

The Politics of Economic Development: Part 1

A Self-Sufficient Community or Self-Serving Corporation?

A Commentary by Teyowisonte (Thomas Deer)

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Recently, Tewatonhnhisáktha surveyed me for the upcoming Seaway Lands Project. I was pleased to be a part of this objective analysis regarding the proposed economic development of the recently returned Seaway lands, and considered it my civic duty to help as best I could. Moreover, I must commend those at Tewatonhnhisáktha for taking the initiative of attempting to involve the various Long House denominations in this process, and hopefully it will serve as an example and set a precedent for future community projects. However, when I began to answer the questions in the survey, I couldn't help but notice that most of these vague questions were rather adjusted in such way as to maneuver me into answering in favor of the initiative set by Tewatonhnhisáktha. For example, who in Kahnawake would disagree that our community should become more self-sufficient? No one of my acquaintance would disagree.

I'm sure I was statistically labeled in favor of the project although I had some serious reservations and some objections regarding the project. Other areas in the survey were rather vague and required a deeper explanation or a clarification that was to an extent unavailable. These flaws, common in surveys, made me wonder how the results were to be interpreted. I wondered if the wording was intentionally adjusted in order to maneuver unsuspecting community members to unconsciously support the project. Indeed, one could even make the claim that this survey was rigged, although I am not making that accusation. Nor am I attacking the integrity or legality of Tewatonhnhisáktha at this time, which perhaps maybe discussed in a future addition of this column. Rather, my mission in writing this commentary is to shed light on the dynamics and politics of economic development itself.

Within the past decade, and especially the last couple of years, a great emphasis has been made on the economic development of Kahnawake. It is widely accepted that economic development is the primary means of achieving self-sufficiency. While this author appreciates and recognizes the community's need for self-sufficiency and independence, I can't help but criticize the ideology behind such ventures that will supposedly sustain us as a nation. To what extent, or rather what consequence, are we willing to endure for mere financial gain? Are we willing to exploit our culture, sacrifice our limited land base, and manipulate our inherited national rights as Kanien'kehá:ka?

In order to understand this argument, we must have a common understanding of what exactly is self-sufficiency and what does it mean to us as Kanien'kehá:ka? Self-sufficiency, in simplest terms refers to the ability of a people to independently supply and nourish their own needs through the utilization of their own resources. This author identifies two different types of self-sufficiency by way of universal practice, one being "financial" and the other being "tangible" self-sufficiency. Financial self-sufficiency's ultimate goal is to ambitiously gain equity in monetary value whereby the population, or rather its government, buys what it needs to maintain a stable economy that can be interpreted and considered as independent or self-sufficient. External trade, land leasing, and cultural exploitation are included in this category. Although this type will undoubtedly provide a sustainable monetary base, it is not being *independently* achieved as it relies on the outside for

buying and selling goods and services. Furthermore, governments tend to become more like competitive corporations rather than representing the people and nourishing their fundamental needs.

Tangible self-sufficiency is a means whereby a people could sustain themselves independently through the utilization of a variety internal means and resources. Simply, the community could produce and offer goods and services that the community would utilize in everyday life. An emphasis on communal agricultural production should be made, as a nation cannot be a nation as long as it does not have a food source. Moreover, an emphasis should be made on basic fundamentals that we need to survive. Why not build a windmill farm that will allow us to supply our own electricity? When will we hear of projects such as communal dairy farms and grocery stores? These are ventures that will be produced by, and utilized by, the community and decrease our dependence on outside institutions and enterprises.

Tangible self-sufficiency resembles the traditional ideology of the cooperative economic system that was used by the Haudenosaunee. Using this ideology we realize that money is merely made of paper, and paper cannot feed a nation. Each and everyone in the community must seriously contemplate the various implications and repercussions that can be produced by agreeing with certain moneymaking ventures.

Next time in this column, we shall examine the traditional philosophy of a cooperative economy. Until then, ever onward towards the good tidings of peace & power!