



Kahnawake, May 27, 2008

Open-letter to the Leaders of Quebec Political Parties

Quebec Native Women is disappointed to see that the Bouchard-Taylor Commission report and that leaders of Quebec political parties did not acknowledge the place of Aboriginal culture, values and language in Quebec.

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission had a mandate to take stock of accommodation practices in Québec and to analyze related issues. The two Commissioners chose nevertheless to address this problem through the sociocultural integration model established in Quebec since the 1970's. More particularly, this perspective aimed to study interculturalism, immigration, secularism, and Québec identity.

The concept of accommodation practices does not apply to Aboriginal people. This is the reason, among other things, why the commissioners decided to withdraw the issue from their mandate. We do not want to question this position. However, in an attempt to analyze interculturalism, discrimination and identity within Quebec society, it is essential to acknowledge the place of Aboriginal issues.

The discrimination faced by Aboriginal people exists for decades in Canada, as in Quebec, and has been institutionalized through policies and laws that are still effective today. The construction of the Canadian and Quebec identity has indeed been made at the expense of the Aboriginal culture, while there was no debate or Commission established for this matter.

Last week, Quebec political leaders expressed themselves on the importance of Quebec history and culture, on the preservation of the French language and on the necessity to adhere to common values. What are these common values, this history and this nation that do not take account of the Aboriginal presence in Quebec?

Mr. Jean Charest has highlighted the desire of Québécois to live together in French. The obligation to use French language, as for English language in Canada, constitutes a threat to Aboriginal languages' preservation.

Mr. Mario Dumont and M. Pauline Marois have also expressed the desire to create a Constitution proper to the Quebec nation, where Quebec would have all powers on the territory. We nevertheless want to remind them that Quebec belongs to Aboriginal peoples, where their right to self-determination continues to be denied.

Aboriginal people are still present in Quebec and the problems that they have to face daily are current. It is thus essential to acknowledge their rights and place during the building of the Quebec society project. Aboriginal people and Quebec people have led similar battles: the fight for the defense and the preservation of their culture. But for Aboriginal people, the struggle also implies to overcome the oppression caused by colonization.

These elements should serve as basis for a long term collaboration and cooperation for the achievement of Quebec's society project, and not as justification to consolidate the supremacy of a Nation over another.

Ellen Gabriel
President of Quebec Native Women's Association