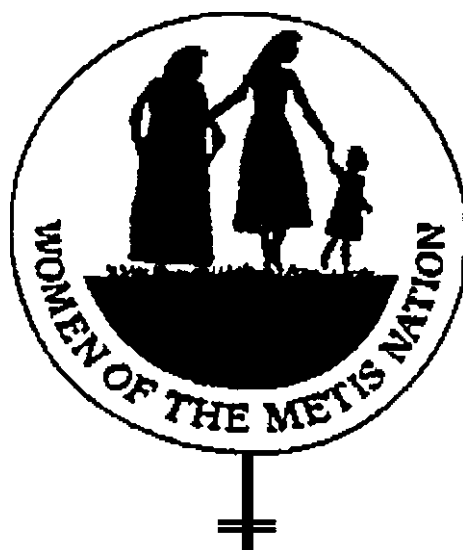


"Women Who Own Themselves"



**Held by the Women of the Metis Nation with the support of
the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples -
Intervenor Participation Program**

June 11-12, 1993

Edmonton, Alberta

Joyce Green

August 30, 1993

**THE FINAL REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE
ON METIS WOMEN AND GOVERNANCE**

WOMEN WHO OWN THEMSELVES

INTRODUCTION

The Women of the Metis Nation has had the Cree word Otipemsiwak on its membership brochure for some time. Otipemsiwak translates as "people who own themselves". When we were casting about for a name for our conference, we decided that the power in the word Otipemsiwak was what we wanted, but we wanted it to be women-specific. We were considering the matter of women and governance, and we are a women's organisation, dedicated to empowering Metis women and advancing our issues. We transmuted (in fine Metis fashion) Otipemsiwak to "Women who own themselves", and that became the title of our conference.

We are women, after all, and the experience of women's lives is shared in great measure across class and culture. We wanted our women's experience to inform our consideration of the issue of governance. We agree with Sylvia Walby ¹ that

"(1) Politics includes gender politics. These are structured power relations between the interests of each gender which are contested in formal political arenas as well as in other social relations. (2) Gender politics have effects upon other forms of politics ... (3) ... Political issues usually have a gender dimension. (4) Gender politics include what men do as well as what women do."

Women of the Metis Nation asked conference participants to reflect on and speak to their experiences and expectations as women. What would

¹ S. Walby, "Gender Politics and Social Theory", Sociology, Vol.22, No.2, May 1988:229.

governance mean for women? How might our lives be different? What kinds of structures and processes would we envision? What role would we play? What was our experience with political change to date?

But we are also aboriginal -- Metis -- and that experience creates a unique way of looking at the world. For some of us, being visibly aboriginal has shaped our interactions with newcomer society. For others, our invisibility has been a barrier to our participation in aboriginal society and politics. Most of us shared a consciousness of being 'other' that creates its own kind of pain. Most of us shared a commitment to being part of this aboriginal collectivity known as "Metis". Many of us had life experiences which create a solidarity of experience with aboriginal men, and create barriers to feminist analysis of our oppression as women by these same men.

Our lives are characterised even more than most women's by a multitude of roles; our analysis is challenged by racial, racist, gendered, sex, regional, and religious cleavages. We ruefully agree with Donna Gretchner: "(T)hey (aboriginal women) remind us, simply by who they are, that everyone has multiple identities at one and the same time and all the time."²

Murleen Browning, British Columbia: "Metis women face triple discrimination: because we are women, because we are native, and because we are native women."

² Donna Greschner, "Commentary", After Meech Lake: Lessons for the Future, (David E. Smith, Peter MacKinnon and John C. Courtney, eds.) Fifth House Publishers, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1991:223.)

Our personal and political histories -- our lived experiences -- shape our analyses. These Metis women analyses are unique. We believe we have an important contribution to make to Metis and Canadian politics, and to society's task of engaging in feminist change and empowerment.

Marge Friedel, Alberta: You're only powerless when you give your power away.

No one else can speak for us. No mainstream, malestream organisation can represent our experiences better than we can. No other Metis, aboriginal or mainstream entity can offer our contribution on our behalf. We have not delegated our voices to anyone. And so Women of the Metis Nation offers this paper to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, so that the Commission may place our views in the public domain, and take note of our insistence on speaking for and about our lived experiences and prescription for the future. We are, after all, women who own ourselves.

THE CONDITIONS OF WOMEN'S LIVES

Mary Weigers, Saskatchewan: You are going to have to speak and the women's issues are the ones you have to talk about."

While Metis women do not have identical life experiences, there are sets of experiences that are shared by a great many women. We name them here, to provide a context for the political analysis that we set forth throughout this paper.

We agree with the feminist proposition that "the personal is political", and that the way we live our lives and engage in relationships is a profound manifestation of our collective politics. We believe that politics is about power: who holds it, who influences it, and who is powerless. Too often, our lived experiences show us that society's politics support the oppression and victimisation of women and children, and that women are relatively powerless to change these conditions.

The harmful conditions that characterise the lives of too many of us include poverty; un- or underemployment; violence in the home towards women and children; sexual abuse of children; personal disempowerment; marginalisation by the political systems in Metis and newcomer communities; racism; and isolation from one another. These conditions are connected. As Mary Jane Mossman wrote,

Indeed, the fact that poverty is a relatively constant feature of women's lives, relative to those of men, means that we must recognize poverty as the economic face of the sex/gender system

of our society; just as women's relative lack of participation in public institutions is the political face of the sex/gender system, and our vulnerability to violence is its social reflection, so poverty (and vulnerability to poverty) is the reflection of a system which defines sex differences by adverse consequences for women.³

Many of us have experienced these conditions; now some of us are understanding them in a political, historical and social context. That is, we are extrapolating from our shared experiences an understanding of the systemic roots of our oppression. This analysis of the systemic causes of women's collective experience leads us to collective action for change.

As long as we keep our pain personal and private, we will fail to see the links between our individual experiences and the political and social structures that shape them. The contextual, collective analysis is an essential precondition for women working for genuine change in the conditions of our lives. Perhaps the single most-repeated wish expressed by women at our conference was that we would network, organise, and work together. Through this kind of collective analysis and action, we believe we can reduce the high probability that women's lives will continue to be marred by the negative conditions named above. We further believe that general societal health is dependent on this change, and that the vitality and viability of future Metis governments must be grounded in genuine empowerment of all members of the

³ Mary Jane Mossman, "The Feminization of Poverty: Challenging Constitutional Reform to Respond to Women's Needs", in Conversations Among Friends: Women and Constitutional Reform, (David Schneiderman, Ed.), Centre for Constitutional Studies, Faculty of Law, University of Alberta, 1992:84.

community. Such a transformation of the conditions of our lives comes from making the personal, political.

Our conference featured a panel discussion of women's organisations, in which women considered the similarities and differences between aboriginal and non-native women's lives and organisations. We were offered solidarity and sisterhood by status, Metis, and non-native women, who shared their experiences and their analyses with us all.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

There is a tendency for scholars, lawyers, and politicians to view women's rights as one of a multitude of "special-interest" claims against the state. These "rights-based" claims are portrayed as conflicting with each other and fragmenting the interests of that fictional group of "general interest Canadians". This fictional group is believed not to advance rights-based claims, is not aboriginal, ethnic, homosexual, disabled, impoverished or women, yet is somehow both normative and the majority. In this context, then, women's rights are viewed as in addition to the rights of people generally, rather than as the rights of women-as-people or people-including-women. Women's rights to dignity, to meaningful economic, political and social participation and choices, to equality of treatment where we are the same as men, and to the equality of different treatment where we are unlike men and disadvantaged because of this difference -- all of these rights-based claims are human rights. If we take it to

be true that society is as strong as its weakest component, then society can only be strengthened by positive action taken to secure women's rights.

Positive action should include the funding of women's articulation of women's concerns. Women are not equally able to speak, nor are we equal beneficiaries of government and agency funding. The Royal Commission's own deliberations and final recommendations will be flawed to the extent that women are silent and unseen in them. We point out that the Native Women's Association of Canada has requested that half of the Royal Commission intervenor monies be made available for women. We concur.

METIS WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

Mary Weigers, Saskatchewan: "It is sad that we have to speak of the problems but we have to, or how will we go forward?"

Women face the impossible choice of working for change for women and as women, or having relative economic and personal security. Many of the conference participants cited the personal repercussions of political activity: women have lost or been denied employment; have endured intimidation about their economic security or social standing; have been threatened with violence and have endured violence; have suffered from personal, political and professional character assassination because they spoke up, or engaged in activity, as women.

This woman's name is withheld to protect her against retaliation; she is a prominent political technician. She was told by her boss (a prominent Metis leader) that she had no business organising and speaking as a woman, and was, essentially, fired. She fears naming her victimizer will cost her professional relationships.

There is a real fear of the punishments imposed for speaking out. Women are routinely subjected to sexist backlash and violence. Unemployability is one common consequence of activism, and the threat of "trashing" (character or professional assassination) or job loss serves to silence many women. Being unemployed means that one can't feed herself and her children. The label 'lesbian' is used to frighten women: being labelled lesbian removes one from the dubious protection of men, and subjects one to an intensified version of the kinds of violence and intimidation cited above. This has a particularly damaging effect on those women who are lesbian, and who are forced to live in the closet by homophobes who have power over their lives. Finally, women who are lesbian or who are called lesbian; women who are feminist or who are called feminist; and women who are activist for change to the conditions of women's and children's lives, often find their aboriginal authenticity questioned. Their very identity is challenged. All of this has a chilling effect on women's activism.

Mary Weigers, Saskatchewan: When you have Metis women who are afraid to speak (because of intimidation) and this is our own men who do that! There are women who didn't come to this conference because of fear of repercussions.

Women at our conference recorded being intimidated in the following ways in the process of political activism as women, for women. Some women advised us in person and by phone that they did not attend our conference because of intimidation. The form of their intimidation is also recorded below.

1. Being threatened with the loss of employment.
2. Being fired, and being forced to resign.
3. Being threatened with the revocation of their Metis cards; being denied Metis "status".
4. Being called unMetis or unaboriginal.
5. Being threatened with eviction and loss of housing.
6. Threats implying physical danger if the women in question continued organising or participating in certain women's politics, or supporting a certain Metis woman activist.
7. Being slandered as sexually licentious or for using sex to procure political support.
8. Being denied ordinary administrative and other supports in the place of employment as punishment, or to force the women out of the place of employment and coterminous political arena.
9. Being questioned regarding one's sexual orientation and practices, and affinity for men.
10. Being ostracised in the workplace, in the political arena, and in the community; having the ostracism organised and orchestrated by political rivals for political purposes.

