

The Native Council of Canada

Up until the 1950s, Métis political interests were represented by a variety of regional and local political organizations and activists. In 1961, the National Indian Council was created, under government auspices, as an umbrella group to advocate for the concerns of Métis and Non-Status Indians; these were mainly urban or off-reserve Aboriginal people.

By 1968, it had become apparent that pursuing such a wide variety of interests through a single organization that was a creation of government and under considerable government influence was problematic. Thus the Canadian Métis Society emerged to represent Métis interests. This in turn, became the Native Council of Canada (NCC) in 1971 at the same time the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) was formed to represent status Indians. The NCC as it was developed was composed of provincial and territorial organizations, usually called Native Councils or Métis and Non-Status Indian Associations.

The NCC was formed in 1971 by the leaders of the Métis Association of Alberta, the Métis Society of Saskatchewan, the Manitoba Métis Federation, and the BC Association of Non-Status Indians. The presidents of the organizations at that time were, respectively, Stan Daniels, Howard Adams, Angus Spence and Butch Smitherim. Tony Belcourt was elected as the NCC's first president. Harry Daniels served as NCC president from 1976 to 1981, it was while he was president of NCC that he convinced then Justice Minister Jean Chrétien to include the Métis as one of the three peoples who would be defined as the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada in *The Constitution Act*, 1982. Shortly after that the three Métis organizations from the Provinces withdrew from the NCC¹ in order for the Métis to have their own seat at the Constitutional talks that took place from 1983 to 1989.

The NCC arose out of a November 16, 1970 meeting of the Métis Associations of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta with the British Columbia Association of Non-Status Indians (BCANSI) at Victoria, British Columbia. Several subsequent meetings led to the official launch and opening of a NCC national office in Ottawa in April of 1971. In 1983 the Métis split from the Native Council of Canada, a pan-Aboriginal coalition, to form MNC as a Métis-specific representative group. The NCC presidents up to the MNC split were: Tony Belcourt (1971-1972), Kermit Moore (1972-1973), Gloria George (1973-1975), Harry Daniels (1976-1981)² and Smokey Bruyere (1981-1983). The NCC continued its operations until 1994, when it changed its name to the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples. It is now an alliance of Non-Status Indians from across the country and Métis from areas such as Labrador and the Maritimes and other eastern provinces. Tony Belcourt³ has documented the formation of the NCC:

¹ At the time they withdrew, Audreen Hourie from Manitoba Métis Federation was the Vice-President of NCC. At the time she was elected she had told MMF that even though they planned to withdraw, she would serve out her NCC term.

² Harry Daniels returned to NCC now CAP and served from 1997-1999.

³ Tony Belcourt, "For the Record: ...On Métis Identity and Citizenship Within the Métis Nation." *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, Volume 2, no. 2, 2013: 128-141.

“The decision to create a national organization to represent our interests in Ottawa was made on 16 November 1970, the eighty-fifth anniversary of the hanging of Louis Riel. This was a momentous gathering of the leaders of the Métis and Non-Status Indian associations of the Prairies and British Columbia and I consider it a great privilege to have taken part in such a seminal event in our history.

The leaders met in a small hotel room in Victoria, British Columbia: Angus Spence, President of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF); Jim Sinclair, Vice-President of the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS); Stan Daniels, President of the Métis Association of Alberta (MAA); myself as Vice-President of the Métis Association of Alberta; and Butch Smitheram, President of the BC Association of Non-Status Indians (BCANSI). We chose to meet in Victoria so we could also attend the First Annual General Assembly of BCANSI, which was also taking place at the time.

We met at my urging because I felt we needed to have a presence in Ottawa if we were to gain federal recognition of our rights and address the call by our people to get a land base for Métis. We agreed to form an interim steering committee to consider our options. Jim Sinclair was appointed Chair and I was appointed Secretary.”

... The same representatives of Métis and Non-Status Indians present in Victoria in November 1970 met in Ottawa in April 1971. We also invited Paddy McGuire, Sr., then President of the Lake Nipigon Métis Association (of Ontario), to join us. His son, Mike McGuire, was also there.

It was at this meeting that we decided to form a national organization and to call it the Native Council of Canada (Métis & Non-Status Indians).² We made a deliberate and collective decision to build a national organization that would include both Métis and Non-Status Indians for two reasons: first, because it reflected the reality of the membership of all of our organizations at the time; and, second, because we shared the same goals and were in basically the same position—landless and without federal recognition.

We also decided to assist Métis and Non-status Indians in the NWT, Yukon, and the provinces to form organizations and join the NCC in order to strengthen our collective voice and lobbying power. Our first need, however, was to get the funding that would enable us to operate a national office and help the other organizations get off the ground.

I was elected President of the Native Council of Canada at our founding meeting in April. On the strength of a \$10,000 loan to the NCC from the Métis Association of Alberta,

We quickly organized the Ontario Métis and Non-Status Indian Association (OMNSIA), the Laurentian Alliance of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Quebec, the New Brunswick Métis & Non-Status Indian Association, the Non-Status Indian and Métis Association of Nova Scotia, the P.E.I Association of Métis & Non-Status Indians, Indian and Métis Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians, and the Métis Association of the NWT. Together with the MMF, AMNSIS, MAA, and BCANSI, the NCC now represented Métis and Non-Status Indians from coast to coast.”

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