

Traditional Government Revisited: A Response

A commentary by Teyowisonte (Thomas Deer)

In my last commentary, entitled, “Traditional Government vs. Mohawk Nation Government”, this author had attempted to caution various camps in Kahnawake on the dangers of misused or misunderstood terminology. Indeed, the problem was far greater than I originally perceived as I received a couple of negative criticisms (but more positive) that were based upon basic misunderstanding. Because of this unfortunate misunderstanding, I shall attempt to clarify the main idea of the previous commentary for these individuals.

Firstly, it must be clarified that the commentaries contained in this column every week exist under the title heading *Oh nisa'nikonhrò:ten*, which questions in Kanien'kéha, “what exists in your mind?” Therefore it must be clarified to my critics who question the author's affiliation, that the opinions and ideas presented in this column are that of the author's and there is no intended representation of any larger body. I encourage my critics to read the title of newspaper columns before they jump to any unnecessary conclusions. Let us then proceed to address the political opinions expressed by my critics.

Critics disliked the fact that this author suggested that the 2000 Operational Resource Manual of the MCK was, “concise, logical, and feasible, and was in fact worthy of Haudenosuane support”. Although these critics apparently forgot to read the rest of this sentence, which proceeded to state the reason for why it shouldn't be supported, I will continue to address their concerns. These people believe that such a statement endorses the idea of self-government and as such puts myself outside the joined hands of the Haudenosaunee. Before responding to these accusations, let us first identify the definition of what exactly is self-government and why it is not an option of the Haudenosaunee.

In the Kahnawake experience, self-government is a process whereby the Government of Canada would “allow” the people of Kahnawake to reinstate their traditional form of government and continue its financial obligation to them in exchange for the dissolution and termination of their inherit national status and rights. We have seen this process used by oppressive countries around the world against Ireland, South Africa, and here in the Mohawk Nation. Self-government is a tool to achieve assimilation and genocide, whereby a super-power takes away their opponent's legal, cultural, and political ability to defend themselves.

It is without question that the MCK has participated in activities with the Government of Canada that can be only identified as self-government. Oppositely, the Haudenosuane, bound by the *Kaianere'kó:wa*, cannot accept this scenario and insist on reestablishing one traditional government, or what I prefer to call a Mohawk Nation Government, that is within the joined hands of the Mohawk Nation and the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy; this means separate from Canada. Similarly to the fictional authority of the MCK, a traditional government not reestablished within the legal confines of the Six Nation

Iroquois Confederacy has no authority to exist within Kanonhsonníkeh (Iroquois Country). This is self-government in practice and was in fact the main idea of last week's commentary.

Contrary to the beliefs of my critics, last week's commentary was actually cautioning the community by exposing this manual as evidence that the MCK's idea of returning to traditional government was in fact a move towards self-government since no provision mentioned a political relationship to the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy. I suppose it is difficult to grasp the theme when dwelling only upon part of a sentence.

It is true I wrote that the manual would be "worthy of Haudenosuane support" if it respected the true nature and strength of the Kaianere'kó:wa which is described as the symbolic Long House analogy. Again, as indicated in last week's commentary, it does not respect such an authority and its institutions; so why must my integrity or loyalty be questioned? I was not endorsing or supporting the manual; rather I was analyzing and observing its composition that happened to contain some good ideas but bundled as a whole was not worthy of Haudenosuane support. Does Kanonhsonni'kéha (the way of the Long House) teach our people to terminate good ideas on the basis of where they come from? Would the Peacemaker have been able to establish peace with an attitude like that?

Criticism is something that every journalist must endure from time to time. However these critics, through simply misunderstanding a sentence, questioned my integrity, loyalty, and patriotism to the Kaianere'kó:wa and the Confederacy; and yet claim to be the initiators of peace and unity. This action composed of misunderstanding and misguided accusations actually discourages anyone who has any interest in being a part of any unity process. I suppose this is what prompts me to respond, as I take these accusations seriously and personally. Perhaps in the future, I should work on developing thicker skin to withstand such criticism, but until then I shall not let these obstacles determine or undermine my dedication to the Kaianere'kó:wa and the Haudenosuane.

Finally I would like to remind my critics that if it is unity they wish to achieve, it can only be accomplished through a process of inclusion, tolerance, and education; as taught by the Kaianere'kó:wa. They have demonstrated a rather exclusive and rigid attitude towards one man's opinion, which prompts me to question their true sincerity to achieve unity in Kahnawake. Indeed, if this author maintained such an exclusive and rigid attitude, I would still consider these critics as, "out of the circle."

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E-mail me at teyowisonte@hotmail.com