

## George Manuel (1921 - 1989)

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Author: Ravi de Costa , McMaster University

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Description George Manuel may be the most significant single figure in the early period of the international Indigenous peoples' movement. In 1975, he helped found the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) at a meeting in Nanaimo, British Columbia, attended by Indigenous people from nineteen countries. Manuel was also one of the most powerful and revered Indigenous leaders in Canada, who was at the centre of major national campaigns on Indigenous rights from the 1960s until the era of constitutional reforms in the 1980s.

Manuel was born in Neskonlith, British Columbia in Secwepemc (Shuswap) territory. Though his leadership had been prophesied by elders, he was spurred into political action over the denial of health services for people in his community after the 1951 amendments to the *Indian Act*. Together with the national and provincial Indigenous organizations that emerged in the 1960s, Manuel campaigned successfully against the Liberal government's White Paper of 1969, which sought the complete erasure of Indigenous life in the pursuit of an undifferentiated Canadian citizenship.

As National Chief of the National Indian Brotherhood, Manuel was soon at the centre of the major changes in Indigenous policy of the 1970s, first securing a sound funding base for the national organization. In this period, there were major changes to the way that aboriginal land title was understood in Canadian law. At the same time, provincial governments like Quebec sought greater access to indigenous lands so that they could begin major hydroelectricity projects and other resource-based schemes. This saw the creation of a new federal policy called "comprehensive claims." Manuel fought against these new treaties, arguing that they merely reproduced the treaties of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that had extinguished indigenous peoples' rights.

In the early 1970s, Manuel began travelling, first in the Pacific and later to Africa, where he met Indigenous and other communities dealing with the ongoing effects of colonialism. He was soon advocating the political unification of Indigenous peoples and the creation of a "Fourth World" movement. This came to fruition in the WCIP in 1975, which became a major node of Indigenous internationalism until the creation of an agency within the UN system — known as the Working Group on Indigenous Populations — in 1982.

The last major campaign of Manuel's career was for constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples during the reforms of the early 1980s.

He led the "constitutional express" of 1980, a brilliant media stunt that drew Indigenous leaders together on trains that converged on Ottawa. Intransigence among the provincial and federal governments forced Manuel to take the campaign to European parliaments and supporters of Indigenous rights. In 1982, Indian, Inuit, and Metis were recognised as the aboriginal peoples of Canada, whose treaty and other rights were affirmed.

Suggested  
Reading:

**Center for World Indigenous Studies website.** *Chief George Manuel Memorial Library*, [www.cwis.org/fwdp/index.htm](http://www.cwis.org/fwdp/index.htm) (accessed 24 July 2006)

**Manuel, George and Michael Posluns.** 1974. *The fourth world: An Indian reality*. Toronto: Collier.

**McFarlane, Peter.** 1993. *Brotherhood to nationhood: George Manuel and the making of the modern Indian movement*. Toronto: Between the Lines.