

## ***The Politics of Economic Development: Part II*** ***The Manipulation of the Haudenosaunee and its Inherited Rights***

A Commentary by Teyowisonte (Thomas Deer)

We, as Mohawk people, have sociologically developed great institutions that have perplexed and inspired people of all nations throughout the world. Some countries such as the United States and the former USSR have even adopted orthodox versions of some of our institutions. Indeed the way of the Haudenosaunee has without a doubt contributed to the moral development of humanity as a whole. Unfortunately, the contemporary and collective Kahnawa'kehró:non seemed to have forgotten or possibly ignored the practicalities and efficiency of our traditional institutions. In fact, some groups here in Kahnawake use inherited treaty rights and nationhood to their own benefit without approval or consent from the original custodians of these rights; the Haudenosaunee or Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy.

What makes us a part of the Mohawk Nation or Mohawk Nation citizens? There are many components that jointly contribute to our status as a Mohawk Nation. First I suppose is by blood right. However blood it is not as important as the following aspects, simply because it comes inherited and without any personal effort or sacrifice. The more grueling aspects of our national culture that require effort and sacrifice include our language, the Kaianere'kó:wa, the passing of Kaié:ri Niori:wake and our annual festivals. To some, this also means following the social teachings of the Karihwí:io. All these cultural aspects require a profound sense of duty and dedication combined with very real struggle and sacrifice in order to continue a threatened way of life; maintains and stabilizes our national status. This is a large burden for those who have made the choice to follow this path yet these same people are manipulated by some in order to make a buck under the guise of economic development.

Politically, we are part of a nation which has inherited many treaty rights as a member community of the Haudenosaunee or Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy. It is the sovereignty of the Haudenosaunee that allows our community to claim nationhood status in the international arena. However, when Indian Act institutions in Canada make decisions or legislation using sovereignty as an argument, the very institutions that consolidate our sovereignty, the Haudenosaunee, are not represented in matters of sanctioning and certification resulting in possible precedents that are undesirable.

When institutions like the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake (MCK) enter into agreements with Canada or Quebec it is very possible that they may jeopardize the sovereign status of the Haudenosaunee by setting certain precedents with government agencies that don't know the difference between the MCK and the Mohawk Nation. Indeed, this was the case when Haudenosaunee citizens tried to use their identification certificates (Red Cards) for tax exemption and were refused by local business establishments as of December 15, 1999. In this instance the traditional rights of the Haudenosaunee were extinguished and usurped by the MCK as a direct result of the Quebec/Kahnawake agreement.

Economic ventures such as Mohawk Internet Technologies (MIT), an institution that is at an arms length of the MCK, house some questionable outside businesses (who actually take advantage of Kahnawake's tax exemption status) such as online gaming and offshore trading that are regulated

by the MCK are under a political guise of implied Mohawk sovereignty. And if that is not the claim I suppose it can be labeled as self-government. Regardless, businesses such as MIT have received their authority to operate from a political institution that is in no legal or moral position to make such claims or determinations. This is not an attack on MIT, an economic initiative that I in fact support and hope succeeds. Rather, I am criticizing MIT's political representation and the MCK's implication that it operates outside the legal jurisdiction of Quebec or Canada because as Mohawks of Kahnawake, we determine our own affairs as a part of a the Mohawk Nation.

Where does that authority come from and how can it be justified? The MCK regardless of its "custom" system of governance is a creation of the Indian Act and an artery of Canada no matter how much they wish they weren't. They do not have the political support from the Haudenosaunee nor do they have the support of the population in terms of numbers. Assuming they were apart from the Indian Act, the MCK is simply an entity that is accountable to no one except themselves and their constituents.

It would be very irresponsible of this author not to provide or suggest constructive solutions to the problems that I've outlined above. We have the ability to fix these problems, we must simply swallow our pride and work together towards common goals and principles. I believe there is a place for community institutions such as Tewatohnhhisáktha and MIT. However such groups and future economic proposals that involve traditional claims and treaty rights must seek approval following a valid authority that would monitor and regulate and the MCK just doesn't fit the glove. In Kahnawake's case, there is no real political representation that caters the community as a whole with each faction having its own constituents. Currently, the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs would be the official political envoy and governing organ for the Haudenosaunee and with out a doubt the Mohawk Nation itself.

In order to bypass this political bureaucracy, a serious effort should be made to establish a new unified Mohawk Nation community government that would represent the interests of all Kahnawa'kehró:non regardless of religious denomination or previous political affiliation. Once such a government is established with the Confederacy's consent, our community would be in a far better position to endeavor in controversial economic initiatives that utilize inherited claims and treaty rights. We can do it together!

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace and power!

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