Laura Langstaff, Alberta: We get death threats (for being involved) -- I've had death threats.

METIS RIGHTS AS ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

"Where are we going? Always home." This line from a long-dead Roman poet is true for all of us, and so it is for the Metis nation in its search for the politics of possibility. Home is where one is centered, where one comes from, and where one returns for affirmation. Those with whom we share this sense of home contribute to our sense of self. The tortuous journey toward self-definition and self-government is, ultimately, leading us home.

There are two separate but related origins of Metis rights to land and political autonomy and to the Metis claim for a negotiated entrance into the Canadian federation.

The first origin is to be found in our inherited aboriginality, which conveys a package of rights. This inheritance is generally though not exclusively from our foremothers. This point is salient insofar as aboriginal women have been politically marginalised and denied aboriginal rights by both aboriginal and mainstream malestream governments and lobby organisations. The denial of the existence and implementation of Metis rights is consistent with the denial of women's potency as rights-bearing and rights-conferring agents. The content of Metis rights, and the mode of their expression, is a

matter for further discussion. (See, for example, Appendix 1.) It is unlikely that expression, in particular, will be universal among all Metis people.

The second origin is a consequence of our unique historical and ethnic locatedness in Canada's genesis, and of the legal claims that flow from that. That is, the Metis are authentically and uniquely indigenous to this continent. Our genesis as a nation is relatively recent, but that fact does not indemnify Canada of our claims. Nowhere else in the world do people like the Metis exist. We are an expression of this land, and have Metis claims that flow from our unique historical origins.

Emma LaRoque, Manitoba: Where does self-government come from? Our heritage of independence, freedom, democratic discipline, organised and principled history of governing ourselves. We are original to this land: we didn't come from anyplace else. We are an ethnically new people.

The Metis have dual inheritances, and are entitled to claim them both. But this duality does not negate the validity of our aboriginality, nor of the indigenous character of our collective existence and consciousness. It merely defines the special character of Metis aboriginality.

Section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982 protects "existing aboriginal and treaty rights". Aboriginal peoples take the view that section 35 is a "full box"; that is, that rights exist regardless of the measure of political will or legal capacity to define and implement them. Federal and provincial governments have preferred to view section 35 as an "empty box", with the capacity to

protect rights as they are defined (put in the box) through processes of political negotiation or judicial review.

"Self-government" has become the pre-eminent aboriginal and treaty right in the section 35 box. As the primary subject of discussion at the First Ministers Conference series flowing from section 37 of the Constitution Act 1982, "self-government" has dominated the discussion of aboriginal-newcomer relations. It featured prominently in the recent Charlottetown Accord negotiations, which included proposals for constitutional recognition of aboriginal governments as a third order of government.

Status Indian visions of governance have, in turn, dominated discussions about "self-government". It is past time to consider governance as a right of Metis peoples, and what is required for exercise of this right. The Metis are an aboriginal people, explicitly recognised since 1982 but arguably implicitly recognised since 1867, via section 91(24) of the Constitution Act 1867. That section, referring to "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians", was drafted not to refer to Indians as a group defined by federal legislation (which did not in fact exist with the restrictive definition of 'Indian' until 1869) but to a group whose characteristic was aboriginality, and who were called (as mistakenly then as now) Indians or 'natives'.

It has yet to be determined whether there are different kinds of rights among the three kinds of constitutionally-recognised aboriginal peoples. This

paper does not attempt to engage in that timely and important discussion, save to point out the need for it in advance of specific rights arguments.

EXTINGUISHMENT OR IMPLEMENTATION

The question of "extinguishment" has been raised by federal and provincial governments in the context of the components of the aboriginal rights claim, and then the means by which this claim could be permanently terminated. The implicit proposition here is that the government seeks to define Metis and other aboriginal title in order to draft an extinguishment process. We suggest it is more useful to consider ways in which that title might be given expression by and in the Canadian state.

Women of the Metis Nation takes the view that aboriginal rights includes aboriginal title as an interest in land and the fruits of the land, and the political authority (jurisdiction) to manage (legislate) on matters pertaining to the care and use of the land. This, then, requires the possibility of federal structural evolution to encompass Metis authorities (governments) with certain authority in relation to certain lands. Flowing from that is the necessity for interjurisdictional and financial arrangements.

Beyond the question of land, however, is the matter of political, economic, social and cultural rights flowing from Metis aboriginal rights. These are perhaps the rights which will be exercised by more Metis than those claiming an aboriginal interest in land. All of this begs the question of who is

Metis for the purpose of this title, and whether the claim inures to the individual, the collectivity or collectivities, or the land.

Federal policy to date has been structured so that, in order to get title recognised in some concrete manner (via treaty or land claim, for example) the right must be extinguished. The political ethic of this exchange needs to be challenged. Currently, there is some evidence that the language of extinguishment is evolving into the language of 'certainty': in exchange for undefined rights claimant groups agree to a list of enforceable rights. Potentially, in exchange for the undefined and largely unexercisable right of title, Metis people (or some Metis people) could acquire legal and practical certainty in relation to a specific piece of land and named authority on that land, or in relation to certain claims against federal and provincial governments. This will raise the complicated question of Metis identity and membership -- that is, who is Metis for the purpose of exercising aboriginal and future defined rights, and for sharing in federal programs that may be created as an expression of its responsibility toward aboriginal peoples.

Women of the Metis Nation prefers to see rights protected in a contemporary context and implemented via locally-appropriate structures by way of treaty agreements, themselves attracting constitutional protection. This does not settle the question of 'membership', nor of who might have the legitimate agency to authorise such an agreement or agreements, on behalf of the disparate diaspora known as the Metis.

SO WHO IS METIS?

Dorothy Thorson, Yukon: How seldom we talk about being Metis in Yukon. Metis are invisible. The 1991 census says 561 persons declared themselves Metis in Yukon but they are integrated into other communities. There is no recorded history of Metis women's contribution to Yukon life. We have no political body. The Council for Yukon Indians has said it doesn't represent the interests of Yukon Metis. Most of my Metis friends hadn't been part of the census. There is no common definition -- some of us are halfbreeds, some Metis.

The question of what combination of ethnic and cultural components provide the conditions for an authentic claim of Metis identity has not been satisfactorily resolved. At our conference, women who identified as Metis included the following range of heritage and experiences:

- * both parents self-identify as Metis;
- * one parent self-identifies as Metis, and a variety of ethnic contributions from the other parent;
- * raised in "traditional" Indian or Metis communities; proficiency in aboriginal language;
- * no lived cultural or community experience, no proficiency in aboriginal language, sense of alienation from both heritage communities;
- * awareness of Metis politics and history;
- * unaware of Metis politics and history;
- * ancestral connection with Red River Metis;
- * variations of half-breeds and mixed-race people;
- * and persons who are themselves, or are descended from, women deprived of Indian status under the pre-1985 Indian Act, including some persons who have been reinstated but who are, for all practical purposes, prevented from living as Indians.

The issue of "boundary maintenance" or "membership" is relevant only if there are scarce benefits to be had by holding membership in a select group. It is a relatively recent phenomenon that a certain lobby organisation has

sought to define "Metis" in such a way as to establish an exclusive and easily identifiable group. The Metis National Council has proposed that Metis identity is genuine only if individuals are descended from a limited number of half-breed persons living in the historic Red River area, are recognised by that Metis community as members, and are Metis within the cultural parameters of this group.

Women of the Metis Nation takes the view that this definition, and others like it, is arbitrary, exclusionary, and would eliminate a large group of people who currently view themselves as Metis. We suggest that there are other attributes to being Metis, which include a package of shared experiences and self-identification. We do not fear a sudden influx of imposters; there are currently no tangible benefits to claiming the label "Metis", and it is unlikely that any in the future will serve as sufficient inducement to subject oneself to the scepticism and ridicule of Metis communities.

We understand that there are individuals who are Metis by default: they do not fit within status or non-status communities; they have a consciousness of being also aboriginal, and for lack of another category of identification, they call themselves Metis. Some argue that there are certain hallmarks of Metis identity which are characteristic of "genuine" Metis people. These hallmarks have been referred to as specific racial antecedents; that is, being able to trace one's ancestry to a defined group of Metis people from the historic Red River

area; to shared cultural experiences and language. Women of the Metis Nation finds within its members women who fit those criteria.

We also have members who do not fit those criteria. Some are of mixed aboriginal and newcomer ancestry but not from the historic Red River, and not of the historic racial blends of French or Scottish and Cree or Ojibway. Some are casualties of the application of the membership provisions of the Indian Act. Some have no cultural grounding, but are searching for it and ask us to assist in that search.

All of this is fine with us. We believe that Metis identity is inclusive of all of us, and that all of us who wish to have something of value to contribute. After all, Metis consciousness was stimulated largely by the historical fact of not fitting in with either of our ancestral groups. Women of the Metis Nation is, however, strongly of the view that Metis people and communities are the only legitimate authorities on Metis membership. We do not support any externally-applied criteria for Metis "status".

Connie Connelly, Yukon: I've never called myself Metis -- I'm a 'breed'.

What is clear to us is that (1) the inheritance of Metis rights is not ameliorated by other ethnic attributes of the claimant, and (2) one generation cannot terminate the birthright of the next. Therefore, the expression of the right may vary across the country and across time, but its existence is immutable.

Historically, aboriginal leaders spoke of the importance of planning political and social change that would serve the interests of the people in perpetuity, and of ensuring decisions were made that would be useful and valid through the seventh generation. The seventh generation was not categorised racially: we are all the children of our foremothers and forefathers, and we are claiming our aboriginal inheritance now. We do not accept that this inheritance is tempered by our variety of racial mixes, and we do not believe our progenitors envisioned a fractured future for their descendants. The Women of the Metis Nation does not believe in "purebred" Metis, and we reject racial measurement as a criterion for Metis identity or rights.

MODELS FOR ABORIGINAL GOVERNMENT

Perhaps unlike other aboriginal peoples, the Metis have a stake in the success of the Canadian experiment. Indeed, the history of Metis activism has been for negotiated entrance into Canadian political and economic processes, rather than for recognition from the state of our separate, pre-existing political integrity. History suggests that we have, as a people, been denied and marginalised by both of our politicoethnic cousins.

