

Why is consultation so hard? The story of the Algonquin Nation, the Moose of La Verendrye
Park and the Quebec Government

Term Research Paper

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Why is consultation so hard for the Quebec Government and seemingly all governments within Canada when it comes to working with any of the Indigenous Nations? Consultation, negotiation, and ongoing conciliatory meetings may help curb any violent confrontations or blockades that may arise in the future between Indigenous nations and non-Indigenous Canadians. Over the past few years, the Algonquin Anishinabe communities that are presently situated in Quebec and around La Verendrye Park in Quebec have been fighting via protest to protect the Moose population in the Park as they have been seeing a sharp decline in the moose population over the past few years.

What led to the current Algonquin Nation Protest?

La Verendrye Park is the traditional hunting grounds of the nine surrounding Algonquin communities that are located in present day Quebec. The animals harvested from the park, mainly moose, help sustain the communities. For about a decade now, the Algonquin Nation has noticed that the moose population was declining in the Park. “According to the results of a recent inventory carried out by the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs in collaboration with representatives of the Algonquin Nation, the moose population has declined significantly since 2008” (Nature Canada, 2020). At the same time, the Quebec Government sells hunting passes to enthusiastic sport hunters which allows them to enter the park and hunt moose for a limited time. Because of the declining moose population, the Algonquin communities pleaded with the Quebec Government to hold a moratorium on moose hunting within La Verendrye Park until the moose populations are revitalized again. Quebec did not want to listen, negotiate or take serious the concerns of the Algonquins so the Algonquins felt that they had no choice but to blockade all access points to the Provincial Park. Prior to the erection of the multiple blockades around La

Verendrye Park, the Algonquins respectfully requested and met with bureaucrats from the Quebec Government, albeit Quebec sent low level bureaucrats to meet with them. In an effort to raise public awareness and gain public support, the Algonquins held multiple peaceful traffic slowdowns while handing out informational piece pamphlets on the declining moose population in La Verendrye Park (Deer 2020). The ongoing blockades and confrontations were both combative and violent, yet peaceful and community oriented. The Algonquins protesting against the Quebec Government selling hunting passes to sport hunters was combative and violent with the sport hunters (Bacon and Richardson 2021). On the other hand, the Algonquin communities who don't always see eye to eye on issues, found a common goal and supported each other and those on the front lines through cash donations for things like food, firewood and gas money to maintain their public awareness campaign (Lui 2020). The ongoing battle ultimately caused a lot of undue stress to all parties involved. A lot of time, effort, resources and planning went into all aspects of the blockades on behalf of the Algonquins, the Quebec Government and the sport hunters. Why did it have to come to this? Why couldn't the Quebec Government just meet with the Algonquin Nation and the Sport Hunters in a respectful and acceptable way in order that all parties can hash out a compromise at a negotiating table? The Indigenous Nations have long lived on Turtle Island well before Canada came into Confederation. When will provincial, federal and Canadians in general learn that they cannot progress as a country without working in harmony with their Indigenous counterparts? We must find ways to respectfully work together.

The Algonquin Nation of Quebec

In order to begin to answer the questions raised, one must look at the history of the Algonquin Nation as well as the history of Quebec and the ongoing relationship between the

parties. At present there are nine Algonquin communities situated in the Province of Quebec where La Verendrye Park is located. The Algonquin communities that live in Quebec deal with both the federal government as prescribed under Canadian law within the Indian Act of 1876 as well as the Quebec provincial governments. The Algonquin people believe that they have been in the general area where they are now, since time immemorial. What is clear is that the Algonquins have been in the area since prior to the Confederation of Canada for centuries. When speaking about the Algonquins relationship with French colonial settlers in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, community members at Barriere Lake explain their understanding of the relationship. “The elders at Barriere Lake contend that when the French approached them to become military allies, they made an agreement that the Anishinabe Nation would always ‘be in front’ when it came to the land because the Algonquins had their own laws to follow. But the government ‘has not remembered this agreement,’ according to Toby Decoursay, and instead has gone about destroying the land” (Pasternak 2017, 61). As with all Indigenous Nations within Canada, the Algonquin people passed their history down to the next generations through oral traditions and this is the understanding of their relationship with French colonial settlers whose offspring would later become citizens of Quebec and Canada.

