

Enter the Mohawk Separatists...

A commentary by Teyowisonte (Thomas Deer)

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The Mohawk Nation is an ancient political and spiritual institution of North America. Under its constitution, the Kaianere'kó:wa, it is the Eastern Door of the symbolic Long House which shelters the original Five Nation Iroquois Confederacy; a primordial domain enclosed by joined hands. There is no other. Three weeks ago, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council (SRMT), after much lobbying, was officially renamed and bestowed the title of "Akwasasne Mohawk Nation" from the US Bureau of Indian Affairs. This turn of events will surely create more division and hardship for those Kanien'kehá:ka who still carry the concept of the true Mohawk Nation in their hearts.

While it can be debated endlessly on who exactly is the "Mohawk Nation" and where its katista or wampum fire is, most can agree that the Haudenosaunee are the custodians or caretakers of what is left of the Mohawk Nation as an political institution; as it is this group that continues to abide by and sustains its ways and laws. This is not to say that only the Haudenosaunee can be citizens of the Mohawk Nation since all Kanien'kehá:ka are entitled to its citizenship and are free to choose this allegiance that traces the White Roots of Peace to its source. Rather, it is the Haudenosaunee who bear the burden to continue its existence through practice.

Much ink can be spent on the inconsistencies with the SRMT's position on their political status, but instead this author will provide the most basic of arguments against this act. The SRMT are an entity born out of the United States and like its Canadian counterpart, travel in the ship rather than the canoe. Regardless of how sincere or insincere their motives are the by taking this route, the SRMT have created a renegade separatist group that now challenge the sovereign integrity of the true and ancient Mohawk Nation. The SRMT is not a Haudenosaunee institution, it does not fall underneath the political umbrella of the Kaianere'kó:wa, and nor does have the support of all Ahkwasahró:non or the people of the Mohawk Nation as a whole. In simplest terms the SRMT, as an institution of a foreign nation, have no legal right to be recognized as either a nation or as part of a nation.

Surely the SRMT have the administrative and financial ability to exert political might over Akwasasne and carry out the services of a government, but to act as a nation is an impossibility according to universal components of nationhood. A nation by definition is a collection of people whose unique traditional components, such as language, culture, historical links, and specific political institutions with defined territories, sets them apart from the fundamental characteristics of another collection of people. Therefore without having truly unique Kanien'kéha components, they may have the power to act like a nation, but they can never be a "Mohawk" nation unless by separating from the original entity to create a new nation. Simply, when an established nation has existed for hundreds of years, and a new regime emits out of this group, you call it what it is; separatism. Such a movement has the potential to usurp the collective inherent rights of all Kanien'kehá:ka and cripple the political abilities of other Kanien'kehá:ka communities; especially in terms of title over the 9 million acres of the Kanien'kéh homeland existing in what is now known as New York State.

Certainly, I question the true motives of the SRMT's push for federal recognition of "nation" status. The SRMT are currently in negotiation with New York State regarding the construction casinos. It is the strategy of New York State to sanction the building of such casinos by federally recognized tribes (or nations as they have now coined), provided they agree to settle on any outstanding land claims. Unfortunately for the SRMT, they are part of a tri-party land claim, which includes the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (Indian Act government) and the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs (Long House government). This Tri-Council was formed in the 1980's in order for the various factions in Akwesasne to collaborate on issues regarding that particular community. In recent years, however, the SRMT has sought to force the two other entities out of the process by using their stateside federal recognition combined with this new "nation" status to eliminate any unwelcome competition.

This move made by the SRMT is very similar to the political patterns of the Oneida Indian Nation of New York headed by CEO Ray Halbritter and his "Men's Council". Using the Oneida Nation as an example of what potential scenarios can be produced as a result of fraudulent political declarations, Akwesasne can soon see a dictatorship guarded by an outstanding number force of non-native police officers that has the ability to suppress any political opposition and damage historical claims that consolidate our inherent rights as Haudenosaunee and Mohawk Nation citizens. Meanwhile, New York State is quite content with the current scenario at Oneida and is anxious to stabilize other indigenous "nations" through its successful strategy of self-suppression from dagging tantalizing riches in front of our faces; tactics that are potentially luring SRMT and the Seneca Nation of Indians who are currently in the same boat.

The SRMT may overcome many political obstacles by declaring itself the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation, but the true and original Mohawk Nation cannot be walked over by a bunch of "hang around the forts" with dollar signs in their eyes and emptiness in their hearts. With that in mind all Haudenosaunee and supporters of the true Mohawk Nation, should use this unfortunate act as an opportunity to unify and make clear to the world that this renegade band of separatists can never claim to be a nation. We can all start by refusing to refer to them as such.

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace & power!