The challenge for Canada is to get beyond the tactic of military, economic and political oppression as tools to avoid political resolution of its cleavage with the Metis, to a conception of Canada that includes incorporation of our often unsavoury national history and of all our constitutional entities, in a structure and process that is characterised by honesty and ethical expression.

There are several proposed and existing models of aboriginal government that bear consideration, though ultimately we may decide that a new model better suits Metis realities.

The Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement and the aboriginal governmental arrangements flowing from it are interesting in terms of the arrangements for interjurisdictional co-operation, sharing and collaboration. The Agreement established the parameters of subsequent specific negotiations leading to First Nation Final Agreements and First Nation Self-Government Agreements. The latter agreements are negotiated by each of the 14 Yukon First Nations, in a process that allows each to tailor the agreement to its particular circumstances, and to assume a range of governmental powers and responsibilities. The ability of this process to respond to the individual needs and circumstances of each community is similar to what would be needed from any process detailing the content and implementation of Metis government. The disparate nature of Metis people and communities means that a single formula and model will be inadequate.

The Yukon model is also intriguing because it deals with rights to traditional territories, and with the right to maintain cultural distinctiveness and social well-being. The agreements attract constitutional protection. First Nations can choose to assume jurisdiction over a wide and important range of subjects, in some cases exclusively and in others, concurrently with the Yukon Government.

The pending division of the Northwest Territories into Nunavut and Denendeh provides an example of a de facto (though possibly impermanent) aboriginal public government. By virtue of their current majority in the population of Nunavut, the Inuit people are in a position to control the government composition and therefore, the government agenda. However, as the population becomes more heterogenous this may well change. The growing interest in natural resource development in the north will likely be accompanied by a greater presence of southern people and corporations. The issue of residency requirements as a condition of participation in public government is a topic that will no doubt become more prominent over the years. Again, this will be instructional for Metis peoples. Where there is a Metis land-based government, it will be important to determine qualifications for residency and for political rights. This leads again to the thorny issue of membership or boundary maintenance.

Band councils under the Indian Act have exercised quasi-municipal powers; as a model of governance the Indian Act council system is rife with examples of what not to do. The authority of band councils comes from a piece of federal legislation, rather than from the Constitution or from each "band". The Act is paternalistic in its inception and administration. It places final authority in the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, rather than vesting it in the band government. The council cannot be genuinely responsive and accountable to the band: the funding and policy parameters, and final approval

or veto of any "band council resolution" or bylaw is vested in the Minister, although the band members elect the chief and councillors. Councils do not even have access to all of their own monies, which are held in trust by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. The Act is sexist and racist.⁴ The Indian Act model, in short, is trivial, manipulative, and classically colonial. Nothing like it should be considered for any Metis collectivity.

Federal "negotiations" directed at achieving "community-based self-government" (CBSG), conferring delegated and mostly municipal powers upon certain band councils, is another federal policy which is achievable, limited and limiting. The "negotiations" are so constrained by federal guidelines as to make mockery of the term. Ultimate authority continues to rest with the federal government. The agreements do not attract constitutional protection. They may not be crafted to acknowledge inherency of political rights; they may not reflect the exigencies of economies of scale; they do not reflect the political gains so tantalisingly offered by the Charlottetown Accord; and in fact, they do not come close to even the Sechelt model, which is unabashedly municipal in character. In short, the community-based self-government process is a kinder, gentler colonialism, with no potential to become anything else.

The Sechelt Act mentioned above is at least more honest than the CBSG process. Federal legislation conferring quasi-municipal powers, it offers the

⁴ J.Green, "Sexual Equality and Indian Government: An Analysis of Bill C-31 Amendments to the Indian Act", Native Studies Review, Vol.1, No.2, 1985.

Sechelt government the ability to control disposition of its land and development on its land. It clears the path to economic development of many Indian Act hurdles. It is not an expression of the inherent right of self-government, and it may potentially result in the loss of land, which is made alienable. We would caution any Metis collectivity against settling for the immediate benefits of a Sechelt-like piece of legislation, as it could compromise rights currently protected in section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982 and the integrity of any land bases that may be obtained.

The Charlottetown Accord was a watershed of aboriginal-newcomer political relations. It offered the possibility of genuine power-sharing and federal evolution toward a trilateral federal structure. It was a courageous proposal, characterised by good-will, flexibility, and hope. For men. Many women, and many different kinds of women in Canada, were bewildered, then outraged by the processes of political exclusion of women adhered to by both the aboriginal and newcomer political elites.⁵ Women of the Metis Nation considers the Charlottetown proposals to have much to recommend them, if and only if women are involved from conception of each idea through to implementation. That is, the reality of women's lives must shape in significant

⁵ See, for example, "A Comprehensive Analysis of the Charlottetown Accord" in The Womanist, Vol.2, No.2, Fall 1992, and "Constitutionalising the Patriarchy: Aboriginal Women and Aboriginal Government", Constitutional Forum, Vol.4, No.4, The Centre for Constitutional Studies, Faculty of Law, University of Alberta, Summer 1993, both by Joyce Green.

measure the political considerations that create new models of governance for us. We agree with Donna Gretchner, who wrote

Metis women could not even find themselves there (in the Constitution) before 1982, for the framers had pushed them completely outside the constitutional text. ... I propose that the conference (on Women and Constitutional Reform) adopt the judgement of Metis women as the basic standard for constitutional reform, since historically the constitution paid them the least attention. In short, approval of a proposed amendment by Metis women ought to be the sine qua non of general acceptance.⁶

The ideal of self-determination on a land base, with a sustainable economy, is a possibility for a portion of the Metis nation. The possibility of a land claim settlement in the historic Red River raises the prospect of the first potent Metis government since Riel's provisional government fell. It is also irrelevant, apart from a salutary symbolic effect, to most of the Metis diaspora and to all the disparate "breeds" who identify as Metis. Women of the Metis Nation supports the efforts to obtain this land for a portion of the Metis population; we also see a need to grapple with the issue of land and governance for Metis peoples elsewhere.

The Alberta Metis settlements have a land base, though it is far from secure; however the majority of Alberta Metis do not live on the settlements. Again, while it is attractive to develop models of government for the settlements, that will not provide a relevant mechanism for most Metis.

⁶ Donna Gretchner, "Prose for Perpetua", in Conversations Among Friends: Women and Constitutional Reform (David Schneiderman, Ed.), Centre for Constitutional Studies, Faculty of Law, University of Edmonton, 1992:63.

Many Metis communities exist in northern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where people have continued to exercise land-based rights and to live in culturally distinct and cohesive communities with a distinct and identifiable population. These communities are well-placed to claim land from the federal and provincial governments, and to develop models of government for their communities.

The question of how to engage in Metis government in, for example, Regina or Edmonton, will not be answered by any models developed for Metis collectivities with a land base or land claim, or with constant and identifiable populations.

Unlike some aboriginal peoples, the Metis people have not rejected Canadian citizenship. Therefore, Metis governments will logically be envisioned within the context of Canada. There are unresolved questions about the rights and duties of Metis people as regards Metis and other orders of government. In particular, the applicability of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to Metis governments needs to be clarified. For reasons that we discuss later, Women of the Metis Nation is strongly of the view that the Charter must apply to all governments within Canada.

Women of the Metis Nation sees a need for clarification of how Metis political interests are articulated to the governments of Canada. To date there has been an implicit conferral of quasi-governmental status upon certain lobby organisations. The federal and provincial governments have chosen to dialogue

and negotiate with some organisations, while excluding others. This choice appears to have excluded women-defined and women-led organisations in favour of malestream ones, which are wrongly characterised as mainstream. Therefore, women's analyses and views have been excluded from the conversations considering the nature and scope of Metis government. This is consistent with the exclusion of organised feminist participation from the processes of federal and provincial governments.

Women at our conference considered the following questions:

1. Who controls lobby organisations?
2. Who sets the agenda and structures the debate?
3. Who participates in First Ministers Conferences?
4. What kinds of factors affect Metis women's participation in malestream Metis organisations?
5. Who is not participating or represented?

It is important to remember that lobby organisations which in themselves may be useful, are not governments. And, in order to obtain the fullest possible representation from Metis people about their political visions, it is essential to ensure women's voices are heard.

Tradition is invoked by most politicians in defence of certain choices. Women must always ask -- whose tradition? Is 'tradition' beyond critique? How often is tradition cited to advance or to deny our women's positions?

Emma LaRoque, Manitoba: We must avoid rigid ideology and fundamentalism. Learn from the mistakes of Europe. Stay away from oppressive traditions -- and all cultures have them. Tradition is only good when it enhances every member of the collective group.

There are international instruments which set the standard for human rights -- social, economic, cultural, political and civil rights. These documents are partially reflected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Whether the Charter or the international standard is deemed authoritative, aboriginal governments will assumably want to adhere to some constitutional authoritative code of government-citizen relations.

Emma LaRoque, Manitoba: As a woman I will never support anything, no matter how lofty (aboriginal self-government) unless and until it has written into it a charter of rights and justice and equality for women. Just because we have been oppressed doesn't automatically mean that all our traditions are great and good and we will be good to each other. We need written protocols that say how we will conduct ourselves justly, fairly, equally. We need the right to disagree.

During the Charlottetown Accord negotiations, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and the National Metis Women of Canada (NMWC) argued for the application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to any aboriginal governments, at least until an equally authoritative aboriginal charter that protected women's equality rights and freedoms was put in place. The Assembly of First Nations opposed the application of the Charter; the AFN and the National Metis Council dismissed women's concerns and declined to

ensure women's full and free participation in negotiations. Some aboriginal men put forward the proposition that a return to traditional government would remedy the abusive and inequitable conditions of women's lives. We have no reason to put our trust in a return to "tradition", especially tradition defined, structured, and implemented by the same men who now routinely marginalise and victimise us for political activism.⁷

Women of the Metis Nation is strongly of the view that women's rights must be constitutionally protected from abuse by all governments. We believe these rights must be given constitutional stature as part of the commitment to recognise women's rights and concomitantly, the systemic violation of them. Even with such "protection", we know our rights are violated casually and constantly in the family, in our communities, and in society generally. But we do not accept this state of affairs, and our insistence on constitutional codification of our rights is of a piece with our rejection of our victimisation. We also believe that constitutional protection of women's rights is part of the societal change that will create genuine safety, equality and respect for women.