It is important to understand the complex history and colonial effects that the Canadian settler governments had on the Algonquin peoples, their traditional practices, their culture, their language and their livelihood. Most Algonquin peoples are of the view that the colonial governments continue to take and take from their people. Shannon Chief, a citizen of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake and a lead organizer of the various protests, illustrates this quite clear in a recent interview she held. “Canadian and Quebec governments are so focused on growing their economies. We’re being privatized in every way. They have come in to take the

trees. They have come in to mine. They want to build pipelines. And now they are threatening the moose” (Lui, 2020). Bringing this view to the forefront may help others understand just how important the environment is to the Algonquins and how they see the relationship with their counterparts, the Quebec and Canadian governments.

The protest regarding the moose moratorium is definitely not the Algonquin people’s first act of objection regarding protecting their land and environment at La Verendrye Park, yet the fight and sentiments are exactly the same. Former Barriere Lake Chief, Jean Maurice Matchewan describes how he was responding to a police officer’s inquiry as to why the Algonquins felt that they could protest logging at La Verendrye Park in 1990. “We’re talking about food on the table and protecting the natural habitat. The wildlife” (Pasternak 2017, 1). Over thirty years ago, the Algonquins were protesting excessive logging that was taking place in La Verendrye Park that threatened the survival of the entire habitants of the Park and today their protesting the sharp decline in their moose populations. Shannon Chief’s sentiments about governments taking and taking from the Algonquin peoples really seems to ring true. What do the Algonquins have to gain from protest; the old status quo? A better question yet is, what do the Algonquins have to lose from protest? If the Quebec government continues to chose to ignore requests for meaningful consultation with Algonquin peoples, rest assured the Algonquin people will continue to mobilize to do everything in their power to protect their traditional way of life, even if that includes putting their lives at risk.

Protests by other Indigenous Communities within Canada

It is important to understand and look at recent past confrontations between other Indigenous nations and colonial governments when considering that meaningful consultation

with Indigenous peoples and Canada can curb violent and combative protests and blockades. In these cases, history must not repeat itself. The non violent protests that began both at the Mohawk Nation of Kahnésatake at Oka in 1990 and the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation at Ipperwash Beach in 1995 are examples in fairly recent history where peaceful protests ended in ongoing long sustained blockades that resulted in many incidents of combative violence. Both long standing confrontations that began with the intention of peaceful protest both ended in death, which is a prime example of why it is so utterly important to find ways to work around confrontations and blockades. The longer a confrontation and blockade persists the more prone to violence that situation becomes. It is as if the colonial governments of Quebec and Canada have not realized this in the year 2021. In all cases, the governments within Canada hold all of the power to listen, negotiate and consult with their counterparts as it's their law and their rules. The one thing that is apparent is that the Indigenous people within their communities and territories in Canada are well aware of the consequences of erecting blockades, however, obviously have come to a point where they feel like they have no other options.

Ipperwash Beach

The people of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation had obviously felt that they have been held in a pressure cooker for far too long and it was time to release the steam and bring public attention and awareness to their concerns regarding the appropriation of their lands by the Government of Canada. It was way past time for the Ojibway people to protest the continuous taking of their territory by various governments within Canada. "The Department of National Defense decided during World War II that it should establish an army training facility on the site of the Stony Point Reserve. Despite protests by the residents of the Kettle and Stony Point Bands, and a vote of 82 percent against the proposal by eligible voters, 2,240 acres of Stony

