

PSAC 901

On behalf of 2,000+ members PSAC Local 901 stands in solidarity with Revolution of the Heart: Ceremonial Action to remove the Sir John A. Macdonald Statue from City Park. This Indigenous-led action, which consisted of land-based ceremony and sacred fire, burning 24 hours a day, from June 10th to June 20th, 2021, saw the successful removal of the statue on June 18th, 2021. This is a big accomplishment for direct action within our community and we congratulate Revolution of the Heart on their success and were pleased that PSAC 901 was able to provide some funding from our Social Justice Committee. Although this particular action is now finished, the larger issues that it addressed are on-going ones that our community needs to tackle. PSAC Local 901 stands with Indigenous peoples and nations across turtle island and their actions.

Numerous calls for the statue's removal have occurred over the years from Indigenous communities within Kingston and from the surrounding region. Last summer, inspired by the removal of confederate statues in the United States, Kingston saw a protest of more than 100 people demanding the removal of the statue. Protestors rightly saw Sir John A Macdonald's legacy, as the first Prime Minister of Canada, of being on founded genocide and oppression in his expansionist policies. Throughout Sir John A Macdonald's career he attempted to control and subjugate Indigenous people in his expansion of the Dominion of Canada. He ensured that his government had centralised control and legislative power of "Indians and land reserved for Indians," and forced through the construction of railroad at all cost. The railroad traversed unceded Saulteaux territory and exploited Chinese labour in its construction, resulting in untold deaths. In the expansion out west, Macdonald capitalized on policies that starved Indigenous populations across the prairies and cleared the land for white settlement. In 2020, despite this legacy and the calls for the removal of the city park statue glorifying Sir. John A Macdonald, the city council remained unmoved, and instead called for adding context to the statue rather than its removal.

The recent discovery of the 215 bodies of Indigenous children in unmarked graves at the former 'Kamloops Indian Residential School' and the discovery of further graves at other residential schools throughout the country has prompted renewed calls to action to address the atrocities carried out by those responsible for the creation of Canadian state. Even since the end of the action, there has been devastating news out of Saskatchewan about the discovery of 751 unmarked graves at Marieval Indian Residential School. Sir John A Macdonald in particular is cited as one of the architects of Indian Residential Schools where generations of Indigenous children were subjected to inhumane treatment. The direct results of these policies are still felt today with the last residential school only closing in 1996. The sixties scoop and on-going removal of Indigenous children into the foster care system, further separating generations from their families, communities, and their cultures continues to the legacy of Madonald's policies to the present day. Revolution of the Heart again pressed for the removal of the Kingston statue, at the same time of the removal of statues of Sir John A Macdonald in other Canadian cities such as Charlottetown, Victoria, and Picton, ON, as well as the toppling of the statue of Egerton Ryerson (a key individual in the creation of residential schools) in Toronto. In light of the Kingston action, an emergency session of the "History and Legacy of Sir John A Macdonald Working

Group " recommended to the city that there be the removal of the statue from the site, when previously the working group had recommended supporting a new plaque.

The action by Revolution of the Heart emphasized the need for healing and the removal of the Sir John A Macdonald statue is seen as part of this process. Intensive labour, by both Indigenous and settler community members, went into this action twenty-four hours over a week in order to achieve success. As part of the action, an information tent was set-up in order to provide space for productive discussions about Macdonald's legacy and the on-going consequences of decisions made at the time of Confederation. Symbolically the removal of the statue, shows that the city is at least beginning to listen to the Indigenous communities within the city and in the surrounding areas. Individuals affected by Macdonald's policies will no longer have to walk by a reminder of the man who allowed for the perpetuation of atrocities against their communities.

The city council should be given some credit for deciding to remove the statue however, overall the June 16th council meeting was disappointing. Although there were some thoughtful and moving delegations concerning support for the removal of the statue, there was an alarming amount of ignorant rhetoric throughout the meeting from delegations in favour of keeping the statue and a number of councillors themselves. The majority (8) of the councillors who did vote for the removal of the statue did so with the express purpose of moving the statue to the Cataraqui Cemetery, a last minute proposal that received no community input. Only four councillors rejected this unilateral decision to move the statue to this location with no further consultation, expressing frustration and indicating that further discussions about the fate of the decision of the statue was needed. A lone councillor, Jeff McLaren who remained silent throughout the meeting, wished to see the statue remain on its pedestal in City Park. Despite the tepid support of many on council, we still celebrate the removal of this statue.

We hope that the city follows this up with the requests from Revolution of the Heart for the removal of the pedestal, which still bears Macdonald's name, not installing the statue in Cataraqui Cemetery and the creation of a monument to residential school victims and survivors. Furthermore, with July 1 recently behind us, we also call on the city to permanently cancel Canada Day celebrations and instead honour the lives that have been lost through the violent actions of the Canadian State. We were heartened by the large demonstrations we saw this year and applaud the removal of a number of statues of individuals who helped perpetuate colonial harms across the county. We must also unfortunately be aware that this action has brought to the surface the racism still present within the Kingston community. From insults and threats hurled throughout the days of the action, to the quazi-Nazi salute by an individual trying to stop the removal of statue on June 18, to the white supremacist graffiti that appeared on the pedestal, the intermittent presence of racist hatred to such a relatively small ask demonstrates the on-going amount of work needed within the city. PSAC Local 901 pledges to support our membership as well as the wider community in continuing anti-racist efforts. We want to reiterate our commitment to serving our Indigenous members and will make every effort to assist and support however possible. In response to this particular action, we support the removal of the pedestal from the former site in City Park of the Sir John A Macdonald statue and the site to be dedicated to the survivors and victims of residential schools. More broadly PSAC Local 901 insists on the implementation of each of the 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. The removal of the Sir John A Macdonald statue is only the beginning.