We agree with Marge Friedel, who wrote:

Land claims would be meaningless if women have no entrenched rights. This has been shown clearly in past history with the case of Bill C-31 Indian women and their experiences in trying to reclaim their rights to land located on reserves. We must ensure

⁷ For further discussion, see J. Green, "Constitutionalising the Patriarchy: Indian Women and Indian Government", Constitutional Forum, Vol.4, No. 4, 1993.

that our voices are heard regarding social issues and that a social charter is included in the Constitution. ... Equality rights for women is high on the Metis women's agenda for the constitution.⁸

Emma LaRoque: Written guarantees for human rights must be paramount in any model of self-government. Since it can never be taken for granted that women's rights will be somehow advanced, Metis women's rights must be entrenched into any self-government model or constitution. These rights must be consistent with those rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Women have an inherent right to those freedoms.

DIALOGUE FOR THE FUTURE

Throughout the conference, panellists and participants focussed on how we as Metis women wanted the future to look, and how we could take part in shaping our future. Generally, then, there was strong support for an analysis that made central the existing conditions of women's lives.

Melanie Omeniho, Alberta: Maybe sometime men and women can work peacefully together but as long as we're threatened and intimidated that's not going to happen.

During our conference panellists and participants engaged in discussion of theoretical and practical aspects of political possibility. Panellists commented on governance as a tool for independence for women who own themselves, and considered how governance might occur and who might be in government.

⁸ Marge Friedel, "Metis Women and Constitutional Reform", Conversations Among Friends: Women and Constitutional Reform, (David Schneiderman, ed.) Centre for Constitutional Studies, Faculty of Law, University of Alberta, 1992:91.

Conference participants were invited to consider whether governance means a legislative body, a service delivery organisation, or both; and at whom legislation, policy and services might be directed. The existence of governance on or off of a land base, and of the economies of scale that should be considered together with the structural models of government, were discussed. It was proposed that rights as aboriginal peoples are additional to those of general Canadian citizenship.

Panellists considering women's organisations talked about theory underpinning women's collective experiences, about the commonalities and differences among status, Metis, and non-native women, and of how women's personal life experiences can politicise women.

Emma LaRoque, Manitoba: Whatever Metis Self-Government comes to being, Metis women's rights to live in safety and freedom from violence must be understood and advanced.

The need to acknowledge the pervasive dysfunction in aboriginal communities was raised, along with the need for collective healing as a condition of a better future. The reality of violence in our lives, and in the lives of our children, was raised by many.

Part of our conference format consisted of small, confidential "Talking Circles" dealing with violence, with empowerment, and with related topics. Each Talking Circle had a facilitator with skills in the topic area. The reports from participants and from facilitators confirms that Metis women are

experiencing a high level of violence in their lives, and they see this issue as an essential pre-condition of Metis governance. That is, the health of families and communities must be a first priority, and must take pride of place on the political agenda now. In the event that governance is discussed, it must include this focus on healthy families and communities. This must include recognition of the reality of women's lives.

Many women spoke of the inability of the traditional Christian churches to meet our spiritual needs; many spoke of the active role those churches played in creating and maintaining the conditions of our oppression. One woman took extreme exception to this critique, and felt it challenged the validity of her faith. Many women identified with a feminist agenda for change; some were uncomfortable with the label "feminist" because they understood it to mean an anti-family anti-male analysis; one, because she felt it was illegitimate for collective traditions; and one, because she viewed feminists as "baby-killers". Several veterans of political activism in Metis organisations spoke of the structural barriers to women's participation, and of the extreme sexism and intimidation they experienced in those arenas. Some of these women also spoke of a tactic of the malestream used to undermine women activists and women's organisations: that of creating a "women's auxiliary" to the malestream, and recruiting supportive women to it, while refusing to allow this woman's entity any political or financial autonomy. Many women made a plea for unity of women as women working for political and social

change. Many women spoke in favour of inclusive terms of Metis identity and rights. One woman spoke in favour of a culturally rigorous definition that would exclude non-aculturated people. Not all of us agree on all points, but there is a strong consensus on many central issues. The following material comes from our collective deliberations.

Rhonda Johnson, British Columbia, urged us to consider the issue of Metis identity. She spoke of the dangers of notions of purity and of racial designations.

Bernice Hammersmith, Saskatchewan, spoke of the politics around the Charlottetown Accord. She noted that all of the establishment of Canada said 'yes' -- the church, state, business, etc. The 'no' vote was, in her view, a rejection of the elite accommodation system of government. Bernice told us

"Great ideas begin with one person. Don't wait for a committee - nothing gets done in committees. Be clear where you want to go and how you're going to get there. Remember the importance of useful structures to accomplish objectives, not to replicate bad structures in other organisations.

Mary Weigers, Saskatchewan, spoke of the many different skills we have and urged us to use them.

When we leave here -- what are you going to do? Are we going to allow our Metis nation to be built without our participation? And have a handful of women labelled as 'rebels' and marginalised? Don't say 'I don't want to participate because they just fight'. Get involved. Phone women and pray for unity among Metis women because Metis women are the ones that will get things going. The malestream are destroying women, women's organisations, women's representation -- in the interests of maintaining power.

Connie Connelly, Yukon, informed the conference that she and Dorothy Thorson will start a Metis women's organisation in Yukon.

Heather Devine, Alberta, urged women to get involved with Metis women's organisations but not to be afraid to develop links with others and to develop allies. She reminded us of the importance of goals and objectives, and warned of the limitations of the bureaucracy.

Government Representatives find themselves developing policy in a vacuum because no meaningful links have been forged with Native communities. It's up to Government representatives and Native organizations to get together to develop equal working partnerships.

Marge Friedel, Alberta, and President of the National Metis Women of Canada, spoke of the need for each one of us to take personal and political responsibility for change.

There are elections all over, and it is up to us -- you have the power. There is an Alberta election on Tuesday (June 18), the Metis Nation of Alberta election in September, the federal election this fall -- don't throw away your power. You're only powerless when you give your power away. Learn your issues; ask candidates where they stand. Many of our problems are created by the elected leaders. Get involved, get a membership, ask questions, vote.

Murleen Browning, British Columbia, called for solidarity among Metis people.

Help us on the other side of those mountains -- there are many Metis in B.C. with roots from here. We're lacking leadership from our male dominated organisations -- help us -- write us -- send us newsletters and speeches. We feel isolated and left out.

(This woman's name is withheld to protect the women referred to.)

(Anonymous) spoke of the reality of the political tensions between male dominated Metis organisations and Metis women's organisations.

Women were threatened by that (unnamed Metis) organisation if they came to this conference -- it's not an issue of whether we want to get along -- women were threatened with losing their homes. I can't reveal the community where these women live, because they are vulnerable to retaliation. These women are isolated, with no road in to the community. They have to fly if they want to travel, which is costly. Those women were prepared to come to this conference. They haven't had a registered Metis local in that community since 1985. The men who are calling themselves leaders of defunct organisations phoned and threatened those women with loss of their housing if they dared come here.

Laura Langstaff, Alberta, spoke of the need for women to support women who are politically active.

We get death threats -- I've had death threats. I'm part of a mainstream organisation -- if you want change, you come out and support those of us who put our lives on the line.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Commissioner Viola Robinson honoured us by making time in her busy schedule to make an appearance at the conference, and offer us words of support. She spoke of how the inequality created by federal policies and the need to bring equality within aboriginal communities and within Canada brought her to political life.

"Making your philosophy a reality has been a struggle for women, especially for Metis women, because your contribution has never been recognised properly", she told us.

Emma LaRoque, Manitoba, spoke of the contemporary land and governance claims by Metis people.

Avoid formulas. We are people of many cultures and communities. Let us never take away the democratic right of each community ... but we do need guiding principles ... how we should conduct ourselves.

We wish to accomplish political, social, and economic wellbeing - health and happiness. We should not have to sacrifice our ideals and ideas to achieve health and happiness.

We need urban models -- associations -- and "complete institutions", ie. some economic independence and development, ... All of these with women's input.

Mary Weigers, Saskatchewan, who is also the Saskatchewan representative to the National Metis Women of Canada, delivered a case history of how one woman has been excluded from the Metis corridors of power and discouraged from setting up a women's organisation. The woman, Bernice Hammersmith, is the Provincial Secretary to the Metis Society of Saskatchewan. She has given permission for her story to be included in our report. Mary told us:

For 2 years, Bernice Hammersmith tried to get a provincial Metis women's organisation going under the auspices of the Metis Society and it was turned down. We just had a Metis Society election -- I'm in a lot of trouble in Saskatchewan for supporting Bernice for Provincial Secretary over an incumbent man. She won. The election was full of manipulation and dirty tricks. Bernice was told she had to give blow jobs for her votes. Ballot boxes were lost. The election commission ousted Bernice, and Metis voters insisted on her reinstatement. Now her colleagues (on the executive) don't include her in the decision making. There's differential treatment -- all other executive members have staff -- not Bernice.

I gave a letter of support to the Native Women's Association of Canada in their protest over the Charlottetown Accord -- and provincial elected men told me I had no right. The Metis Society received \$80 thousand to fund our woman's society -- and none went to our women's society. The Metis Society created a new women's organisation to replace ours and they have in fact started a parallel group. Funding is the carrot used to attract women into this new organisation. The Metis Society gave money to the new women's group. Access to programs provided by the Metis Society is used as muscle to coerce individual members into political compliance. We have experienced the unethical and unconstitutional removal of women by the men in power. They also control employment. Our voice is not heard ... we are afraid to speak.

The Metis National Council of Women has a bylaw that states that only women who are recognised as Metis by the male-dominated Metis nations of Canada can appoint women to the Metis National Council. This excludes any group that is not connected to a "parent" (malestream) organisation in any province. The MNC's women's board is filled with their political appointments, not with women's organisations' appointments. We need your involvement and solidarity. Where will we go if the MNC is a Metis government and women aren't represented?

I have been threatened with having my Metis card withdrawn for my women's political activism. Is that the kind of nation that you want? You are going to have to speak and the women's issues are the ones you have to talk about.

Bernice Hammersmith adds to this story:

I ran in the election of February 1992 as provincial secretary of the Saskatchewan Metis Society. This is one of 3 positions that are voted on in a provincial election by all members. I ran on a platform that I would initiate a code of ethics, conflict of interest guidelines, membership criteria, a role for our senators, a cleaning up of the electoral process, and major roles for women, our youth, our disabled and our elders. These proposals are controversial. The power bloc includes persons convicted of criminal charges during the time they have run and held office. The controversy stemmed from the conflict of interest guidelines and the code of ethics , which would put a halt to nepotism, would prevent persons with a criminal record from running, and would prevent

persons charged with such activity from running until the matter is settled. Senators should be the enforcers of conflict of interest and ethics.

