

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Letter to City of Hamilton's council and mayor

From: Joshua Weresch

Sent: November 25, 2017 11:13 AM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca

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To Ms Rose Caterini, the clerk of Hamilton City Council:

Good morning. I hope this finds you well. Please include the letter, below, as public correspondence to Hamilton's City Council, available on the city's website for public perusal. Thank you so much for your time and attention in these regards.

To the mayor and councillors of the city of Hamilton, on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Anishnaabe Nations:

Let me tell you a story, from one stranger to another group of strangers. We can, in no wise, be yet called friends but we can, perhaps, come to that in time; we live, as always, in hope. I have grown up in this city, on this land, loved by a father who came from Novi Sad, Yugoslavia and a mother who came from Barrhead, Alberta. Only in the last five years or so have I come to learn more of what it means to be a settler on this land, to know that the land on which we live and move and have our being was taken by force of words and arms from natives. While I can wallow in the guilt this knowledge brings, I can also take responsibility for what I know and use that knowledge to change the conditions and lives that my children – my six- and four-year-old daughters and my two-year-old son – live in the midst of their days. I choose, as a settler, the latter course. In speaking of settlers and indigenous relationships with a colleague of mine of Anishnaabe descent, she said, echoing a Metis poet, Just begin; speak with others who are non-Native.

In the light of this knowledge and these stories, I would like to take some of your time, while you read this, to propose a few directions that this city can move in order to welcome, warmly, native people. Also, if some of you are already doing this, then keep it up and, please, continue that good labour. These are not my ideas, but are borrowed from the concluding chapter – Tetitewennonhthothshta Tsi Niyonkwarhotenhs—We Are Causing Ourselves to Have Control Again, the Way We Do Things – of Susan M. Hill's book, The Clay We Are Made Of: Haudenosaunee Land Tenure on the Grand River. Also, I sent a draft of this letter to friends of mine who are Kanienke:ha and Metis women for their thoughts, ideas, direction, and, most of all, leadership.

First of all, as Susan Hill notes, there is the long-standing issue of land claims. The city of Hamilton is on treaty land; according to a map of First Nations' treaties from the Ontario government, the land was taken in 1792 in the Between the Lakes Purchase and Collins Purchase, Treaty No. 3, for £1,180, 12 shillings, and 4 pence. Susan writes, "I continue to believe, however, that there cannot be reconciliation without an equitable accounting for lands and monies illegally and unethically seized. That is a huge bill; however, Canadian wealth gained at a cost to Six Nations has created a very unhealthy relationship. The road forward must address this in order to succeed" (p. 240). I would propose, then, that Hamiltonians begin to rectify the years of economic inequality for the Mississauga of the New Credit and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy by re-directing all of their property taxes toward the Haudenosaunee Land Use Agreement's Perpetual Care and Maintenance Fund, which is

“a community trust fund to subsidize Confederacy operations and long-term well-being programs for the Six Nations people.”

Second of all, we should, as people living on Haudenosaunee land, learn the languages of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, whether they be Seneca, Kanienke:ha (Mohawk), Onondaga, Cayuga, or Oneida. The Aboriginal Health Centre offers classes in Ojibwe and there are videos and classes online to learn to speak Mohawk. Best of all, of course, is the course of getting out and getting to speak face-to-face with others who are learning and become more fluent together. Instead of taking up spaces in classes, though, for native languages, settlers could also learn to speak their own ancestral languages, if they don't already speak them. For me, that'd be German and I'm learning some of it as I go, as well as trying to learn to speak Kanienke:ha. Accompanying the revival of these languages must be, according to Susan Hill, the complete community control of Native schools by Natives and the long-term financing of these schools. Such financing would come from the settlement of land claims.

Third of all, Susan stresses the importance of environmental responsibility, also noted in the Haudenosaunee Land Use Agreement, mentioned above. While it is encouraging that McMaster University is partnering with Six Nations' personnel in regards to water quality and testing, this is only a beginning. The identification of edible and medicinal plants around Hamilton should be mandated and could be led by those who can share that knowledge, already available through knowledge-keepers at the Aboriginal Health Centre.

These are, I should stress, not my ideas but ones gleaned from the work of others. If there are any mis-representations of their words, they are not theirs, but my own. As the recent blockade of Argyle Street reminds, actions such as these, whether road or rail blockades, are, in the words of Theresa McCarthy in In Divided Unity, the shaking of the chain that connects the autonomous nations of Native peoples and the nation of Canada in respectful relations. “When Indigenous peoples act with such conviction,” writes Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in “The Powerful Legacy of the Rotiskenrakéh:te - Those That Carry the Burden of Peace,” “Canadians should all listen and ask, what can I give up to promote peace?”

Thank you all for your time and attention in these regards. I hope this story has a hopeful ending and look forward to continued dialogue and conversations and, more, actions.

Respectfully,

Joshua Weresch

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