

A Critique of the new MCK Draft Membership Law

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After looking through the new Draft MCK Membership Law, there are some points that need to be addressed. While the document attempts to, and in some cases does in fact, solve many known problems that have existed within the past, the document is still in much need of refining. Being a product of a paternal non-native, I feel it would be inappropriate for me to address the section that deals with membership standards, a topic which I'm sure to have opinions that are more subjective than constructive. Nonetheless, this criticism is made in good faith and in constructive spirit despite my reservations.

My primary concern with the document is contained in the preamble, thought to be one of the more victorious elements of the document. First of all, the document falsely gives the impression that the MCK institution of membership is somehow affiliated or extended to the Mohawk Nation and the Rotinohsonnión:we. Although the preamble does not come right out and state this, this is certainly suggested. The document's preamble state much patriotic jargon that asserts its loyalty and devotion to the traditions and customs of the Mohawk Nation and the Rotinohsonnión:we. This again adds to the suggestive premise that the Rotinohsonnión:we were either involved in the technical development of the project or that it recognizes its validity. Neither is true.

In fact, the MCK's Draft Membership Law contains no recognition of the instatement, reinstatement, and adoption policies that exist within the Kaianere'kó:wa and practiced by the Mohawk Nation at Kahnawake (Rotinohsonnión:we). Furthermore, the document does not contain any provision that recognizes those who are citizens of the Mohawk Nation by rights of passage that are in fact practiced by the Rotinohsonnión:we at Kahnawake. This ignorance is actually contrary to what is asserted in the preamble and insults the sovereign integrity of the Mohawk Nation and the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy.

In a period whereby the MCK is moving towards what they call a traditional government under the Kaianere'kó:wa, they should be more sensitive to the policies of the Mohawk Nation and Iroquois Confederacy. Likewise, they should either delete this suggestive and misleading information contained in the preamble or recognize the Mohawk Nation at Kahnawake's policies of instatement, reinstatement, and adoption while respecting its citizenship rolls. Regardless if Long House people refused to participate in the so-called consultation phase (as they are lawfully subordinate to Confederate standards of citizenship only), this law still affects and usurps the inherent rights of Rontinonsesró:non because the MCK holds land or other financial aids hostage against insubordinates of their policies.

If the MCK truly valued the words in the document's preamble, their technicians should have incorporated or recognized such reservations and should have further consulted the Longhouse (Rotinohsonnión:we) Position on Citizenship (circa 1999) as well as the 1985 resolution of the Haudenosaunee Grand Council dealing with Confederate

citizenship before printing contradictory information. Reaffirmed in 1987, this resolution of the Haudenosaunee Grand Council explicitly states that only the Haudenosaunee themselves, “reserve the exclusive right to determine our own citizenship/membership in accordance with our own laws and supported by international law”. The preamble of the Draft Membership Law not only disrespects and insults this convention, but it further has the ability to damage the inherent rights and claims of the Mohawk Nation and Rotinohsonnión:we by brandishing the preamble as truth to the Governments of Canada, the United States and other Indigenous Nations.

As for the actual provisions of this law, I’m sure the technicians did the best they knew how; as the concept of membership is replete with considerations that leave more problems once one is solved. On this note they have my sympathy, as it must have been difficult to compile such a document. However, there are still things that are problematic and should be repaired.

The first and foremost of these problems is the creation of a body known as the Council of Elders, which at one time was an integral aspect of the Draft Kahnawake Charter, and thus receives the same criticism. Kahnawake, as an indigenous community that is somewhat socially and culturally inverted compared to other indigenous in terms of social and cultural knowledge, such a Council may not be the most exclusive inheritors of traditional wisdom of knowledge. Despite the fact that they probably do know everyone else’s business, hardly qualifies such a Council as genealogists or experts on Mohawk tradition.

All generations both young and old share the pieces to the grand cultural puzzle since the revival of the Kanonhsonni’kéha in Kahnawake. Elders have much knowledge and are certainly are custodians of onkwawén:na, but any authority with so much influence shouldn’t be isolated to one demographic or faction. Indeed respect for eldership must be instilled within everyone, but political qualifications and criteria outweigh age.

Another dangerous factor is this Council’s subordination to the MCK, who are also responsible for their appointment and salary. This aspect further aids the MCK in creating a political monopoly in Kahnawake, not to mention many democratic notions of checks and balances. Here again, we see another potential point of division and possible corruption, which certainly should be reconsidered.

The inclusion of certain responsibilities in the criteria for Kahnawake residents, is a positive effort I am pleased to see; as it is necessary to make Kahnawa’kehró:non better aware of their role and responsibility as Kanien’kehá:ka. However, I am much troubled to see that in order to be recognized on the Registry, one of these responsibilities state that one must become subordinate to the laws of the MCK. There is a significant percentage of Kahnawa’kehró:non, most of those Rotinohsonnión:we, who consciously reject the political legality and dominion of the MCK and the paramountcy of their laws. These people are now going to be coerced into subordination by holding residency rights hostage. Technically, the claimed paramountcy of this document challenges the true supremacy of the Kaianere’kó:wa, which once again illustrates a contradiction in the

MCK's effort toward a traditional government. This also was quite inappropriate and should be also removed.

1981 had seen the first step in halting this attack and infiltration of colonial assimilation, making all Kahnawa'kehró:non aware that this method of genocide was not to be tolerated anymore; thus establishing a cap in interracial marriage. Certainly, an evolutionary and adaptive course of action is the only way to really ensure that the bloodline of the Kanien'kehá:ka at Kahnawake is replenished; meaning that provisions could change in severity due to the evolution of Kahnawake itself.

In the end we must remember that in the previous century, Kahnawake had seen an extremely effective method of genocidal assimilation; this of course being the interbreeding between native and non-native. The Government of Canada had understood that this innovative attack would destroy the harmonious nature of Kahnawake and create a Euro-class system that would create a cancer of hierarchal division. Likewise, they implemented measures to cater to this interbreeding and domestic division through the Indian Act. At the same time, we must be further aware that the offspring of this campaign are caught between two divulging worlds, and are the real wounded casualties in the war against assimilation. The late Mike Woodrow, a respected and loved citizen of the Haudenosaunee at Kahnawake, once said in regards to the matter, "if we cherish Mohawk blood so much, then we cannot spare a drop".

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace and power!