These were discussed across Saskatchewan and the Metis communities were very supportive of these initiatives. The past bad practices had resulted in a disillusionment and apathy of Metis people. My initiatives would empower and involve members. My experience during the Metis Society election was dreadful and the process seemed like woman-bashing ... of woman who disagreed with the Metis Society power bloc, while women who support them uncritically are supported in turn. My supporters had unbelievable problems during the election ... I spent Election day in my community of Ile a la Crosse where everyone knows everyone. On E-night there seemed to be a discrepancy in the reporting system ... my scrutineers were refused access to the central polling station, the place where ballots were being phoned in; my support apparently evaporated ... but then persons alleged inadequacies of ballot box protection and handling, the loss of ballot boxes, and irregularities of balloting and of polling station security and placement.

I only won by 5 votes, which seemed impossible given my level of support and organisation ... so my election was contested. Meantime I took office ... there was manipulation of persons on election commission to review my case, with one alleging that she had no information about anything to do with me. She wrote the Metis Society saying she washed her hands of the whole affair. I was removed from office.

The challenger of my election, Mr. Dorion, argued I had allowed treaty Indians to vote in Swift Current and elsewhere. This was untrue in the first place, and in the second place, voter eligibility is decided by the Metis Society of Saskatchewan and its officers, not by candidates for election. They were going to remove me from office based on one unfounded and unchecked affidavit asserting that so and so is a treaty Indian. If there was a problem with the election and with who voted, that speaks to a problem of the election commission and the process, rather than with my candidacy and incumbency.

The Metis Society was paying for the lawyers to go after me, and I had to respond with my own money and assistance from friends to clear my name of unfounded allegations in a kangaroo court.

I refuse to accept the label that I could only get elected if I coerced people to pretend to be something they weren't and to have my reputation smeared for their crummy election commission's job. Finally, I asked the Senators (who have little formal power but they are influential in our communities) if they would hear my story. They heard my story and agreed to speak for my reinstatement.

Self-government is not going to fly if this is how we behave; we need integrity and consistency and honour. We must put the political priority on the communities; the worst political brutality is now practiced on each other and this does not benefit those who we purport to serve. Community people are disillusioned. We have to ask how self government can work when there is such terrible process and practice of politics in MSS, and, finally, this organisation is accountable to its funding agencies rather than to its communities.

The Metis women's group of which Mary Weigers is president was critical of Metis election processes, and argued in favour of code of ethics, an enhanced role for elders, and more participation by women and women's organisations. That group had always been accepted as the Metis women's voice. However, a new organisation disguised as a working committee was set up by the MSS.

Meetings were held without Mary being invited or notified ... the committee worked to undermine Mary and the Metis women's organisation. The biggest issue seemed to be the non-incorporation of Mary's group ... the MSS refused to recognise a group that wasn't incorporated. However, many Metis society locals are also unincorporated, and they are recognised. The lack of recognition by the MSS caused funding problems for Mary's organisation.

Mr Mitchell, a minister in the provincial government, declined to give money to Mary's organisation unless MSS provided a letter confirming that the women were a provincial representative group. MSS promised to provide it in return for a commitment that the organisation would support the Charlottetown referendum.

This issue became a national one. A national Metis women's council was designed to provide provincial women's organisations with a national voice ... the Metis National Council then said only

women's organisations recognised by the provincial malestream Metis organisations would be acceptable participants. It is no coincidence that many of the marginalised women's organisations had been critical of the malestream.

Across the country, the malestream systematically created new compliant organisations and marginalised the authentic women-created organisations from political involvement. The Metis National Council of Women was created, with a constitution permitting only women recognised by the malestream organisations of each of the provinces to have a place in the women's council.

The original women's organisations decided that if they couldn't organise nationally under the auspices of the Metis National Council, they would do it apart from the MNC ... this resulted in the creation of the National Metis Women of Canada, whose President is Marge Friedel.

Marilyn Moge, Alberta: It is up to each one of us individually to get involved in the process.

Rhonda Johnson, British Columbia, talked about how our exclusion from power keeps us politically incompetent and impotent. She cited her personal experience, both with trying to organise Metis women and working with a malestream Metis organisation, to illustrate the point.

The Pacific Metis Federation had no women's organisation, although there is theoretically a structure for a women's organisation -- the argument is that there is no money so the structure is inactive; women can't meet. At the same time, leaders argue that we shouldn't separate the men and women. But women aren't involved. Therefore, women don't develop political skills or gain political experience.

The men in power in that organisation got money from the Secretary of State (during the run-up to the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord) and a portion was contractually required to go to women.

I talked to a few women about coming together as an association. Women were organising at that time at the national level; representatives from most provinces had met in Winnipeg when the Prime Minister was meeting with Metis National Council leaders. I was involved with women from other provinces in a meeting with the MNC president at which we took him to task for denying recognition of our validity as a national organisation and as individual provincial organisations, as the voice of Metis women.

Directly following that meeting and upon returning to B.C. I was called into the office of the President of the Pacific Metis Federation and told by the President, Norm Evans, that I had 'no business organising and speaking as a woman'. At the end of that meeting, I was given an option: either move to another community on Vancouver Island and continue my employment or to remain in Vancouver and cease working for the Pacific Metis Federation.

When I had accepted the position with the PMF it had been on the explicit understanding that, as I was a single parent who needed to be close to my family support system in Vancouver, I would not be required to work outside of Vancouver. So this was really no option.

The PMF later organised a woman's organisation, on the condition it be part of the Pacific Metis Federation rather than independent of it.

Dorothy Thorson, Yukon: CYANA -- Council of Yukon Artists of Native Ancestry -- challenged the right of Metis artists to call themselves native artists.

WOMEN'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCERNS

Throughout the conference women made observations about their experience and about the kinds of measures that are needed to address the conditions of women's oppression, inequality, and political non-participation. Many of these recommendations received substantial support from the

conference participants and we wish to draw them to the attention of RCAP.

1. Metis women must strategise to become a significant presence in malestream Metis organisations.
2. Metis women need to network with each other. We are isolated from each other as well as from the political power base in Metis and newcomer societies.
3. Women's organisations need to set attainable goals in specific timeframes, and strategise to achieve them.
4. Women need to find ways to work (political organising and strategising as women) and communicate without fear of the Backlash.
5. Organise: organising starts with one phonecall.
6. Fundraise so we can organise -- set up a foundation.
7. Offer support to activist Metis women; become active.
8. The education system is currently not teaching what is needed. The crisis in our school systems is a reflection of a greater social crisis. We (women) need to pull together. We need to focus on the major issues.
9. At the level of community there is a need to do team building so that the 'nation' or 'community' can pull together instead of against one another. Differences are acceptable except when they harm the collective.
10. We must make a conscious effort to predict what our children are going to need in the future and begin building for that now.
11. Half of Royal Commission intervenor monies should have been earmarked for women.

CONCLUSION

The Women of the Metis Nation want to provide the RCAP with our perceptions of community self-government principles, politics, and economies. We preface these remarks by observing that all members and all conference participants may not agree with them, as our constituency is a diverse one. However, these remarks are a fair reflection of the commentary shared by women at the conference, and of the research commissioned by us for this report. Women of the Metis Nation support it as a representation of the conference and organisational consensus on these matters.

We believe that the conference "Women Who Own Themselves" was an important step in the long hike of bringing women into the process of change. Those who attended the conference had an opportunity to place their voices on the record, and to document their Metis women's experiences. For some, it was the first time they had the opportunity to speak in a forum where they would be listened to. This report will take women's voices into the debates being encouraged and recorded by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and so into the public arena. Women of the Metis Nation views the raising of women's voices as a fundamental part of our mandate, and we urge the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to join us in meeting this mandate. After all, it is appropriate that women who own themselves also speak for and about themselves.

Dorothy Thorson, Yukon: We (Yukon Metis) have poor representation at the national level and little or none at the territorial level: we are forgotten people. This conference is the first time we have been asked to speak for ourselves, and we thank you for the opportunity."

We now entrust our collective conference experience to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, hoping that it will be given the serious consideration that so many of us have been denied to date. We invoke the promise made by RCAP Commission Viola Robinson in her address to our conference:

I want to assure you that the issues addressed by Aboriginal women will form a vital part of our final report. We will not "sweep things under the rug".⁹

We believe that aboriginal women's visions of the possibilities of aboriginal government are essential for the creation of political, administrative, economic and social models for the future. The women who participated in our conference "Women Who Own Themselves" demonstrated commitment to all manifestations of the Metis nation. These women are committed to the viability of any form of governance and ultimately, to the vitality of our families, communities, and peoples. We also believe that aboriginal women's accounts of the reality of sexist oppression by both aboriginal and 'mainstream' politicians and political structures must be taken seriously. To fail to hear the

⁹ Viola Robinson, "Notes for a Speech to Women of the Metis Nation, Edmonton, Alberta, June 11-12, 1993:10.

- first will deprive us all of (at least) half the political talent available. To fail to hear the second will perpetuate that oppression.

APPENDIX 1

Correspondence from Emma LaRocque

July 27, 1993

APPENDIX 1

In a letter to Women of the Metis Nation dated July 27, 1993, Emma LaRoque provided the following thoughts for consideration. We attach them as part of our report, and thank Emma for her thoughtful and substantial contribution. We note that what follows are Emma's views. Many of these matters were discussed by women during the conference; the consensus developing on the basis of conference discussions is presented in our recommendations.