Point Reserve property was appropriated on April 14, 1942, under the War Measures Act” (Hedican 2008, 162). At some point during the appropriation of this land, the Government had promised the Ojibway communities that their lands would be returned to them after the government was done using them for the war. In the year 1995, the community had yet to see this promise come to fruition which is why members of the community decided to protest at the very location where their lands were appropriated. What happened next is still disputed to this day. The end result was that protestor and Ojibway community member, Dudley George was shot to death by a police officer employed with the Ontario Provincial Police, a division of the Ontario Government. The officer’s version of events and the protestors who witnessed the events that occurred do not line up at all. What is important to understand here is that this protest should have never gotten to the point where an ultimate confrontation would take place where guns were involved that resulted in death. The governments have all of the power to stop these things from happening as the Indigenous communities ultimately have to follow Canadian Law. Although much is being learned and understood about Indigenous law these days, this wasn’t the case in 1995. It’s hard for Canadians to understand or even accept Indigenous law when they don’t want to see it. “Indigenous law can be hard to see when we are used to seeing law as something the Canadian government or police make or do” (Napoleon 2007, 1). What is clearly missing from the governments within Canada is the will to solve these issues through dialogue. One only needs to look back at what former Premier Mike Harris’ directive to the Ontario Provincial Police was with respect to the protests led by the Ojibways at Ipperwash Park and that was “I want the fucking Indians out of the Park” (CBC News, 2006). Shortly after that statement, Ojibway community member Dudley George was shot to death. Former Premier Mike Harris vehemently denies ever saying that statement, however it has been reported widely. With

leadership like that, it is absolutely no wonder that the Ojibways of Kettle & Stony Point could never create a dialogue with successful outcomes with the Ontario government.

The Oka Crisis

The images of protest, confrontation and blockade that continuously ran across major news sites via television, radio and print newspaper in 1990 are still etched in my memory. Even though I was a child at the time, I knew and understood that what was happening was not good for anyone. Quite simply put, “In March of 1990, the Mohawk erected a blockade to prevent the arrival of bulldozers scheduled to break ground on the golf course expansion” (Meng 2020, 39). The Mohawks were fighting the expansion of the golf course which was on their traditional territory and that included a sacred burial ground of ancestors. Again, the end result here was death, however not on the part of Indigenous people but on the part of representatives of the Government of Quebec. “An early morning raid staged with 100 police officers equipped with tear gas, concussion grenades and assault rifles went terribly wrong when shooting broke out between the two groups, leading to the death of Corporal Marcel Lemay of the SQ” (Meng 2020, 39). Can the Quebec and Canadian governments really have let this happen? They put their officers’ lives on the line all because they could not listen, consult and negotiate with the parties involved. This is not to say that Corporal Lemay’s death was the only act of violence at Oka. There were many acts of violence previous to the late Corporal Lemay’s death. Aged 14, a child at the time, a young Mohawk woman, Waneek Horn-Miller was stabbed by a bayonet at some point during the protest (CBC 2016). There were many more acts of violence such as rock throwing at cars and people, etc... The protest which is now infamously termed by media as the Oka Crisis lasted for several months beginning in July through to September 1990. Again, the longer a blockade lasts, the more prone to violence it can become as is clearly demonstrated.

Is it just up to the colonial governments to meet at the table with their Indigenous counterparts to have meaningful dialogues with successful outcomes? Of course not. It is also up to the Indigenous leaders of the communities to come and meet in a respectful way. It is vitally important that both parties have good intentions to hash out issues that can create satisfactory results for both sides. With that being said, it's important to note that these rules are being played out within Canadian law by a colonial government that was enforced on Indigenous peoples. The important thing here is that both parties have to think about what's best for their future generations and the future of Canada while respecting and honouring the past. The Canadian Government needs to take Indigenous law into account when dealing with their counterparts. "Any process of reconciliation must include political deliberation on the part of an informed and involved Indigenous citizenry" (Napoleon 2007, 19). Consulation and negotiation is never easy, however, the spirit and intent of the original treaties that were signed by Indigenous leaders and colonial leaders of the past need to be acknowledged.

The Current Situation Between the Algonquins and the Quebec Government

At present, the Algonquin Nation and the Quebec Government have reached an agreement via a "Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Moose Management Between the Anishinabe Nation and the Gouvernement Du Quebec" which was signed in June 2021 by the leadership of the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council and representatives of the Government of Quebec (Kitigan Zibi 2021). One of the immediate interim measures agreed to by both parties state that "... for the period from April 1, 2021 to March 31st, 2023, in particular, the suspension of the issuance of moose hunting licenses in the Territory of Application for this period" (Kitigan Zibi 2021). This translates to a two year moratorium on the sport hunting of

moose in La Verendrye Park, therefore for the time being, there are no more blockades erected and there are no massive protests occurring at the writing of this paper. The Algonquins have been protesting in various aspects and forms for the past two years on the issue and we are all very lucky that there have been no deaths on either side of the argument as there has been much documented violence on the front lines. Since the moratorium was signed a few months ago, APTN news has reported that violence against Indigenous communities is on going with parts of moose carcasses being discarded at entrances to Indigenous communities; a clear sign of disrespect towards Indigenous communities (Bacon and Richardson 2021).

