

The Umbrella Fiasco

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Last month, I received a copy the draft Umbrella Agreement produced by the C/KR (Canada/Kahnawake Relations). After thoroughly reading through this set of documents, that has been sometimes described as Kahnawake's "bulletproof vest", I required some questions answered before making an educated opinion on it. So this author wrote a letter to the C/KR e-mail address asking some questions of concern that will help me consolidate an opinion as I already had a partial hypothesis in the works. Unfortunately, they never responded to me so I am forced to speculate regarding my hypothesis.

Ignorance is expected during this so-called consultation and question period so I am not perturbed, however there are more immediate concerns that certainly need to be addressed. It is this author's opinion that the draft Umbrella Agreement prepared by the C/KR is an extremely dangerous blueprint for a "brave new Kahnawake". Aside from the obvious implications of the overstated self-government scenario, the umbrella agreement has the potential to ultimately result in totalitarianism.

How would this occur? The C/KR has stated that its ultimate goal is to remove the entire Indian Act, but as a preliminary move in the meantime will attempt to remove certain sections of the act while maintaining certain items that are erroneously perceived as inherent rights. The C/KR process also calls for a transfer of responsibilities and jurisdictions of certain portfolios that are currently in the domain of the Department of Indian Affairs and the Government of Canada; paving the way for the installation of a traditional government. While on the surface no one can really disagree with these intentions, the circumstances for they are attached to prompts me to question its motives as well as anticipate the negative effects of such agreements. What would result from the C/KR's success is the creation of an unaccountable government that has removed its political constraints, enabling them to exercise ultimate authority in Kahnawake. This conclusion is composed of two scenarios that address internal and external accountability.

Once their primary obstacle (Indian Act) is dissolved, the MCK or whatever type of new government they hope to devise, will have their hands free to establish and fortify more and more fiscal influence and dependence over community members under the guise of economic self-sufficiency and political liberation; while in reality such initiatives would only further sustain and reinforce its control. This control through dependence strategy would discourage any kind of retaliation against whatever totalitarian acts are committed by the dictatorship, which ironically is the same strategy used by the Government of Canada to control and suppress its indigenous peoples.

Indeed, the MCK has declared its intentions of reestablishing a democratic traditional government with themselves as the acting executives, which would refute this author's prediction of an inevitable dictatorship under such conditions. What makes any current or future government susceptible to becoming a dictatorship under the pathway of C/KR, even under a traditional form of government, is its severance from the Mohawk Nation and Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy

combined with a new self-governing relationship with Canada that establishes independent jurisdictions over important portfolios with a capitalist attitude.

This combination establishes both a climate of external unaccountability by preventing national intervention and a strangle hold of fiscal dependence that nullifies internal accountability by keeping internal retaliations at bay. This combination has the potential for a dangerous totalitarian dictatorship that can not only suppresses the people voice, but also strips its citizenry from their inherent Haudenosaunee rights and replacing them with newly achieved ethnic privileges.

What seems to go unrecognized is that one of the primary reasons for returning to a traditional form government is to be under the protective umbrella of the Haudenosaunee. Instead, Kahnawake would remain a renegade community to the Mohawk Nation and continue to be a dependent captive of the Government of Canada since it would still depend upon its funding. Captivity, no matter how luxurious the conditions may be, is still captivity.

A common rhetoric held by those in the elected council is that whether or not all Kahnawa'kehró:non like it, the Indian Act is here and the MCK is the government of Kahnawake. This skewed point of view does not capture the true dynamics of political life in Kahnawake. Kahnawake has various political bodies, some more popular than others depending on certain conditions and circumstances, but like Canada the only way the MCK remains a force to be reckoned with is because they control the community's treasury which makes an obedient constituency. The Indian Act is only as powerful as we allow it to be and once this fact is realized true progression can finally be made; as it can ultimately be defeated by ignoring its authority.

Perhaps community bodies independent of the MCK, particularly the Haudenosaunee of Kahnawake, should prepare variant alternatives to this damaged umbrella. Indeed, certain safety guards must be established to protect our rights but it must be a unified effort under the jurisdiction of the Mohawk Nation as the inherent government of all Kanien'kehá:ka; which would inspire civil confidence rather than fiscal dependence among the citizenry.

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace & power!