "Justice for Dudley George." The justice strip is long enough to go all the way around Queen's Park, but they need people to help to hold it up. So, if you can make it out there at all, please try and help.

**DS:** Yeah, Thursday. We should try to get up there for that because they do...they are asking. It's the opening of the Queen's Park legislature with the throne speech and it's also an opportunity to...when the attention is on this government, and what they are proposing for the next year, it's an opportunity to show that this inquiry needs to be called. You know, now we have international support from the United Nations Human Rights Committee, and there's no legal impediment to the province calling an inquiry. In fact, there's no legal impediment to the federal government calling an inquiry, a federal public inquiry. So, they're both studying the legal opinions at this time, but if we have a lot of people who come together in unity to support this demonstration, rally, and hold up this...it's like that police tape that you see at a crime area. That police tape that says "caution, keep out," that yellow tape that cordons off the scene of the crime? Well, Queen's Park is the scene of the crime in this case into the death of Dudley George because that's where the decision was made, and that's where the decision came from that the OPP crowd management unit was ordered into the park, and that has come out in various pieces of evidence.

Ken Dean's appeal to the Appeals Court for his conviction of criminal negligence causing death, in his appeal documents he states that they were "following orders." They were following orders. Now, where did those orders come from? They had to have come from, you know, above the hierarchy of the Ontario Provincial Police. So, that's the scene of the crime, and they're going to cordon off the whole of Queen's Park. So, this will be a good opportunity to show them that there is strength in numbers. And the various groups that belong to this Coalition for a Public Inquiry, the human rights groups, the labour groups, the faith groups, the Aboriginal groups, the Aboriginal support groups, all the different anti-racism groups, we can come together and show their support and show their position on these human rights abuse that's going on right here in our backyard. And so, this is a good opportunity to come together to demonstrate this.

**DS:** We're now going to listen to **Redbone**. Redbone, a popular band from, I believe it was New Mexico and California in the early 70s. This comes from the CD ***Dance Me Outside***. This is "**Come and Get Your Love**," here on Smoke Signals.