

PARTICIPATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES  
IN FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCES ON THE CONSTITUTION

Issue

The participation of aboriginal peoples in First Ministers' Conferences on the Constitution.

Background

Since 1978, representatives of the aboriginal peoples have had numerous opportunities to present their views on the Constitution to officials and political leaders of both levels of government (annex for details).

To participate in these meetings and to research their constitutional positions, the three national aboriginal organizations have been given contributions by the federal government amounting to \$1.8 million since 1980. Because some provincial governments have given contributions to the aboriginal associations in their provinces, the federal government since 1980, has contributed \$160,000 to the aboriginal organizations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

Comments

No public organizations in Canada have received funding from the federal government of the magnitude provided to the aboriginal organizations. Even though the Métis do not have the same status with the federal government as do the Indians and the Inuit, they have received equal amounts of money.

Despite Indian and Métis opposition to patriation, the federal government has not only maintained funding for them but has extended it beyond the termination date of March 31, 1981, in order to assist the organizations to retain on staff, the expertise which they have acquired or developed.

A second extension of funding is now under active consideration to assist the aboriginal peoples to keep their staff until broader proposals can be considered for funding their constitutional research activities leading up to a First Ministers' Conference.

Sub-section 36(2) of the Resolution guarantees the participation of aboriginal representatives at the First Ministers' Conference that will be convened within a year of patriation. At this conference, the agenda will include "an item respecting constitutional matters that directly affect the aboriginal peoples of Canada, including the identification and definition of the rights of those peoples to be included in the Constitution of Canada". Only the aboriginal peoples have this privilege, which is otherwise reserved for representatives of governments.

Constitution.  
- Parliamentary debate briefing notes.

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