Given the history of the Algonquin peoples, is it so hard to understand why the Algonquins rely on the moose for their food security and why they are willing to erect barricades knowing what the end result could be, all to protect the moose? The people of the Algonquin community of Barriere Lake which is situated right in the middle of La Verendrye Park hunt very few moose per year to provide food, medicines and clothing to their families. At the same time, the non-Indigenous sport hunters buy their hunting passes from SEPAQ, which is a division of the Quebec Government that allows for them to hunt around two hundred moose per season which is just within a matter of weeks (Lui 2020). The Algonquin history of harvesting every part of the moose is a true testament to their culture and not just a rack of antlers on a wall. The Algonquin people have a long standing relationship with the moose and it permeates through every fabric of their being.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Since time immemorial, Indigenous nations located within North America have had a special relationship with Mother Earth including but not limited to the land, the waters, the air,

the plants, and the animals. “As long as Aboriginal people have occupied lands across the North of Canada, they have supplied themselves with the essentials of life by utilising the resources of the lands and waters. Along with necessities such as building materials, clothing, and fuel, food was obtained from the harvesting of wildlife and plants. While all of these needs are still met today to some extent directly from the natural resources around them, food obtained through the harvesting of wildlife through hunting, fishing, trapping has become for most Aboriginal people of the North the key item of household income and wealth derived from the lands and waters” (Weihs and Sinaaq 1993, 4). What is most important to note here is that while Indigenous people have harvested food for thousands of years as they always have, they still harvest food from the lands and the waters to this day. When Weihs and Sinaaq are referring to household income and wealth today, what this means as it relates to the Algonquin people is that they now have funds that would have been spent on food for other basic necessities such as clothing, housing and many other life essentials. Most people who reside in Indigenous communities are far from wealthy as we see in the news every day, where Indigenous people are fighting for things like access to clean drinking water which are basic Canadian human rights. For a community like the Algonquins of Barriere Lake who are situated right in the heart of La Verendrye Park, they live a one and a half hour drive away from the nearest grocery store, so hunting and harvesting in the park saves them a lot of gas money to get to and from said grocery store. An interview with Algonquin youth citizen, Liam Cote explained to a news outlet that “Barriere Lake doesn’t have a store near them,” Cote added. “Hunting is their only resource for food. And we want to protect the moose and stand in solidarity with our people” (St. Jean 2020). The Algonquins of Barriere Lake are truly living the way their ancestors have lived thousands of years ago. As referenced in the documentary film titled *The Invisible Nation* by Desjardins and Monderie, the Algonquins

were dependent on the natural wildlife for their very own survival to sustain themselves, their families and their community. When illustrating how the Algonquins survived prior to the Confederation of Canada and Quebec, *The Invisible Nation* describes how important hunting was to the people. “It’s then vital to keep the hunters healthy. They have to know the exact location of big game, their one source of food which can feed the clan for several weeks” (Desjardins and Monderie 2007, 4:30:12). This documentary film is an important story of the Algonquin Nations of Quebec, beginning with the arrival of the Europeans in the sixteenth century. The documentary reveals how the once thriving Algonquin Nation and their natural environment and resources were destroyed to almost nothing and how most of the Algonquins live in poverty today, which clearly demonstrates the vital importance of the food sources within La Verendrye Park for the Algonquins.

Mohawk scholar Andrea Lickers describes the relationship that Indigenous people have with food that comes directly from the lands and the waters as “a respectful relationship, and not taking advantage or overconsuming is exactly what allows for our community to continue to fish, hunt and sustain ourselves. Always take what you need, but never more, and never take so much that you will harm that plant or animal family or it will not be there for you in the future” (Soma et al., “All My Relations,” 323). Food security, sovereignty and sustainability within Indigenous communities is another important aspect that clearly explains why the Algonquins are willing to put their lives on the line to protect the one animal that means the most to them. The Mohawk Teaching of “All My Relations” and thinking about the next seven generations can teach people how to preserve and not be so wasteful with food in the present day. This teaching is similar to most Indigenous teachings about taking only what one needs in order to ensure that there is enough of anything left over for the next seven generations. This teaching relates directly to the