- A. Written guarantees for human rights must be paramount in any model of self-government. Since it can never be taken for granted that women's rights will be somehow advanced, Metis women's rights must be guaranteed/entrenched into any self-government model or constitution. These rights must be consistent with those rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Women have an inherent right to those freedoms.
- B. The role of Metis women re Metis Self-Government cannot be relegated to "making valuable contributions" -- Metis women must have an inherent right to participate fully and equally with the entire process of developing self-government(s). Every significant aspect of our lives should be facilitated by any and all governments, eg. in education, justice, freedom, equality, safety, socio-economic and cultural development.
- C. Many Metis women live in poverty, therefore, every effort must be made to end this poverty. Urgent attention must be given to: Metis land bases, community development, housing, health, economic opportunities, equality in the work force, education, and general social well-being. At every turn, Metis women must participate equally in defining what an 'end to poverty' should look like.
- D. Many Metis women live lives of violence. Please refer to my 28-page report on "Violence in Aboriginal Communities" which is included in RCAP's latest publication The Path To Healing. I offer many suggestions as to addressing violence in Metis communities. Whatever Metis Self-Government comes to being, Metis women's rights to live in safety and freedom from violence must be understood and advanced. This has implications as to the kinds of justice systems we should be developing. In other words, protection, justice and healing for victims of violence, particularly sexual violence and battering of women should be an integral part of any Metis justice system. At the same time, every effort must be made to end the socio-economic conditions which foster violence.

- E. There are yet numerous Metis communities whose economies and cultures are land-based. Metis women have been integral to the development, vitality and survival of these land-based cultures. Any Metis Self-Government must be based on the principle of entrenching whatever land base (ie. the acres or so where Metis have lived and/or trapline areas) Metis have remaining. For example, throughout northern Alberta (ie. Lac La Biche - Fort McMurray stretch) numerous Metis do not live in colonies. But these Metis live on lands that belonged to their ancestors long before the province came into existence! Obviously, these lands morally belong to them but Alberta will not release these lands nor is there constitutional recognition of these people's Aboriginal rights. As we speak, both federal and provincial governments are assuming these lands belong to them and are wasting no time moving in ... moving in forms of gas and power lines exploration, logging, military usage or prison camps, etc. It is imperative that such recognition come at this point, otherwise, future generations will have nothing to look back to, nothing to depend on for economic and social well-being, nothing to build on. What is "Metis Self-government" without a land base, without a people who can remember and build on a distinct culture?

At the same time it should be as strongly noted that recognition of land/property rights for Metis on the basis of Aboriginal Rights should not be restricted to "traditional" usage of lands and resources because such a restriction is based on early European notions of Aboriginal peoples as primitive, therefore, unchanging (which is often associated with "traditional"). If we would subscribe to such a notion, we would always lose our lands the moment we make cultural changes. Obviously, this is of extreme significance because Aboriginal cultures were changing and dynamic cultures. There was nothing inherently static or "primitive" about them. Aboriginal peoples never resisted change, as myth has it. What they resisted was dispossession and destruction.

The soul of original Metis culture was change and self-sufficiency. **Otipemsiwuk**. The birth of the Metis nation was a signal of change. Further, Metis peoples of the 1600s to the late 1800s were not only in the centre of change, but they were always independent, free and self-sufficient. We have a proud heritage and traditional of change, of versatility, of innovation and of taking care of ourselves. **Otepemsiwuk**. If Metis peoples are not in the forefront of change today it is only because of colonization not of any cultural retrogression! Metis should have a right to live their cultures any way they please without having to

forego those Aboriginal and land rights which do morally belong to them. The right to change is as inherent as Aboriginal rights. Metis people require a land base, rural and urban.

For those Metis who live in urban centres every effort should be made to ensure that they have access to lands, property and housing. Not to mention, equal access to all other socio-economic amenities.

- F. One of the rationales for Aboriginal Self-Government is the facilitation of Aboriginal survival and development as "distinct" cultures and societies. As stated above, Aboriginality and Aboriginal Rights should never be equated with a static culture nor restricted to "traditional cultures". Native peoples have always changed yet, throughout the cultural changing, they have maintained traditions and there has always been a continuum. In other words, there is a Metis culture which is traceable and recognizable, there are Metis peoples who are a distinct entity. This is a tribute to Metis because they do not have all the usual anthropological, sociological or legal 'markers' to protect their identity boundaries. Also, many peoples have claimed to be Metis when they were/are not.

Of all Aboriginal groups, the question of maintaining identity is most challenging to Metis peoples. This is a question of cultural survival, a question which faces all Canadian groups, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, interested in maintaining a "distinct" culture. How shall Metis peoples maintain their identity? On what substantial basis is one Metis? Who can qualify as Metis? For example, is anyone who claims to be "part Indian", especially a claim that goes back centuries or generations ago, automatically "Metis"? Is there not a cultural component (ie. distinct history and ethnicity) to being Metis? If we hope to maintain a Metis identity for purposes of cultural survival, distinction and development, we must come up with some boundaries. We need to define the parameters re what constitutes Metis identity. Let us do so with openness, with the recognition that there are differences among us, for example, regional even cultural differences, yet let us develop some parameters such that we will remain culturally distinct, so that we will survive as a group, as a recognizable entity.

In order to support the survival of Metis identity, some support systems in addition to land rights should be in place. For example, educational institutions and cultural centres which would advance Metis history, languages, literatures, arts, cultures, religion(s), and sociology, etc. Perhaps a conference on Metis identity would be in order.

Support of self-government should be support of Aboriginal social and cultural vitality. And support of our social and cultural vitality entails full support of Metis women as equal partners in this venture.

APPENDIX 2

Conference Agenda

"WOMEN WHO OWN THEMSELVES"



OTIPEMISIWAK

"People Who Own Themselves"

Women of the Metis Nation

"WOMEN WHO OWN THEMSELVES"

HEARING THE VOICES OF COMMUNITY METIS WOMEN

***A Conference on
the meaning of Self-Governance to
Community Metis Women***

held in conjunction with

***Women of the Metis Nation
Annual General Meeting***

June 11-12-13, 1993

PALACE INN
4235 Calgary Trail North
Edmonton, Alberta

3:00 - 3:15 **Stretch Break**

3:15 - 3:30 **Versailles Room Plenary**

Talking Circle Reports

3:30 - 4:30 **Women's Movement Panel**

Moderator, Julie Anne Le Gras, feminist activist and research consultant; Panellists Vidya Kumar/Alberta Status of Women Action Committee; Marge Friedel/National Metis Women of Canada; Sheryl McInnes, feminist activist and scholar.

This panel will consider the women's movement and aboriginal women's place within it, including solidarity, shared issues, and differences.

4:30 - 5:00 **Break**

5:00 No-Hostess Social **Kensington Room**

6:00 Dinner

7:00 Emma LaRocque

7:30 Metis Dancers

RESOURCE WOMEN BIOGRAPHIES

MARIAN CARR is from the Six Nations Mohawk Reserve. She lives in Lethbridge, Alberta, where she is with Student Services at Lethbridge Community College.

BERNADETTE COOK heads the Self-Government Directorate for the Ontario Native Women's Association in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

CONNIE CONNELLY is a Metis woman from Whitehorse, Yukon.

MURLINE BROWNING is President of the B.C. Women of the Metis Nation and also of the Central Interior Metis Women's Association. She is board member of the Nechako Aboriginal Advancement Society in Prince George, and of the National Metis Women of Canada.

MARGE FRIEDEL is President of the National Metis Women of Canada, and past president and founding mother of the Women of the Metis Nation. Ms Friedel has a long history of advocacy of Metis women's political inclusion, most recently in the failed Charlottetown Accord process. She is the aboriginal representative on the Steering Committee for the 1995 World UN Women's Conference in Beijing, China.

JOYCE GREEN is a feminist activist and consultant and a doctoral student in Political Science. She has written and spoken extensively on women's, aboriginal and constitutional issues. She is of newcomer and aboriginal ancestry and struggles to honour them both.

BERNICE HAMMERSMITH is an activist for Metis women, and is Provincial Secretary for the Metis Society of Saskatchewan. She is the only woman on a 15-position executive.

BETTIE HEWES is the Liberal MLA representing Edmonton Goldbar and the Liberal Critic for Women's Issues. Before being elected in 1986, Ms Hewes served twelve years on Edmonton City Council, followed by a term as Chairwoman of the Board of Canadian National.

JUDI JEFFREY works with Esther Supernault at Native Counselling Services. Her interests are in media and video.

RHONDA JOHNSON is a legal advisor to the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and a scholar of Canadian and constitutional matters, on which she has written extensively.

VIDYA KUMAR is a researcher with the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee, with a mandate to raise women's awareness of federal issues and to increase women's participation in the next federal election. Ms Kumar is a feminist scholar in political science.

MARIE LAING is the New Democrat MLA representing Edmonton Avonmore.

CORA VOYAGEUR is a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan Band. She has worked with a variety of Indian organisations and bands in advisory and consulting capacities. Her areas of study include compulsive gambling behaviour and all aspects of Indian education, particularly adult education.

MARY WEIGERS is President of the Saskatchewan Metis Women's Association and a board member of the National Metis Women of Canada.

THE RAGING GRANNIES began in B.C. in 1986, and there are now Grannies Raging across Canada. The Edmonton group was established in March 1992. The Grannies sing about political issues, such as world peace, the environment, war toys, women's rights, NAFTA, safe sex, provincial elections, and the like. Women don't have to be a granny or really old to join; they just need a sense of humour and a social conscience. The Grannies contributed their time to this conference, and wrote a special song for conference delegates.

LAURA LANGSTAFF is a member of Women of the Metis Nation, and a popular entertainer.

APPENDIX 3

Presentation by Marge Friedel

Women's Movement Panel

"WOMEN WHO OWN THEMSELVES"

Conference

June 11 - 12, 1993

Appendix 3

Women' Movement Panel

by Marge Friedel

At the recent annual meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in Saskatoon in June, a black woman activist, Unity Johnson, shared her vision of the women's movement. She reminded women that "...a movement is not a flat line, it has different rhythms. Not all women are the same on that line. We need to fight in different places, at different times, and in different ways." For many years, mainstream woman have been pressing forward on women's issues through addressing the circumstances that keep women from enjoying equality. Because of women activists women are considered persons. Prior to 1929, we were not persons. That was only the beginning.

The changes fought for and won by these women have had impact on the lives of some women, and to them we all owe a debt of gratitude. For other women, the changes have impacted our lives to a lesser degree. Women of color, women with disabilities and Aboriginal women are among those who do not enjoy the same degree of equality as those in mainstream society. For instance, when women won the right to vote in Canada in 1913; it was not until 1960 that Indian women won the right to vote as women, we are a diverse group. We each have different issues. We also each have different issues at different times. When women rejected the Charlottetown Accord last

October - the reasons for the rejection varied for the different groups representing women - but it was the first time all women had come together in agreeing on the issue. The voice of women was heard in a resounding "NO!".

