

Seventh Generation Newspaper Editorial

Young People Have No Voice in Indian Act System

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For many a generation the young people of Kahnawake have created campaigns which expressed valid concerns, opinions, and recommendations for the social, political, and economic determinations for the Kahnawake Territory. Any such campaign has been met with ignorance, ridicule, and suppression by a nucleus of aged ultra conservative constituents of Kahnawake's many political institutions and factions. It should be also noted that these same people use the name of the young people, or the "faces in the ground that have yet come", to attain certain political and economic ends in the community of Kahnawake.

The Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, or the Indian Act government in Kahnawake, has been notorious for such claims. Indeed, it is quit ironic to see these so-called public servants declare that their actions are motivated by Kahnawake's youth and yet prohibit the youth's input and voice on determinations that will directly affect them. Adding to this blatant contradiction is that these usually capitalistic determinations are enacted in their name as though they have been consulted. The legislation responsible for constraining the young people's voice and input is the Indian Act of Canada, which is essentially the constitution of the MCK. This colonial doctrine authorizes only those who are 18 years and over to participate in its so-called democratic electoral operations. Furthermore, only those who are 18 years and over are eligible to be legal constituents of the MCK and vote in public meetings.

Within the past decade many issues in Kahnawake have been addressed by Kahnawake's youth. Issues like gambling, drugs, the Policing Agreement, and more recently the Quebec/Kahnawake Agreement. Where was the consultation with the young people? When the colonial idea of progress is interrupted by adolescents, they are usually punished or ignored.

Indeed, the MCK's lack of attention and ignorance has had an affect Kahnawake's youth. This resulting in the extinguishing the natural *fighting spirit* of the young people, a quality and mannerism that is necessary to continue the indigenous struggle. The same struggle that resists colonial attempts at assimilation and genocide and secures cultural and national survival. When this *fighting spirit* is lost, these discouraged adolescents will turn to drugs and alcohol as salvation. They will begin make mischief and vandalism in order to gain some kind attention for themselves, even if it is negative. This is the very real result of the Indian Act's so-called democratic government. In a sense, the MCK has taught this new generation, through lack of attention and unjust persecution, that it is okay to assimilate and have no opinions. It is no longer questioned by any free thinking native that the Indian Act of Canada is intentionally designed to assimilate, discourage, and extinguish the *fighting spirit* of the indigenous resistance establishment. So why

must we continue in a system that alienates a significant portion its population? Is there an alternative?

In November of 1993, members of the Peacekeepers severely beat a fifteen-year old boy accused of vandalism. The MCK publicly denied that the Peacekeepers had been, “unnecessarily rough” in the Gazette, date November 4, 1993. Frustrated by this tyranny and inspired by truth and justice, members of the Young People’s Society, summoned by their fighting spirit, erected roadblocks in protest of the actions by the Peacekeepers and the political employers of the Indian Act government. Only when the young people radicalized did their views and grievances become heard. Finally, the young people achieved a victorious redemption. Is this the only way Kahnawake’s youth can get some respect and action? Perhaps, but such a militant approach should be reserved for when all grass roots campaigns have been exhausted.

An aspired alternative to this colonial system of political impotency is a return to the true democratic republic portrayed in the many different versions of the Great Law of Peace. Although there are many different renditions of this constitution, and just as many Long House denominations, the traditional principles of peace, righteousness, and power remain universal. In this institution of peace, righteousness and power, the voice of the people is an ensured right. Instead of denouncing the legitimacy of certain traditional denominations, and instigating division by resurrecting old wounds, the MCK should encourage a serious attempt at a transition to traditional government. This process must include all sectors and factions of the community, regardless of religious denomination.

It becomes quite evident to this author that a return to a truly democratic traditional government becomes necessary in order to guarantee the voice and input of everyone, minimizing the chance of a full-fledged revolution caused by the MCK’s ignorance and totalitarianism. This community has almost come to the brink of civil war on more than one occasion. However, we may not be as luck when the next injustice is performed. In closing, keep in mind that it is the young people who are the most valuable natural resource the community of Kahnawake has, because they, and they alone, will inevitably ensure our future and survival as a Nation. Perhaps in the future, this author may witness and life in such an indigenous utopia.

Ever onward towards the good tidings of Peace and Power!