A RESPONSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A MOHAWK FROM THE BAY OF QUINTE

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ABSTRACT

It should be amply clear that exposure to the society of the dominant culture has not been good for the Indians of Canada. Concerns for their future welfare based on lack of familiarity and fear of the unknown can be very misguided. In the end, native people, if given control over their own affairs, will take over and manage their affairs well in their own interest.

In responding to concerns raised during the opening session, these comments will be illustrated with a few anecdotes that go directly to the point of the matter. Concerns expressed for the welfare of the Indians affected by resource development may be likened to those of Henry Higgins for Eliza Doolittle. Higgins wanted her to have no wages. "If you give her money, she'll only drink." Solicitous concern based on lack of familiarity and on fear of the unknown can be very misguided, no matter how well-intended.

If native people have the locus of control, they will take over and manage their affairs well in their own interest. An illustration from the Bay of Quinte reserve where I practised medicine for many years provides an excellent illustration of this point. When the Medical Officer of Health of the time refused to sign the liquor licenses for the various Band gatherings and festivities, the Band Council fired the Medical Officer of Health and I was appointed. I approved the licenses. After a brief back-lash with an increase in drinking, Band members and Council brought the situation under good control.

In another situation, the Band received assistance from Dr. Maureen Law, then Assistant Professor of Public Health at

Queen's University, to set up their own successful public health system, illustrating that with talented and imaginative consultation ways can be found to return management of their own affairs to native groups. (Dr. Maureen Law is now Chairman of the Board of the World Health Organization.)

The caution of thoughtfulness about the impact of resource development on the Indians is very much appreciated by the Indian peoples; however, the long range issues will revolve around the locus of control over Indian affairs. If given control over their own affairs, there may be a little bit of exuberance initially, but the native people will land on their feet.

Reflecting on the long-range vs. the temporary aspect of resource development impacts, there are two major themes to which attention should be directed. Firstly, the various Indian nations play different roles in the development scene. The Mohawks of Canada are so embroiled in Canadian economics that they will go down "the pipe," too, in the event of an economic disaster, while the Dene and the Cree have vast natural resources and an independent way-of-life. (I, personally, am hoping that the Cree or the Dene for whom I have done some work recently will look after my

children in the event of such a disaster.) Secondly, the major challenge will be to ensure that the natural resources of the Dene and the Cree are developed and not exploited.

In conclusion, in looking to the future of the native peoples in Canada, it is to be

hoped that the ongoing dialogue will be undertaken with the conviction that the natives of Canada are sophisticated enough and that the government of Canada is honourable enough to make an appropriate and fair bargain.

RÉSUMÉ

Tous devraient reconnaître que l'exposition aux valeurs sociales de la culture dominante a porté préjudice aux Indiens du Canada. Les préoccupations en ce qui concerne leur bien-être dans l'avenir fondées sur une piètre connaissance de la réalité et sur une crainte de l'inconnu peuvent être très mal avisées. En définitive, si on lui donne la responsabilité de gérer ses propres affaires, le peuple autochtone prendra la relève et administrera sagement ses affaires au mieux de ses intérêts.