



The Numbered Treaties: Fair and Respectful?

Blog Post by Jackie Taypotat and Calvin Racette

All across Canada, treaties are in the news. When First Nations made treaties with the British Crown, they were promised many things. Treaties are *supposed* to be fair and respectful to everyone. But are they?

Between 1871 and 1921, the British Crown signed 11 Numbered Treaties with First Nations. The treaties allowed settlers from Great Britain and other countries to make their homes in Canada. Settlers could also benefit from the resources on this land.

These settlers are the ancestors of many people who now live across Canada. The settlers built farms, businesses, and communities.

What About First Nations Peoples?

First Nations peoples did *not* benefit from the treaties nearly as much as the settlers did. Here are some examples.

Healthcare

First example—Healthcare, medicine, hospitals, and clinics. First Nations people were dying from diseases that had been brought into the area by settlers.



The Paskwa Pictograph, from the 1800s, shows a history of Treaty 4 promises up to 1883.

First Nations leaders wanted access to healthcare. The First Nations leaders and British Crown representatives agreed that every reserve would have a medicine chest. The medicine chests that arrived were small, similar to first-aid kits. These chests did not provide good healthcare in the way that the chiefs had negotiated for.

Some First Nations people are *still* waiting for better healthcare. In fact, on some reserves, hospitals and clinics have never been built. Is a lack of healthcare fair and respectful to First Nations people?

Treaty Days

Second example- Treaty payment amount. Each year, many First Nations hold Treaty Days in their communities. On Treaty Days, many band members receive \$5 from the Canadian government.

Why only \$5? When many First Nations signed the Numbered Treaties, they were promised a payment of \$5 every year.

When these treaties were signed, it cost just over a dollar to buy a pair of jeans. Today, a pair of jeans costs much more than that, but the treaty payment amount has never been increased.

Is a \$5 payment fair and respectful to First Nations people?

Treaties were negotiated a long time ago, and some promises do not make sense anymore.



This medicine chest was used in Canada in the late 1800s.



Priscilla Cadotte from Cote First Nation at Treaty Day in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. She goes to Treaty Day because "It's to remember my ancestors, to remember the treaty rights they did give us."

Working for Change

First Nations people are speaking out about treaties and how things need to improve. Here are just a few of the groups who are working for change.

Assembly of First Nations (AFN)

Chiefs of First Nations have formed the AFN. It protects the treaties and works with governments to honour the treaty promises of health, education, languages, and cultures.

First Nations Summit

Many treaties are still being negotiated in British Columbia. The First Nations Summit helps First Nations who are working on treaties with the province's government.

Idle No More

In 2012, Idle No More began protesting how the Canadian government treats First Nations people. The members of this group want the government to respect First Nations, treaties, and the environment.

Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)

The NWAC meets with Canadian leaders to improve the lives of First Nations and Métis women. The group works for women's rights and improvements to education.

Treaty promises have not been kept. I think we need new promises to improve relationships between First Nations peoples and other Canadians. We all need to think about this question: What would be fair and respectful for *everyone*?



Thousands of people rally in support of the Idle No More movement. They are protesting government treatment of First Nations groups in Vancouver.

Comments

Posted by Jason in Saskatoon

1 hour ago

First Nations people were promised reserves, and now they have them. Isn't that treaty promise fair and respectful?

Posted by Cailyn D

34 minutes ago

No, Jason, because reserves were supposed to be good places to live, and many are not! On lots of reserves, the water isn't safe to drink. Also, some houses are in bad shape and unsafe. And there still aren't enough healthcare clinics!

Posted by Emily from Winnipeg

17 minutes ago

Some schools on reserves don't even have enough money to buy books for their students. Did you know that some reserves don't have high schools? Kids have to leave their homes to finish their education. That is not fair or respectful.



A resident of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, Manitoba, carries a container of water into his home. The community has not had clean drinking water since 1997.

Let's Talk

1. Why might treaty promises need to be updated?
2. What questions would you ask about treaty promises?

1: Image courtesy of the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, 2: (top) Medicine chest, 1875-1900, 19th century, M21681.1-2, © McCord Museum, Montreal, (bottom) Chanss Lagaden/CBC Licensing, 3: Sergei Bachlakov/Shutterstock.com, 4: The Canadian Press/John Woods,

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