

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1997-02-07
Segment 1
Episode Air Date: 1997-02-07

Dan Smoke recalls the events of two conferences that he and Mary Lou recently attended: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Conference held in Montreal, Quebec, and the Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native Peoples Annual General Meeting held in Toronto, Ontario. Both events included discussions about the impact of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples on Native communities across Canada.

Host(s): Dan Smoke

DAN SMOKE: Aanii! Boozhoo! Sge:no! Shekoli! Koolamalsi, and greetings to all of our listeners of Smoke Signals, First Nations Radio here at CHRW 94.7 FM. We are London's First Nations radio program, and we are describing to you in detail some of our journey through the news magazine, Smoke Signals, and we talk a little bit about arts, we talk a little bit about traditional teachings, we talk a little bit about community announcements, and some of the things that Mary Lou and I and other volunteers of Smoke Signals have been doing and attending so that we can bring the news and we can bring the information back to you, the listener. We strive in earnest to try to get the most timeliest topics of the day. Most recently, Mary Lou and I attended the **Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Conference** that was held at McGill University in Montreal last weekend. And that was on January 31st, February 1st, and February 2nd. We were able to...unfortunately, because of the weather and the traffic congestion, we weren't able to make it to the opening ceremonies on January 31st where **George Erasmus, Rene Dussault**, who were the co-chairs of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, gave their presentations, and this was followed by talks from **Matthew Coon Come**, who is the Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the **Cree** of northern Quebec.

We were able to hear some of the presentations that were made on Saturday, February the 1st, and some of the workshops that we attended. One workshop that I attended that I was really impressed with was how the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples affects women and how women's role in the Royal Commission report, you know, that relationship between women and the Royal Commission report, which was authored by seven people. Of the seven people, I believe five were Aboriginal and two were non-Aboriginal, or it was four were Aboriginal and three were non-Aboriginal. But this was one of the conferences that is trying to address what it is that's in the report that the chairs of this report have been saying in the news for the past, well, since it came out last year. And they have been saying that it is up to the Aboriginal communities themselves to push the findings of this report. It is up to the Aboriginal communities themselves to use this report as leverage in coming to a new relationship, to a new agreement, with the provincial, municipal, federal governments of the day. And this, I think we heard that, I know I did on the Saturday, February the 1st, different workshops that I attended, I heard that quite often that it can be used now because the First Nations people have spoken.

Over the past five years, this Royal Commission has travelled to communities all throughout Canada. They have come to London. I know myself, I made a submission to the report, to the Royal Commission, twice. Once in London, once in Toronto. And both times, you know, I thought they were trying to reach out to the communities. I often heard at these workshops that the people in the communities who are in isolated areas like northern Ontario, northern Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan, they couldn't give a hoot about this Royal Commission report because, you know, they have more pressing needs. They have more pressing wants in their own livelihood just to survive. I mean, they are living in third world conditions. The poverty

that exists in most First Nations communities in the north is, I mean...it's a reality and the Canadian federal government should acknowledge when they go to the United Nations, when they talk about how Canada is supposed to be the #1 country in the world for human rights. It doesn't...this revealing fact never surfaces that the First Nations people who are living up in these northern areas are living in conditions that are third world, and that are worse.

I heard one speaker, he's the Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba by the name of Eric Robinson, who is an Ojibwe, and he is the MLA for Rupert's Land. He talked about in his riding, the average number of people living in one home, okay, one bedroomed home—that's one bedroom, one kitchen, and if they have plumbing, then there's a bathroom—but in one home, there's eight people. That's the average. That was the average! The statistics were astounding! I mean, I sat there, and I was glad that I was taping it because I'm hearing it, you know, I was just overwhelmed by the astounding statistics that were quoted by speaker after speaker about some of the conditions that First Nations people are living in across this country, that the status quo that the people in the south don't even know about, don't even acknowledge. So, this Royal Commission Aboriginal People's report will hopefully sensitize the Canadian public. I know the federal government right now has already come out on record saying that they intend to do nothing with this Royal Commission report because it is an election year. An election will be called probably towards the end of 1997. The provincial government is an anti-First Nations government. They couldn't care less. So, it's...just makes it harder and harder for First Nations people to try to raise awareness and sensitize [inaudible] the coexistence that we want to achieve in our own territory, in our own land.

So, that...I found that the whole weekend was a great weekend. It was all courtesy of the First Nations Student Services, **Vivian Peters**, who organized this trip for a number of First Nations students, eight First Nations students who are full-time students here at Western, and myself and Mary Lou were able to join them. It was indeed, it was a full weekend. It was also an opportunity to see Montreal and visit McGill campus, visit downtown Montreal, talk to some of the people, and talk to other people, other participants who were also in attendance at this conference. And so, we are going to play a little bit of footage from that a little later on in the show. One of the workshops that I attended, as I said before, was the workshop on First Nations women and the relationship they have within their communities and how the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples affects them. Patricia Monture, who is a graduate of Western, and she is also a graduate of the law school at Queen's University, and she has taught law out at Dalhousie University out on the east coast, and now she is teaching Native Studies at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. She's now living between Saskatoon and her husband's reserve on **Thunderchild Reserve First Nations** in Saskatchewan. It's a **Cree** First Nations community. And she was one of the presenters, so we'll be listening to what she had to say about this report.

DS: We were at a conference previous to that on January 25th. It was a one-day conference in Toronto. That was the **Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native Peoples** Annual General Meeting, with the theme "We Can't Stop Now," that was held at the Native Canadian Centre which is located at Bloor and Spadina. And there were current national and international issues spoke about there at this conference. **Kahn-Tineta Horn**, who is the president of CASNIP, spoke on the Royal Commission, a betrayal of Aboriginal Nations, and I think her...I mean, it was kind of interesting to hear her, and then when we went to this Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Conference, we heard the same sentiments expressed throughout. You know, exactly what Kahn-Tineta was saying. But we won't be hearing from Kahn-Tineta this week. We'll hear from her in future shows. Jay Mason, who is a past president of CASNIP will be...he talked on emancipating consciousness. And we are going to feature Jay Mason today

because he had some interesting comments. It was a short talk, so it will be just a...it was a short sound bite that I think people walked away to lunch feeling “oh, this is an interesting way of looking at the situation between the status quo and the Indigenous populations of the world, why it exists the way it does today.”

And [Elma Brooke], who is a **Mi'kmaq** from Nova Scotia, she talked on how government uses Native communities to serve development. Sacagawea Hill, John Hill, talked on **Gustafsen Lake**, the abuses of state power in British Columbia. Steve Fobister, we didn't get to hear him, he spoke on **Grassy Narrows**. **Waneek Horn** spoke on preparing the Aboriginal youth for leadership, we didn't get to hear her...oh, we did get to hear her, so we may feature her on a future show. And Marcia Simon from the **Stony Point First Nations**. The theme of her talk was after one year, still no enquiry into the murder of **Dudley George**. We are going to have an announcement about Marcia coming to town. She is going to be coming to London. I believe it's on February the 19th, and it's going to be up at King's College. We'll let you know when the announcements come to get your pen and calendars out. The keynote speaker was Joan Grant-Cummings, who is the president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and she talked on self-determination and liberation, the role of women in equality movements. So, it was a very timely talk as well.

DS: So, as I said before, we are going to feature what Jay had to say. And this will all happen after we hear from **Bill Miller**. Bill Miller is from Wisconsin, and this is his CD, ***Raven in the Snow***. This is “**The Eagle Must Fly Free**,” here on Smoke Signals.