

## ***Voting, party politics, and real democracy***

A commentary by Teyowisonte (Thomas Deer)  
teyowisonte@hotmail.com

The 2002 MCK elections were certainly interesting and unique this year as it seemed that these elections had gained extraordinary recognition and involvement from many Kahnawa'kehró:non. While I am somewhat shocked and disturbed by this large participation, it is something I'd rather address in another article as this one will focus on the inherent dysfunctions of the Indian Act systems and its illusion of democracy.

Every new election year Kahnawake's candidates for the MCK seem to use more diverse and creative means of campaigning already utilized in outside non-indigenous communities, and to say that this evolution of campaigning is an evolution of democracy is unfounded. Surely, this campaigning may contribute to one's voting power and constituency, but to classify the large voter turnout as democratic is as dangerous as inviting the fox into the henhouse.

A unique aspect of the past two elections has been the emergence of "party politics" in the MCK arena. Party politics, for the benefit of those unfamiliar with this concept, is a group of politicians and their constituents who share a common political platform and strive to gain a majority vote for their party in order to attain an influential leverage upon the existing political establishment. In governments such as the United States and Canada, party politics is the most effective route in attaining a political monopoly upon the executive and legislative branches of government.

While party politics can be an effective means of control and stability within any political institution, it cannot ensure the delivery of direct democracy to its citizenry. Without thoroughly examining the flaws of so-called "western" style democracies, let us focus of the Indian Act system, whereby this criticism is especially true.

Suppose a group of nominees who ran their campaign underneath a common party platform actually receives a majority victory and gains a unified monopoly over the MCK council table. What if this dominion decides to push and pass extremely sensitive and controversial legislation that could affect the entire community? Because the Indian Act isn't engineered to achieve resolution through consensus (again, because of the voting farce) combined with the fact there is no leadership accountability statutes, this dominion cannot be stopped. One does not need to have a political science degree to understand that the Indian Act system is simply not designed to contain a multi-party system and cannot handle the inclusion of such. Understanding this criticism is really a matter of appreciating logic and academics.

My criticism of party politics within the confines of the Indian Act system should not reflect my true opinion of party politics in relation to true or direct democracy, when in fact I do favor a multi-party system as a true vehicle towards true democracy; provided its constitution is engineered to embrace such a concept. In a letter to the community during his campaign, Joe Norton had claimed that, "party politics is not Kahnawake's

way”. I beg to differ on this point, as I believe party politics is the very foundation of the Haudenosaunee political establishment.

The Kanien’kehá:ka of the Haudenosaunee are inherently classified into three parties or clans; the Turtle (Rotiniáhton), Wolf (Ronathahión:ni) and Bear (Rotiskeré:wake). These three clans have a constituency and leadership that are based on inherent birthright as opposed to competition or popularity. Membership through inherent birth lineages discourages the competitive and rival element apparent in common party politics and their drive for leadership or dominion in the political arena.

What then, makes party politics succeed within the traditional government of the Haudenosaunee and not in “western” style democracies such as the United States and Canada? Both Canada and the United States have at least two political parties for their constituency to choose from, and based upon the popularity of that party; it will attain a political monopoly upon the entire citizenry. The Haudenosaunee do not compete for either an administrative or legislative dominion and achieves determinations through consensus as opposed to a majority vote.

Perhaps voting is an efficient method of having the input of millions of people as is the case with Canada and the United States, but even in their system it is more about lobbying than true representative government. While one could argue this free choice of political affiliation is the very essence of democracy, I certainly discourage the practice of a political system that only recognizes the will of the majority and neglects that of the minority. Although, opposition (minority) parties do exist within Canada, they are sadly subject to the same aristocratic competitive nature of the system that ultimately forces them to disagree with anything the majority desires, even if the proposed resolution is the right thing to do. How can ka’nikonhrí:io (a good mind) be practiced when you are constantly competing to consolidate your dominion?

Fortunately, Kahnawake’s population is incomparable to Canada’s, allowing more direct democratic methods; such is provided within the Kaianere’kó:wa. In politics, I do not vote and I never will, as participating within the political functions of that regime only validates its existence here in Kahnawake. Voluntarily participating within colonial establishment only makes Canada’s job at assimilation easier since they do not even have to force it upon anyone. Moreover, aside from accepting the Indian Act system through participation, candidates and their supporters have began to adopt foreign views of popular leadership and the competitive nature of campaigning.

The point of which this article is trying communicate is that the MCK system of governance is not a democracy in a literal sense. The archaic Indian Act system is not engineered for it and any claim that the people’s voice is heard and acted upon is a play on semantics. There is no evidence of true or direct democracy other than the squeaky wheel getting the oil. Therefore, this author again recommends to all Kahnawa’kehró:non to stop breathing life into the Indian Act system. Only when confidence is depleted from the colonial dinosaur will people truly seek other

alternatives; then perhaps we won't have any more excuses to neglect our traditional form of government.

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace and power!