I believe that the women's movement has, in recent years, come to recognize the diversity of women. I agree with Unity Johnson and her analogy of the women's movement. When I consider the position of Metis women on this wavering line, I believe that they are lagging far behind. We must unite, identify our issues and move to bring our issues to the forefront so that we too can keep up with the fight for equality for all.

In my capacity as President of Women of the Metis Nation (WMN), and in my initial meetings with other women's organizations, I found that the experience and knowledge of some of these women was intimidating. These fears were soon alleviated by the warm reception and support which I received when I related Metis women's experiences. It was not long until I learned that Aboriginal women do have a contribution to make to the women's movement. The perspective that was passed on to us by our mothers is something that we can share with other women; we can be proud to contribute this perspective to this movement.

As Metis women, we have not only been oppressed by fact of gender, but also by the color of our skin. The stereotypical vision of native, as a whole, is the first obstacle which many of us have to overcome. The view that natives are dishonest, lazy and unintelligent was firmly entrenched in the eyes of many. Much of this is as a result of the colonial dominance of European society. As

Metis women, we have had to also overcome the stereotypical view of ourselves as the drunken, promiscuous "squaw". This stereotype is not only how we have been seen in the eyes of white society, it has also become entrenched in the eyes of our own society as well. For the majority of Metis women, their socio-economic status in Canadian society is far below that of most other women. It is no doubt that the lack of recognition of Metis people as a whole, and the resulting lack of financial resources to the Metis by Canadian governments has contributed to this status. I believe that only through a concerted effort by Metis women to address the issues (ie. how we have been kept near the bottom of the socio-economic ladder), will we begin to deal on an equal basis with the rest of Canadian society. The battles that are being waged by women in the women's movement - employment, equity, poverty, violence against women, universal medi-care, etc have not yet been addressed by Metis women. Metis women need to become part of the ongoing dialogue regarding the issues which face women in Canada.

APPENDIX 4

CONFERENCE EVALUATION

By: Colleen Glenn

WOMEN WHO OWN THEMSELVES
JUNE 11, 12, 1993

Number of pre-registered participants		104
Number of actual registered participants		97
# of Conference responses	17	(18%)
Keynote addresss	15	
	# on list*	
Talking circle #1 (2 days)	(4)	3
Talking circle #2 (2 days)	(16)	1
Talking circle #3 (day 1)	(13)	5
Talking circle #4 (day 1)	(11)	0
Talking circle #5 (day 1)	(10)	6
Talking circle #3 (day 2)	(6)	5
Talking circle #4 (day 2)	(9)	5
Talking circle #5 (day 2)	(12)	5

* lists were not always complete - persons sometimes moved from workshop to workshop and did not sign the list.

Keynote Address Emma LaRocque

- #1 Did the Keynote Address focus on the theme of the Conference?
yes
- #2 Did the speaker address Metis women's potential power?
yes, two wanted to hear more about 'potential'
- #3 Was the speaker prepared and informative?
yes
- #4 Did she present a useful view of Metis women's experience?
yes
- #5 Did you enjoy her presentation?
yes
- #6 Would you want to hear her again?
yes, but one found her unavailable for conference as a whole

Comments:

There were 97 forms distributed. There were 15 responses.
15% response rate.

TALKING CIRCLE # 1 Women's Empowerment Marian Carr

- #1 Do you feel that the workshop facilitator was knowledgeable and prepared?
yes
- #2 Was there enough time and opportunity for your own participation?
2 yes. 1 somewhat
- #3 Was the workshop useful and enjoyable?
yes
- #4 Were the facilities adequate?
1 yes , 2 blank
- #5 What improvements would you suggest?
3 blank
- #6 Would you attend another workshop with this facilitator?
1 yes, 2 blank

Comments:

The whole back page was not marked for 2 of the 3 responses. They may not have realized there were more than three questions.

There were 4 names on the list. There were 3 responses.
75% response rate.

TALKING CIRCLE #2 Women's Empowerment Gayle McKenzie

- #1 Do you feel that the workshop facilitator was knowledgeable and prepared?
yes
- #2 Was there enough time and opportunity for your own participation?
yes
- #3 Was the workshop useful and enjoyable?
yes
- #4 Were the facilities adequate?
yes
- #5 What improvements would you suggest?
more time

#6 Would you attend another workshop with this facilitator?
Yes

Comments:

At the bottom of the form the participant noted that although speakers were excellent some went on too long. She noted that some physical activity could have counterbalanced the great food. These remarks could be construed as a conference evaluation and not a workshop evaluation.

There were 16 names on the list. There was 1 response.
2% response rate.

... 4

TALKING CIRCLE #3 HONOURING OUR VOICES

Esther Supernault, Judi Jeffrey

- #1 Do you feel that the workshop facilitator was knowledgeable and prepared?
yes
- #2 Was there enough time and opportunity for your own participation?
3 clear no, 1 yes and no, 1 no sense could be made of
- #3 Was the workshop useful and enjoyable?
4 yes, 1 no
- #4 Were the facilities adequate?
yes
- #5 What improvements would you suggest?
3 wanted more time, 1 said the film should have been shown first, 1 not sensible
- #6 Would you attend another workshop with this facilitator?
4 yes, 1 no

Comments:

There were 13 names on the list. There were 5 responses.
38 % response rate.

TALKING CIRCLE #4 Native Women's Studies

Cora Voyageur

no responses

Comments:

Possible reasons for no responses include:

- 1. No response is better than an unfavourable response.
- 2. The facilitator was hoping to engage the participants in a joint learning experience. It didn't seem to work.

TALKING CIRCLE #5 Women in the Shadows

Muriel Stanley-Venne

- #1 Do you feel that the workshop facilitator was knowledgeable and prepared?
5 yes, 1 blank
- #2 Was there enough time and opportunity for your own participation?
2 unqualified yes, 3 said not enough time for discussion, 1 blank

- #3 Was the workshop useful and enjoyable?
5 yes, 1 blank
- #4 Were the facilities adequate?
4 yes, 1 mostly, 1 blank
- #5 What improvements would you suggest?
2 found no room for improvement, 1 wanted more time for discussion, 1 felt basement room too close, 1 blank
- #6 Would you attend another workshop with this facilitator?
4 yes, 2 blank

Comments:

This workshop consisted of a National Film Board film. Most of the time for this workshop was spent watching and very little time was left for discussion.

There were 10 names on the list. There were 6 responses. 60% response rate.

TALKING CIRCLE #3 The Personal is Political
Rhonda Johnson

- #1 Do you feel that the workshop facilitator was knowledgeable and prepared?
Yes
- #2 Was there enough time and opportunity for your own participation?
1 yes, 4 not enough time
- #3 Was the workshop useful and enjoyable?
yes
- #4 Were the facilities adequate?
4 yes, 1 said room too small
- #5 What improvements would you suggest?
4 more time, 1 unintelligible
- #6 Would you attend another workshop with this facilitator?
yes

Comments:

There were 6 names on the list. There were 5 responses. 83% response rate.

TALKING CIRCLE #4 Metis Women's Organizations

TALKING CIRCLE #4 Metis Women's Organizations
Murline Browning, Mary Weigers

- #1 Do you feel that the facilitator was knowledgeable and prepared?
3 yes, 1 yes and no, 1 came too late to form an opinion
- #2 Was there enough time and opportunity for your own participation?
4 yes 1 no
- #3 Was the workshop useful and enjoyable?
yes
- #4 Were the facilities adequate?
3 yes, 2 blank
- #5 What improvements would you suggest?
4 blank, 1 wished for wider participation (more delegates)
- #6 Would you attend another workshop with this facilitator?
3 yes, 2 blank

Comments:

Two responses were not marked on the back page. Again, they may have not known there were more questions to be answered. There were 9 names on the list. There were 5 responses. 55% response rate.

TALKING CIRCLE #5 Dancing Around the Table
Muriel Stanley-Venne

- #1 Do you feel that the workshop facilitator was knowledgeable and prepared?
yes
- #2 Was there enough time and opportunity for your own participation?
2 yes, 3 not enough time for discussion
- #3 Was the workshop useful and enjoyable?
yes
- #4 Were the facilities adequate?
3 yes, 1 too hot, 1 blank
- #5 What improvements would you suggest?
1 no room for improvement, 2 more time for discussion, 1 more ventilation (physical, I presume), 1 blank

7

#6 Would you attend another workshop with this facilitator?
3 yes. 1 no. 1 blank

Comments:

At the bottom of one response "I sometime felt that other women's comments were undermined by her additional comments."

There were 12 names on the list. There were 5 responses.
42% response rate.

CONFERENCE EVALUATION

Number of evaluation form distributed 97

Number of responses 17

18% response rate

#1 What workshops did you attend?

Talking Circle #1	2
Talking Circle #2	0
(see end remarks from the sole response for #2)	
Honouring Our Voices (#3, day 1)	3
Native Women's Studies (#4, day 1)	0
Women in the Shadows (#5, day 1)	5
Personal is Political (#3, day 2)	4
Metis Women's Organizations (#4,2)	4
Dancing Around the Table (#5,2)	4
blank	3

#2 Which was your favourite workshop?

Talking Circle #1	2
Talking Circle #2	0
Honouring Our Voices	2
Native Women's Studies	0
Women in the Shadows	2
Personal is Political	3
Metis Women's Organizations	2
Dancing Around the Table	2
Governance Panel	1
Partisan Forum	1
Plenary Sessions	1
both films (#5, both days)	1
blank	2

#3 Did you learn about governance at this conference?

yes	12
no (definition problem)	1
a little	1
blank	3

Comments: Three mentioned the importance of women's solidarity and how important it is to organize and share information.

#4 Was the conference positive about women?

yes	16
blank	1

Comments: "I heard. not what could have been, or should have been but rather what can be and what will be." One mentioned that this conference presented a positive view of women not that of powerless victim. Five mentioned how strengthened they felt by being around Metis women who were strong, powerful, resourceful, invigorating, overwhelming and refreshing. One said "too negative about men."

Topics at future conferences

Continue this conference's discussion	2
Unity and Progress	
Economic Development	
Personal v. Political	
Robert's Rules of Order and meeting procedures	
feminism	
culture and children's involvement	
common principles before individual ambition	
healing	
racism	
spirituality	
foster care and children's rights	
housing	
training in proposal writing and community organizing	
blank	4

#5 Were the facilities and location suitable?

yes	7
blank	4
faulty sound system	2
cramped basement	1
good food and service	2
bad service	1

Comments: one found facilities typical of those designed by men who will never have to work in them. One thought a hotel in a small town might be more friendly. One wanted smoke-free hallways. One wanted some outdoor space and windows that opened.

