

Mohawks

~~myths. It is in the composite of the right to make claim to unoccupied territories. Absolute monarchies of Europe laid claim to 'new territories' that were bereft of 'civilized' people. Aboriginal inhabitants were denied the status of legal subjects because they were not fully human. On this basis, Europeans claimed the right to seize and occupy the land, and at the same time exterminate aboriginal nomads. Being heathens made the actions morally right and just, based on Christianity. The New World Order would rapidly transform the world, as rivers of Indian blood flowed in all directions.~~

The Mohawks at Oka

The greed for a nine hole golf course by a decadent white colonialist group at Oka stirred one of Canada's largest Indian confrontations. Now, bored with only an eight hole course, gluttony demanded that it be doubled. Why should the Mohawks have use of the land? They only left it to waste away. It was used only for spiritual ceremonies, burial grounds and recreation. That's stupid and wasteful, while decent people could have an exclusive playground. It would be a place to show off their wealth, and to peacock on. And so the white supremacists of Oka granted themselves a generous chunk of Mohawk land for their apartheid golf course.

Did they talk to the Mohawk people? Did they offer them a price for the land? Were there any negotiations? Of course not. When did the colonier ever consider the oppressed as owners of land? By the nature of supremacy, the colonizer also fails to consider that at some moment he will be abruptly disrupted. Decolonization erupts. A hostile turn of events by the oppressed suddenly confronts the oppressor. The Indians of Kanesatake had suddenly reached the point of ejecting the oppressor. And so the border of colonizer/colonized became a blaze of fury and hostility. The Mohawk people erected a blockade on the road to the precious piece of aboriginal land. But the colonizer does not see or hear the frustrations of the oppressed. Mohawk men armed with rifles took their positions at the barricades of confrontation. They issued warnings to the Oka town council: no one will be allowed to enter the sacred Pine grounds of the Indians.

The naked truth of decolonization cried out: we are prepared to fight and, if necessary, to die in defense of our land. Colonialist squatters are weak without the support of the big colonizer. The Oka council would not confront the Mohawks, who now suddenly became their enemies. Yet for centuries they were neighbours. The imperial judicial system of sophisticated discrimination against Indians would continue for the few privileged

whites. After three months of legal work--to the Indians that's conspiratorial work--they obtained a court order to remove the road block. But, this court's policies are irrelevant to Indian society. Why should they obey a court order of a <sup>imposed</sup> ~~foreign~~ <sup>imperialist</sup> British government that has served to cheat them from their land. Would the judiciary give Mohawks a court order to build an exclusive lacrosse court on the whiteman's graveyard? I doubt it. Disregarding the court order, the Mohawks demanded that they would deal only with the federal government, on a nation to nation basis. What arrogance of these pigmented aboriginals, exclaimed the imperialist officials.

Brothers and sisters from neighbouring reserves, Kahnawake and Akwesansane, joined the Kanesatake Mohawks to give them their support. The well-armed warriors prepared defensive positions around the road blocks. During this crisis of decolonization, the native's reasoning is appealed to. Native Affairs Minister Ciaccia asked that the blockade of the Mercier bridge be taken down. He is asking the Indians to trust in negotiations and policies that are solid and highly esteemed from past experiences. Ciaccia also asked mayor Quillette of Oka to 'not force the issue' and to 'put the golf course expansion on hold'. Indians only mocked and laughed at this 'time worn' reasoning. The oppressed can feel the secret timing of the

colonizer.

The state police arrived at the blockade. They fired tear gas cannisters into the Mohawks section. A bulldozer was moved in to crush the Indian barricades. More police advanced and started firing. Mohawks returned the fire and the battle was on. A policeman was killed. No one knows how. Suddenly the entire force of police retreated, leaving their cars, guns, ammunition and the bulldozer. As good guerrilla warriors, the Mohawks collected all this modern efficient weaponry. They were now in a much stronger situation militarily. In such moments, the oppressed masses mock the colonizer's words and actions. "The bulldozer was put to work crushing the abandoned police cars and piling them upon the new barricades. Warriors took turns climbing on top of the overturned police cars from where they would wave their rifles in the air and scream out war cries." (MacLaine, *This Land is Our Land*, p. 22).

