

# The Tobacco Wars: First of series

## Bill C-10 is not about fighting crime, its about destroying ...

By Lynda Powless and Donna Duric, Writers

Word spread quickly through Six Nations.

"Have you heard, the OPP shut down a smoke hut this morning."

Word came shortly after, it wasn't true.

And then came the call "we should shut down the roads."

Panic.

And it's being generated from a federal bill, Bill C10 that the federal government is trying to turn into law.

Bill C-10 claims to be aimed at cracking down on illegal "contraband tobacco" growth but that's not how it's being seen by First Nations.

First Nations believe they are the target of the move.

Hazel Hill is the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council's planning department

director.

She says Bill C-10 is an attempt to destroy an economy with no legal basis.

"Any of the bills Canada or Ontario have, have no bearing or impact on the Haudenosaunee."

She says its about treaties and Canada is ignoring it.

"We do not have any treaty agreements or relationship with Canada or Ontario. Our treaties are pre-Confederation treaties that require complete and full justification of any treaty infringement through an engagement process."

Hill said it is a blatant attack on Haudenosaunee economies.

"They have a responsibility to uphold the honour of the Crown. This is an attempt to dissolve Haudenosaunee treaty rights and

economies in order for them to gain control of our people. It's more akin to ethnic cleansing or genocide," she said.



HDI director Hazel Hill

She isn't alone.

Audrey Hill is a member of the Turtle Island Trade and Commerce business group that has been working diligently on tax issues affecting Six Nations.

She doesn't mince words when it comes to Bill C-10

"It is an act of terrorism on our people and an activity of economic oppression."

Audrey Hill said it is Canada's attempt to con-



Audrey Hill

trol First Nations.

"We've started to generate an economy and like a pebble in a pond with ripples going outward our community is growing and prospering and Canada doesn't like that."

She said the Six Nations

tobacco industry has generated income for families.

"We have an obligation to feed our families and take care of each other. We are coming from our own Haudenosaunee world view. It's about taking care of each other and ourselves.

"If this industry is to be stopped what is Canada going to do about the hundreds of people that would be unemployed or businesses that would go under."

She said she operates a small tobacco company. "We employ 32 people, each with five people at home, multiply that times all the shops, the impact it would have on other businesses here, restaurants, laundromats, garages and the surrounding communities. We leak \$157 million out of this community every

year that is spent in surrounding communities. It's not even a leak it's a contribution to these surrounding communities to help them keep their businesses going and their families fed."

As a result, she said the Six Nations tobacco industry is benefitting not just Six Nations, but Brantford, Caledonia, Hagersville, Ancaster and Hamilton.

"There is far more of an impact than just our community."

She said the industry growth is a direct result of Six Nations taking care of itself.

"The government never had a hand in helping us to get out of the situation they put us in. One of poverty, abuse, that they created."

She said Bill C-10 coupled

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# ...economies, First Nation leadership says in rejecting the bill

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with more bills coming at First Nations are a threat of terrorism against First Nations.

"This threat of terrorism that they are going to stop us from providing for our families that's the real harm here."

Turtle Island Trade and Commerce has been looking at this issue for some time now.

She said like the Indian Defense League said more than 40 years ago, when Six Nations international border crossing rights were at risk from government intervention, "they said we needed to hold the line to protect our border crossing rights. Well we need to hold the line for our people and our families and hopefully the leadership will

stand up and say we have to do something for all of us."

TITAC holds weekly meetings at the GREAT building auditorium and is currently running a series of talks on taxation.

She said the tobacco issue is a nationhood issue. "We are our own nation and no outside government has control over us."

She said she wants to see the Confederacy take the lead on the issue with the administrative assistance of the band council.

"This is outside of the band council. They don't have the GREAT Law. It lies with our traditions, but that doesn't mean it has to be adversarial. The band council is very capable of handling the administration but the leadership has to come from the traditional council or the federal gov-

ernment will enforce all kinds of acts on us and implement them through the Indian Act."

She said the Confederacy needs to take leadership.

This past weekend an off-reserve newspaper held what it called a "community meeting" on the tobacco industry and sent ripples of panic through the community.

"I think that's why the rumour spread the OPP had shut down a smoke shop."

She said, "It's unfortunate but the meeting made it sound like Bill C-10 was in effect now. It caused shock and our people have not had a chance to rally around the issue or figure out what they are going to do about it and here we were at a meeting and I thought we were gonna hear about what the act

was but it was a more reactionary meeting. They have everyone in panic mode."

Jan Longboat, a community elder said she attended the meeting, "there were a lot of people there I didn't know. I thought it was a community meeting but it was more activist," she said.

Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill said, "We do not support Bill C-10 and have signed a declaration denouncing this bill along with the other Iroquois communities who attend the Iroquois Caucus. This could have serious impacts by criminalizing our people for transporting tobacco products."

She said band council will discuss having a community meeting to include people who are involved in the tobacco industry to decide on the next steps in



Ava Hill

fighting the bill.

"Six Nations was never consulted on this bill," she said.

Joe Delaronde, spokesperson for the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, says the Iroquois Caucus has passed a resolution to reject Bill C-10.

He said the Caucus is, "looking at other solutions

to the problem but basically rejecting its implementation and the criminalization of our people. From the perspective of all the Iroquoian communities in this area, we're basically rejecting C-10, including all its components and contents."

He said there has been a "complete lack of consultation" with Iroquois people on the proposed bill.

"Even if they've spoken with us, there's been nothing meaningful and no attempt to accommodate Iroquoian people. The fact is, C-10 basically is looking at the Iroquoian communities. It just seems to strike right at our people."

The Caucus is made up of elected leaders from seven Iroquoian communities: Kahnawake, Six Nations, Akwesasne, Kanehsatake, Tyendinaga, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Wahta.