The plenary room was awkward and speakers could not be seen when they were sitting down.

The four blank responses were so for the whole back page. They may have thought there were no more questions to be answered.

Suggestions for improvement

- more time for discussion 2
- more time for networking 2
- more time for longer workshops
- written text from speakers
- not enough Alberta representation

Comments: This question was listed under #5 regarding facilities and location. All remarks about facilities and location have been included in question #5, above. This paragraph refers to improvements in the conference material and organization.

#6 What would you like to see as follow-up projects?

- a. Community workshops? 9
- b. Regional conferences? 8
- c. Speaking tours by resource people 9
- d. Written material 7
- e. Women's talking circles 7
- f. Other:

Metis women's film series, participationon TV and radio talk shows, Metis women and the Arts - writers, poets, storytellers, artists - showing and talking about their art, emphasis on women outside the 'political field', ie. teachers, "...becom(ing) more focussed and sophisticated in terms of political anaysis, agenda-setting, and action, so that specific objectives could be identified and pursued each year."

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

1. OBSERVATIONS

Rate of response:	on list	# of responses	%
Workshops:			
Talking circle #1	4	3	75%
Talking circle #2	16	1	2%
Honouring Our Voices	13	5	38%
Native Women's Studies	11	0	0%
Women in the Shadows	10	6	60%
Personal is Political	6	5	83%
Metis Women's Org.	9	5	55%
Dancing Around Table	12	5	42%
Keynote Address	97	15	15%
Conference	97	17	18%

Workshops: The proportion of evaluation responses bore no relation to the number of participants in a workshop. Large numbers of participants did not mean large numbers of responses. In fact, the two smallest workshops produced the highest response rate. Reasons for this could include:

- a) The facilitator set aside time for writing of evaluations. (This was done in the film workshops)
- b) The facilitator was good at her job.
- c) The participants were extremely interested in the workshop subject matter.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING RESPONSE RATE

- a) Distribute the evaluation form at the beginning of each workshop with instructions regarding when they are to be turned in.
- b) Different coloured paper for evaluation forms would set them apart and perhaps serve as a reminder.
- c) Reward or penalize performance. Perhaps,

completed evaluation forms could be traded in for dessert at the banquet.

2 Forms

Problems:

a) All forms except the Keynote Address had questions on both sides. 4 of 17 (24%) of the Conference Evaluations and 6 of 30 (20%) of the workshop evaluations were blank on the back page.

b) There was some confusion about the 'suggestions for improvement' underneath question #5 on the Conference Evaluation.

Some interpreted this to mean suggestions were to be restricted to facilities and location. The question should have had its own number or have been located in a different position.

3. CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE EVALUATIONS

a) Did we hear only from those who particularly enjoyed the conference or a certain workshop or those with an axe to grind?

b) Would some have not responded at all if they had nothing good to say?

BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANTS

Number of participants	97
Number from out of Province	10
Number from outside of Edmonton	50
Number registered at the hotel	
Thursday	23 adults 6 children
Friday	40 adults 10 children
Number of children in childcare	10

SUBMITTED JULY 19, 1993.

Colleen Green

COLLEEN GREEN

APPENDIX 5

Presentation by Marge Friedel

NATIONAL SHARING PANEL

Appendix 5

National Sharing Panel

by Marge Friedel

After the collapse of the Meech Lake Accord, the Government of Canada continued its attempt to try and amend the Canadian Constitution. On April 12, 1991, the Prime Minister of Canada announced the forming of a special "National Unity Committee". The task of this Committee was to consolidate and provide direction to the federal program for Constitutional renewal.

The goal for this panel of Federal Politicians was to listen to the views of Canadians regarding the Constitution. On July 5, 1991, it was then announced that the Federal Government had agreed to allow a parallel native process, which would work in tandem with the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reform. Native people were to conduct miniature constituency assemblies for various designated groups - elders; women; youth; and urban natives. Joe Clark, Minister of Constitutional Reform, committed the Government to financially supporting this native process - to the tune of ten million dollars. Of this amount, ten percent was to go to women, regardless of the fact that we make up more than 50% of the population.

At this time, there was no independent voice for Metis women nationally. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) was attempting to represent all native women. Given the complexities of the issues of First Nations women, Metis women's issues were not front and centre.

Rhonda Johnson, a Metis woman who was hired as a Constitutional Coordinator by the B.C. provincial Metis organization - Pacific Metis Federation - contacted me at Women of the Metis Nation in July of 1991. Ms. Johnson wished to discuss women's participation in the parallel process. Rhonda and I agreed to work together to locate other provincial Metis women's organizations who would want to address Constitutional issues. We subsequently located the Provincial Metis Women of Saskatchewan, which was headed by Mary Weigers. We also found a newly formed committee in Manitoba - Manitoba Metis Women. With the financial assistance of the Metis National Council [MNC - the national organization of the Metis in Canada], a telephone conference call was held among these provincial Metis women's groups. Preliminary plans were made to host a national conference for Metis women in Vancouver later in 1991.

Attempts by WMN to get involved in the constitutional process and to acquire the women's portion of Constitutional funding which was allocated for Alberta Metis women were met with firm opposition by the Metis Nation of Alberta [MNA]. The proposal to hold an Alberta conference was rejected by the MNA because Women of the Metis Nation would not agree to having the agenda set by the MNA or to having the MNA control the finances. We were told that WMN could not be financially accountable.

Later that year, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced that he would meet with the Metis in Winnipeg on October 3, 1991 to discuss Constitutional issues. Invited to this October meeting were elders, veterans and women. Two women's representatives from each B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan provincial

Metis women's groups along with numerous Manitoba women, met with Mr. Mulroney at this meeting.

Later that day, a meeting was held among the Metis women who had attended and special resolutions were passed which outlined how we would support each other in the ongoing negotiations for Constitutional inclusion with our respective provincial Metis organizations. The provincial Metis women leaders then met with the male-dominated leadership of the MNC in Winnipeg that same day in order to begin negotiating this separate process. We also agreed to meet in Edmonton on October 25 & 26, 1991 at an upcoming Constitutional Conference. This Conference was hosted by the Centre of Constitutional Studies, University of Alberta. The Conference topic was "Women and Constitutional Reform". It was at this time, a few weeks later, that we heard that there had been a new Metis women's group formed by the Metis Nation of Alberta. The executive of this new group [Alberta Metis Women] were all employees of the MNA. It would appear that the reasons for the MNA forming this new group was to ensure control over the Constitutional funding which was specifically allocated for women in Alberta.

Provincial Metis women's groups decided to meet at the conclusion of the U of A Conference at the Continental Inn in Edmonton. Both Women of the Metis Nation and the newly formed Alberta Metis Women were represented at this meeting along with the Saskatchewan, B.C. and Manitoba groups. After a heated debate, the Alberta Metis Women walked out. The Manitoba women's group then left as they stated they did not want to become involved in a provincial dispute. The other representatives from Saskatchewan and British

Columbia agreed that we would probably not have another opportunity to all get together; as a result, we went ahead and formed a national organization. On October 26, 1991 the National Metis Women of Canada was officially born.

The first executive of NMWC was chosen at this meeting. These included:

President	Mary Weigers, Saskatchewan
Vice-President	Maggie Blondeau, British Columbia
Treasurer	Marge Friedel, Alberta

The position of Secretary was left vacant in order to allow a seat on the Executive for Manitoba, should they chose to come in later.

In the meantime, the roller coaster ride known as Constitutional Reform continued. On February 10, 1992, with the financial support of the Native Women's Association of Canada, Marge Friedel of WMN presented a Metis women's perspective to the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reform in Ottawa.

With mounting pressure from all Aboriginal organizations, the Government of Canada announced that there would be a Conference dealing specifically with Aboriginal issues in Ottawa in March, 1992. After numerous, unsuccessful attempts by NWAC to have seats assigned at this Conference to Native women, NWAC was able to obtain limited funding from the Native Council of Canada which they in turn provided to WMN to send representatives to the Aboriginal Conference. However, we were not allowed participant status by the Conference organizers - we were only offered one observer seat.

Five women from Alberta and two women from British Columbia attended the Ottawa Conference and participated in a protest on Parliament Hill against the treatment of Aboriginal Women in the Constitutional process.

It was at this time that we began to first hear the views of opposing Metis women's groups (specifically, those women's groups started by the male dominated provincial Metis groups). We were told that there are "no Metis women's issues; that there are only Metis issues". Also at this time, the Metis National Council of Women was being formed. Mary Weigers of the Saskatchewan Provincial Metis Women was asked to join this group. As she was the President of the NMWC, this put her in a difficult position. After discussions with her provincial board of directors and other provincial Metis women's organizations, it was agreed that she would continue to work with both groups in an attempt to reconcile the division that had been created.

In December, 1992, a division of Metis women in Saskatchewan occurred. The Provincial Metis Women of Saskatchewan were pushed out of the national Metis Women's organization which was formed by the MNC - Metis National Council of Women.

It is a difficult time for women, I really wish to commend Metis women for having the courage to speak out. It has not been an easy task.

The Native Women's Association of Canada filed a law suit against the Government of Canada - for the discrimination of Native women in the Constitutional process.

NMWC wrote a letter of support to NWAC; it was filed with that court challenge. All four male dominated Metis political organizations found it

necessary to intervene in this court action. The backlash felt as a result of this letter of support was very stressful.

On June 26, 1992, as a result of the conflict of interest and her own busy personal schedule, Mary Weigers stepped down as President of the NMWC during a telephone conference call. I was chosen as the new President. Murline Browning of B.C. was also placed on the Executive. We have maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Federal Secretary of State for core-funding for Metis women. It appears that we have been somewhat successful in our advocacy but the dilemma in which the Federal Government finds itself is one in which they are uncertain which national Metis women's organization to fund. To my knowledge, this question has not yet been resolved.

It is very discouraging and disappointing that Metis women have allowed this division to take place among themselves. It is my sincere wish that all Metis women will meet again in unity in the very near future. There are too many issues that we must address; issues which affect the daily lives of Metis women. Our voices need to be heard in the future. Canadians will be facing yet another round of Constitutional talks and Metis women need to be prepared. Self-government will impact our daily lives and women need to be at the negotiating table. We need to be dealing from a solid, unified position in order to ensure that Metis women's issues are raised at that table.