Minister Ciaccia refused to go behind the barricades and negotiate with the Mohawks. To him "peace talks could not take place inside an armed camp." But, it was not an armed camp, it was protected Indian land. Ciaccia forgets that peace talks at Quebec City would also be 'behind armed camps'. The Quebec police force and the Canadian military are much greater an armed camp than that of the Mohawk's

barricades. He is protected by this very military regime. Next, Premier Bourrassa presented the Mohawks with an ultimatum: either lay down your weapons or begin negotiations within 48 hours, or the government would take "appropriate steps"---meaning a military assault on the Mohawks. But that is impossible as a condition of negotiation. Once the oppressed lay down their <sup>guns</sup>, what have they got for negotiation? Nothing. That is total surrender, not negotiation. The next step is jail.

For Indians, the most essential issue in the struggle is land. Land will bring bread on the table and above all it will bring dignity and freedom. For this, they will sacrifice their lives. The colonial context had faded into the past as far as the Mohawks were concerned. They were now into the phase of decolonization. No longer were they interested in co-existing with colonialist settlers. The white supremacists of Oka and the nightly crowds of racists who attacked them and the poice at the Mercier bridge barricades were their opponents, and not part of Mohawk society. As expected, after a long stand-off between the Mohawks and the police, the federal government moved 4,400 soldiers, backed up by several helicopters, armoured personnel carriers and heavy weapons, into the action. This was the largest military force deployed domestically since 1885 when Ottawa attacked the Indians and the Metis

is Saskatchewan to seize their lands for the CPR, and then imprisoned those natives they did not kill.

Finally, after 77 days of confrontation, the Mohawks agreed to a settlement. They laid down their arms. But, as is consistent with the colonizer, he betrayed the oppressed. All those speeches and negotiations by government authorities were a collection of dead words. Instead of being treated as equals, most of the Indians in the confrontation were loaded into police vans and hauled off to jail. Many were later released on bail. They still face court charges.

Decolonization never takes place unnoticed. It happens under the glare of history's floodlights. It is a complete calling into question of the total colonial situation. Racism in Canada was most vividly shown when more than 200 Mohawk women, children and elderly left the reserve near the end of the seige. As they drove through a crowd of white people, rocks, concrete chunks and whatever missiles could be found, were thrown at the passing Indians. With great anger and force, they pummelled the Indians' cars. They damaged many and injured several people. It was a picture straight out of South Africa. Repeated on TV, this scene was a startling picture to many Canadians and to much of the world who had known Canada's international image as a country for its justice and

kindness to its minorities. Canada has now been fully exposed as a pseudo-apartheid country peopled by ugly racists.

"It was the most horrible experience of my life," said Angela Deer. "The chilling image will remain long after the details are forgotten. An angry mob hurling debris at fleeing Indian women and children. It was a scene out of South Africa, but it happened in Quebec this week when Mohawks in a caravan of about 60 cars were ambushed by about 200 white protestors." (Van. Sun Aug. 31, 1990).

The Mohawk confrontation of 1990 did more than expose Canada's racism. It told Canada's imperial government that colonized aboriginals have awakened from their long spell of subjugation and oppression. It served to raise the consciousness of their plight of deprivation and powerlessness. It helped to restore the Mohawks to their once eminent position as undefeatable guerrilla warriors, which they were for many centuries of history. Their genius as warriors has continued to be a vital part of their traditional society. Above all, they have raised the awareness and tactics for the aboriginal struggle for sovereignty to new and advanced levels. This struggle has served to change the tactics of the civil rights movement of the 1960's from demonstration, sit-ins, picketing and

strikes, to a higher level of systematic armed struggle. Likewise, the issues will change from local problems of social injustice, poor welfare treatment, and discrimination, to issues of self-determination and sovereignty.

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