

March 13, 2001
ARC-A Observer Training
Aboriginal Rights Coalition – Atlantic

Urgently in need of Funds to support training of Observers/Witnesses in Burnt Church

Tatamagouche Centre

We are urgently in need of funds to support the training of Observers/Witnesses to be present during the fishing seasons in the First Nation community of Burnt Church (Esgenoopetitj). It will cost \$7679 to train 15 Observers (see budget which follows). More funding will be required to maintain their presence in Esgenoopetitj during the fishing seasons.

Any financial contributions are welcome.

Donations can be mailed to
Betty Peterson
Apt. 416, 6969 Bayers Rd.,
Halifax, NS B3L 4P3

Or to

Tatamagouche Centre
R.R.#3
Tatamagouche, NS B0K 1V0

Please clearly mark your cheque with "ARC-A Observer Project".

Project Backgrounder:

Who we are:

The Aboriginal Rights Coalition is a national organization of churches, church bodies, Aboriginal peoples and community organizations that builds alliances and solidarity for Aboriginal and social justice in Canada. Through implementation of programs of public education and action, ARC supports Aboriginal peoples toward recognition of land and treaty rights, and other elements of justice. In Atlantic Canada, there is a strong group (ARC-Atlantic) that is currently working on issues related to the Supreme Court Marshall Decision of 1999, which recognized Aboriginal rights to natural resources in the Maritimes.

The Tatamagouche Centre is an adult education centre owned by the United Church of

Canada. With a mandate to enhance personal and organizational capacity to work toward a more just and loving world, the Tatamagouche Centre has credibility and collaborative relationships among many community-based organizations and churches. The Tatamagouche Centre has been working with ARC-Atlantic, in efforts to bring educational opportunities around the Aboriginal context and needs to non-Aboriginal people.

ARC-A and Tatamagouche Centre have been working together to develop and sustain a group of Observers, to be available to First Nations communities as they exercise their legal rights to natural resources. During the 2000 fishing seasons, 20 people were trained as Observers, and were a peaceful presence while the First Nations people of Esgenoopetitj exercised their right to fish.

Observer Project Goals:

To have a trained team of observers/witnesses and supporting network available to increase the likelihood of a peaceful response to the implementation of rights of Aboriginal peoples to natural resources.

To support these First Nations and non-Aboriginal people in peacefully dealing with the issues they are facing.

Project Objectives:

To develop a training program which includes both relevant contextual background and non-violence training for observers. To train observers to accompany or witness with First Nation people as agreements are negotiated in the East Coast fishery.

To provide administrative and ongoing logistical support to observers.

To continue to build networks and working relationships between First Nations and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Background

As the Supreme Court of Canada decides increasingly in favor of First Nations Treaty Rights where resource issues are involved, the potential for violent confrontation increases. This is because there are strong vested interests in the fishery, and a lack of in-depth non-Aboriginal understanding of the content and validity of treaties signed many years ago in this region.

The lobster fishing situation in eastern New Brunswick has resulted in several incidents of violence against persons and property, as well as numerous threats during 1999 and 2000, in the wake of the Supreme Court Marshall Decision. After a particularly frightening incident involving an armed stand-off between fishing boats in the ocean in 1999, some people in Burnt Church reserve suggested that observers from non-Aboriginal communities could be helpful. The First Nations community of Burnt Church (Esgenoopetitj) was feeling very alone and insecure as a result of apparent prejudicial actions by the RCMP. We were asked to draw up a list of names of people who would be willing, at short notice, to go to Burnt

Church to be witnesses, or accompaniers, to help maintain the peace.

The hope was that this would reduce the potential for violence in a variety of ways. First, it would show the people of Burnt Church that they are not alone and forgotten; second, it might move the RCMP to take action more quickly to disarm the opposing sides; and third, it might result in quicker responses in the justice system if illegal activities are seen and reported by non-involved, as well as involved people.

The Program

We will be training Observers to be present in the First Nations community of Esgenoopetitj during the fishing seasons of 2001 (i.e. May to June and August to November). This training will be consistent with our two previous trainings, held in April and August/September 2000. It will be led by non-Aboriginal educators who have trained and spent time as accompaniers with Project Accompaniment in Guatemala, and other Aboriginal educators and leaders who will also bring contextual grounding and real-life experiences to the training. The training will take place during two sessions: April 8-11 at the Tatamagouche Centre and April 26-29, at Esgenoopetitj NB. Trainees will be expected to pay \$200 toward the cost of their training.

The Work

Overseen by a Steering Committee and Esgenoopetitj community members, the Observers will take turns, working in pairs usually, being present in the community. They will be billeted in the community, and will monitor the waters as the community initiates its own lobster fishery under its own management and conservation plan. Using notebooks, cameras and video cameras, they will document the events as they witness them during the fishing season in Esgenoopetitj. With daily contact with community members and weekly reports to the Steering Committee, the Observers will be supported throughout their work.

During 2000, Christian Peacemakers Teams were also present in the community. CPT is an organization supported by some faith organizations, committed to being present and staging actions in places of injustice. Observers from both of our groups cooperated as they witnessed in Esgenoopetitj during 2000. We expect this to occur again during 2001.

Caveat

The upcoming fishery, which is planned by the community of Esgenoopetitj, is expected to be more volatile than last year's because, in more than a year, the government of Canada has still made no inroads into a peaceful resolution to the Aboriginal fishing rights issue. It is felt that it will be very important to have Observers present, in order to prevent the violence we have witnessed in the past. We hope to train up to 15 more people for this purpose.

Of note: In September 2000, one of our Observers was tossed into the water when the

boat from which she was videotaping was rammed by an RCMP boat. The video equipment was confiscated, and the Observer was arrested, unhurt. The legal ramifications of this arrest are not yet clear.

Observer Requirements

Observers are required to participate in the entire training and then to commit to at least one week of observing during each of the spring and fall fisheries. The fisheries run from May to June, and then again from August to November.

People who observe must be at least 18 years of age, and be self-disciplined, with an ability to be calm and cool in the face of potential excitement. They must be committed to the values and goals of ARC-Atlantic. With the possibility of attending training and then not being deemed by the trainers to be ready yet to observe, they must also be prepared for disappointment in the name of the greater good. During observation periods, Observers' travel, accommodation and meal costs will be covered by the project. There is no pay for this work. Observers will also be prepared, after their observing, to speak about their experiences with non-Aboriginal people and groups. It is helpful for Observers to come sponsored by groups such as churches or social justice organizations.

Potential observers will be required to fill out an application, listing two references, before being considered for this training.

Training Budget

Aboriginal Rights Coalition – Atlantic Observer Project
April 8-11 and April 26-29, 2001

Expenses

Leadership/Trainers \$2680
Special Resource People \$ 200
Meals Accommodations for 15 participants \$3120
Meals Accommodations for Trainers \$ 789
Refresher Days for last year's Observers \$ 180
Childcare \$ 150
Travel \$ 560
Total \$7679

Income

Tuition 15 trainees @\$200 per participant \$3000
ARC Fundraising \$4679
Total \$7679

For more information:

If you would like more information, please contact one of the following:

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