

THE TWO ROW TIMES TOBACCO SERIES

Hundreds attend C-10 info meeting

By Jen Mt.Pleasant

SIX NATIONS - Almost twenty years ago to the day, in February 1994, the RCMP threatened to invade the Six Nations territory in its crack-down on cigarette smuggling. And once again, the federal government is threatening Haudenosaunee people to send in their "goon squad" in an attempt to seize any and all 'illegal' tobacco.

The only difference is if Bill C-10 passes into law, it would share the task of seizing tobacco to provincial as well as First Nations police agencies. Concerned community members packed the hall at Six Nations Polytech last Saturday to listen to a line up of speakers discuss the ramifications of Bill C-10 and what it means for First Nations people who are involved in the tobacco trade.

Jonathan Garlow, founder of the *Two Row Times*, explained to the crowd what this new proposed piece of legislation means to him. "Despite attempts of extinguishment, we are still here," stated Garlow. "Since time immemorial, we

have benefited from the relationships of tobacco trade and it has strengthened our economy and has improved the quality of life for those on First Nations communities."

Bill C-10 was brought before Parliament back in November 2013, and is an act to amend the Criminal Code of Canada (trafficking in contraband tobacco). Known as Tackling Contraband Tobacco Act, the following will be added to Section 121.1(1) of the Criminal Code if the Bill becomes law: "No person shall sell, offer for sale, transport, deliver, distribute or have in their possession for the purpose of sale a tobacco product, or raw leaf tobacco that is not packaged, unless it is stamped."

Garlow explained that tobacco is a sacred plant and is indigenous to the Americas. Tribes in North, Central and South America have been trading tobacco for thousands of years. He said Bill C-10 is an attempt to criminalize Native people and may result in a possible confrontation like that at Kanohstaton, if the Bill becomes law. What's im-

portant now, he stated, is how we respond to the actions of Canada.

Local businesswoman, Audrey Hill is a member of the Turtle Island Trade and Commerce Association whose mandate is to do business and support local businesses according to, "our inherent right and according to the Two Row Wampum," said Hill. In regards to the Guswhenta, Hill explained, "Our boat may rock but it has never tipped over. We need to understand what vessel we go into and what to put in that boat. So be mindful of what vessel you are in."

Hill said, "We're always wondering what are they (the government) going to do to us next? When do we resume our nationhood?" She also said Bill C-10 is an act of terrorism because it is terrorizing us, as First Nations people.

Audrey Huntley, the author of several short films on the First Nations tobacco industry explained that there is a lot of propaganda circulating about the Native tobacco trade. An example she gave was of a conve-

nience store owner, who stated that Native tobacco shops sell cigarettes to kids. After Huntley investigated the claim further, she found out that 'legal' tobacco companies are the ones who have developed flavored cigarettes with a goal of appealing to the younger generations.

Joe Deom who is Kanienkehaka from Kahnawake spoke about the First Nations Education Act and stated that it is important for all First Nations to create their own laws. Regarding Steve Ford's suggestion that band councils make their own laws to tax tobacco, Deom stated that from a traditional point of view, band councils are an arm of the federal government so, "how can they make laws against their own government?"

Deom asked, "Whose law should prevail? Traditional law because it's the only way to assert our sovereignty." However, Deom went on to suggest that both Six Nations governments need to work together in establishing laws which will see revenue going back into the community and that

funds need to be shared with the traditional council as well to ensure they maintain a viable government.

The last speaker of the evening was Shawn Brant, who is Kanienkehaka from Tyendinaga.

Brant, who is involved in the tobacco industry, described his feelings of support and economic security and being able to, "enjoy the same benefits as our non-Native brothers and sisters." He explained how he has put a portion of his financial income from the tobacco trade back into his community with a food program which feeds up to 140 families twice a week. He also funds a nutritional program, which educates people on healthy living.

Brant, who focuses his time and energy on raising awareness on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, drew parallels to that of Bill C-10. He stated the overall issue is lack of compassion and sense of decency within this (the federal) government, "A government that seeks to prosecute our men within our communities.

Inconsistency is what is happening. Are we going to stand up on that battlefield and engage them and fight them and defeat them?"

Brant feels that all the current issues relating to Indigenous people: the FNEA, Bill C-10, fracking, and missing and murdered women, all need to be dealt with in a righteous and just way. But instead, he said, "The government is taking us to war and battle on their terms." Instead, Brant said, "We need to dictate and identify what we want and what we intend to do, on that battlefield."

A strong message was sent by Brant that if the Canadian federal government has plans to target our economy then, "we better be prepared to target theirs as well!" Brant concluded by explaining that he wants people to truly understand the situations and circumstances we face, and to make a link and make a commitment that, "we won't stand for this."

Bill C-10 has been referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in March.