

Update from Grand River

April 29, 2008

By Hazel E. Hill

Somehow in two days we've gone from a peaceful demonstration to barricades. And you can thank the OPP for that.

A Six Nations peaceful demonstration against the action of the OPP in Tyendinaga, after they had beaten & arrested at least 10 people, and then surrounded a handful of others at gunpoint around the quarry in Mohawk Territory; was turned into a standoff and barricades shortly after 7 p.m. Sat. nite.

A men's council was called at Grand River on Friday April 25th, after a call had come from Tyendinaga informing that the OPP had guns pointed at men & women in the Quarry. Conflicting reports were being received and calls were being made asking people to come & help, while other calls were saying don't come.

The men decided that regardless of who, why or what had happened, the fact that the OPP moved into Mohawk Territory, beat up, dragged out and arrested some of our people; was a reason to show support for those who found themselves surrounded at gunpoint and in a very volatile situation.

And that was the OPP's first mistake. They had to have known that taking action against ANY of our people, whether they were right or wrong, justified or not justified; the OPP moving in and attacking Haudenosaunee People at gunpoint, in an area that had been home to peaceful demonstrations on Mohawk Territory, lands acknowledged by the Crown as a 'claim' and the basis for negotiations between the Crown and the Tyendinaga Mohawks for months; on top of what they have

already supposedly learned from Kahnesetake, Ipperwash, Kanonhstaton, they HAD to have realized that if they moved in, the people would re-act.

The Six Nations Police and the OPP were contacted, & they were advised that a peaceful demonstration was going to be set up on Hwy#6 bypass, and the OPP closed the road at either end to prevent any traffic from coming through.

A message was sent out from the women involved in negotiations in Tyendinaga advising that this had been sparked by an isolated incident, was not related to the negotiations, and that their peaceful demonstration had concluded at 7 pm that evening. They could not support actions of violence and they were imploring the people to keep the peace. Contact was made with the women there and a message was sent from the men at Grand River "this demonstration at Grand River has nothing to do with Shawn Brant, its against the action of the OPP and in support of the people who were surrounded". And regardless of beliefs or divisions, in everyone's mind, both at Tyendinaga and at Grand River, the one thing paramount and where all the people were united was the desire to prevent further violence and to somehow resolve this peacefully.

Communications continued between the men at Tyendinaga & Grand River with the OPP to see if there was a way to bring the stand off in Tyendinaga to a peaceful resolution. To make sure that no one else was hurt or worse. The OPP near Tyendinaga were asked to back off a bit, to bring a tense situation to at least a more calm atmosphere. They backed off to the corner of each side of the boundary road leading into the quarry . An OPP press statement was sent out. That statement was their second mistake. They issued a statement that the Mohawks in the quarry were armed. The statement was false.

It immediately brought to the minds of the people, haunting memories of Ipperwash and how the Government of Canada used false propoganda to justify police action against the people there and an unarmed Dudley George was shot and killed. Co-incidently, and almost prophetically, that message seemed eerily confirmed loud & clear when we got home from the demonstration later that night and turned on the T.V.,..... "One Dead Indian" was airing.

Saturday morning things seemed relatively quiet. The people in Tyendinaga had had a good night. Others were able to get in to bring them supplies on 4 wheelers & overall, spirits were good. Saturday afternoon, as part of the discussion between the Mohawks at Tyendinaga and the OPP, a proposal from the OPP was put to the people. "You walk away, we walk away". But having heard that statement the day before, and witnessing the arrests of others, trust did not exist. As a counter offer, the OPP were asked to publically retract that statement about the people being armed. That way the people felt it would eliminate any possibility of another cover up and potential for planned police action against the people inside. In the peoples' minds, it was the only way to prevent another incident such as what happened at Ipperwash. The OPP were advised that if they retracted that statement, the people would then consider leaving the quarry. it would provide them with a better opportunity to resolve the situation, a means to end the stand off. It was a way of moving forward. Grand River supporters re-affirmed that request to the OPP. All agreed that this would be one step closer to resolving this situation peacefully and quickly.

The higher ups in the OPP went into a 'behind the doors' meeting. Within an hour, a message was sent to the people at Grand River that the OPP had a message to deliver to the people here. Designated men went to meet with the OPP.

The message they brought back was not one of a resolution, but another ultimatum. "In the interest of public safety, the road must be open. In 15 min surveillance cameras will be sent down and anyone attempting to obstruct traffic in any way will be charged". And that was their third mistake. Calls went out. The local radio station was contacted. The Six Nations people responded. Memories of April 20th 2006 resounded in the minds of the people, and our people responded immediately. Factions of religion and politics did not exist. The people stood united and ready. Once again the OPP were going to try and use force rather than peace. The men stood their ground. They positioned themselves on the road, armed with nothing but the truth. They were on their own land. They were involved in a peaceful demonstration. They had violated no laws.

The situation was tense. 6th line was lined with people. The men had lined themselves across the by pass. The OPP had sent down their camera van and another cruiser. They were stationed a few hundred feet from the men.

At the same time, Six Nations Elected Chief Bill Montour put a call into Minister Bryant. A strong message of unity was delivered to Mr. Bryant and he was advised to re-think the position they had taken. "If our people are harmed, all Iroquoian communities are going to rise up"

Carloads of people from the community kept rolling in, lining up and down 6th line, more and more people were gathering and getting ready.

Minutes later, the OPP turned and retreated back to their position at the lights at the end of the by pass. The road was not worth the fight. But the damage had been done. Immediately, the men went into action & the barricades went up.

Early Monday morning, amid rumours that the swat teams were moving in on the people at the quarry's, to gossip of barricades are down at the by-pass in grand river, things began to slowly work their way through. Around 8:50 a.m. the OPP had moved their swat team to only about 5 feet from where the people were on the road outside the quarry. Opp wanted the road opened. Those that were at the barricade agreed to let them open that part of the road to allow the non-native people access. They went back to the barricade closest to the quarry and joined the rest of the people there. They would move no further. They were on Mohawk Land. Little by little throughout the day, the OPP tactical team slowly disengaged to the point where there was only about 30 cruisers left in and around the area. The OPP assured the people they were not going into the quarry. By 4 p.m., the OPP, the swat team and the helicopters were all out of site. The situation at Tyendinaga had come to a peaceful resolve.

Throughout yesterday and early this morning, through the course of many meetings and discussions; and after feeling they had accomplished what they had set out to do.... and that was to ensure that the people in Tyendinaga were able to leave that quarry safely and freely..... the decision was made to open the Hwy #6 By-Pass.

The men had honoured their word. They had upheld their responsibilities to the Creator and in their understanding of the Law, to protect the Land, the Law and the People regardless of geographical boundaries, political differences or religious beliefs. Peace was once again restored in Haudenosaunee Territories.

In Love Light & Peace,

Hazel