harvesting of moose by the Algonquin communities and how important food security is to the Indigenous nations of Canada. The sports hunters can learn a thing or two about this teaching as opposed to throwing moose parts at the Algonquin protesters. There is video evidence in a newsclip aired and reported by the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) which shows an incident where unwanted moose parts were discarded and violently thrown at members of the Algonquin Nation who were protesting for the moose moratorium. Members of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake picked up the moose part and began to harvest it right away for bone marrow which is often used as a medicinal healing tool within many Indigenous communities (APTN 2020).

Traditional foods are such an important part of life for Indigenous communities as they are with any community. All of the Algonquin people share their game with their extended family members and friends and help to feed each other. I myself have never been hunting once in my life, however there is moose meat in my freezer right now that has been given to me by extended family members. All Indigenous communities share their food. Ceremonies, powwows, and potlatches are all places where feasts take place within the Indigenous communities of Canada. Traditional foods like moose meat, fish, beaver, and rabbit are always prime staples at any feast within an Indigenous community. The traditional foods are part of the Indigenous peoples identity and culture, which is why protecting the moose is so important to the Algonquin people.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, the sole issue at hand here is that the Algonquin Nation is literally fighting for their own food security while the Government of Quebec and sport hunters are

fighting for money and recreation. The Government of Quebec receives funds by selling sport hunting passes and the sports hunters pay for that recreation. This is not the first time in Canada's history that Indigenous people have to fight for what's rightfully theirs as seen at the protests of the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation at Ipperwash Beach and the Mohawks of Kanasatake at Oka. At present, there is a protest going on in British Columbia in support of the Wet'suwet'en Nation and their opposition to pipelines (Montreal Gazette 2021). No matter where the six hundred and thirty three First Nation communities are in the country of Canada, you are going to find some of those nations always at odds with their municipal, provincial or federal counterparts.

“First Nations peoples have extremely diverse cultures that are connected to their region and their own history” (Sinquin n.d.). While the stark diversities amongst the Indigenous nations of Canada is evident, there are far more similarities and experiences that the Indigenous people of Canada and the United States have in common because of their shared histories with living off the land and their relationships with colonial governments. Are the colonial governments going to continue to let protests and blockades happen? There has got to be a way to work together. Working together starts with respectful dialogue by both parties. Coming together in a meaningful and respectful way to work things out and find an acceptable solution takes effort by both parties in order to avoid violence and death on either side. If other confrontations and blockades between Indigenous nations and governments within Canada have taught us anything at all, it is that human life is not always guaranteed at the end of the day, which is why I wholeheartedly believe that dialogue through consultation between all parties is an absolute must.

The Ipperwash Inquiry was established in 2003 to study the events that occurred at Ipperwash Beach in 1995 that resulted in the death of Chippewas of Kettle & Stony Point member Dudley George. The Chiefs of Ontario who represent the one hundred and thirty three First Nation communities in Ontario pushed for an inquiry for years and it finally got approved by the Ontario government eight years later. “The Inquiry was also asked to make recommendations that would avoid violence in similar circumstances in the future” (Hedican 2008, 161). Perhaps government can take these reports and recommendations that included and were led by Indigenous people, such as the Ipperwash Inquiry, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report and the most recent Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Reports and take the time to really understand them, read them, and work with their counterparts to implement them. What we all have here are blueprints for a path forward, a successful path forward for all Canadians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. When Indigenous people succeed, all of Canada will succeed too. One thing that is for certain is that Canada cannot afford to lose any more people like Corporal Lemay or Dudley George because they did not want to sit down at a table with their counterparts and work out their differences. It is completely understandable that it is not always that simple, however we have to continue to try. Dudley George had to die to get Ipperwash Provincial Park transferred back to the people of Kettle & Stony Point First Nation. Corporal Lemay had to die only for the federal government to buy the land at Oka so that no one can expand a golf course on the Mohawk’s traditional and sacred burial grounds. Do the Wet’suwet’en people have to die? Do the Algonquin people have to die? Will more government representatives have to die? If the violence at these blockades tells us anything, it tells us that this is where we are headed next.

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