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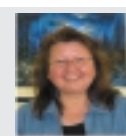
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Manitoba and Wuskwatim Co-Proponents Weave Tangled Web

Poet Sir Walter Scott once wrote, "oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." With these famous lines, he is commonly understood to have meant that once a first lie is told, or promise broken, then many more will follow to cover up the first. This leads to contradictions in the story being told and, ultimately, to the confusion of the teller of the tale.

Just as Scott suggested, it would now appear that the Manitoba Government's broken promises to the Metis people, as well as the recent statements and actions by the Manitoba Government, Manitoba Hydro, and Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (NCN), have resulted in much contradiction and confusion. Is this an indication that Manitoba Hydro is spinning a web of deceit?

There was a recent March 10, 2004 Manitoba Legislative debate between Premier Gary Doer and Mr. Jon Gerrard, Liberal Party Leader, regarding the need to consult with the Metis people about the Wuskwatim Projects. In the debate the Premier wrongly stated that his Government had been consulting with the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF), and that his Ministers "have had full consultations with the Metis Federation." He also suggested that his government will undertake consultation "in a fair way for the Metis people."

According to the transcripts of the debate, correcting the Premier's slip-up, Liberal Leader Mr. Gerrard properly stated, "the Manitoba Metis Federation has not been



MMF feels it's concerns were ignored at CEC hearings

fully consulted." MMF President David Chartrand has supported the position taken by Mr. Gerrard. In a recent letter to Premier Doer, President Chartrand wrote, "clearly your Ministers and staff have not fully briefed you." Could it be that Manitoba Hydro is not properly briefing the Ministers and the Premier?

President Chartrand says that unlike the Premier's Ministers and staff, "Mr.

Gerrard took the time to inquire as to the MMF concerns regarding Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro's refusal to engage in meaningful and proper consultation with, and accommodate the Metis Nation to address our collective Metis title, rights, and interests that will be infringed by the proposed Wuskwatim Generation and Transmission Projects."

In a recent interview, President Chartrand explained, "there has been no consultation, or accommodation, of the Metis Nation by the Manitoba Government, Manitoba Hydro, or NCN. The Metis are being virtually locked out." Both Mr. Gerrard and President Chartrand's statements are consistent with earlier interviews and statements made by the MMF to Grassroots News and other Newspapers.

On the other hand, the Premier's statements are contradicted by an October 6, 2003, letter, written on the Premier's behalf by the Honourable Minister Oscar Lathlin to MMF President Chartrand. In the letter, Minister Lathlin suggested at that time, the government was not prepared to enter directly into consultations with the MMF. Why this discrepancy between the Premier and his Minister?

The Premier's statement is also contradicted by a February 19, 2004, Winnipeg Free Press article in which its Crown Corporation Manitoba Hydro spokesman Mr. Glenn Schneider was quoted

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as saying, “the Manitoba Metis Federation is not a government,” and that the utility has consulted with community councils. The article suggests Schneider’s position is that the MMF has not been, and does not have to be consulted. This is contrary to the Premier’s statement in the legislature.

But even more interesting is that Mr. Schneider’s remarks about the MMF were challenged in a recent meeting with MMF Vice-President Darryl Montgomery, when Tim Sale, Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, agreed that the MMF “is a government.” It appears that the Minister and Manitoba Hydro are also in nearly open conflict regarding the role of the MMF.

Schneider’s remarks also appear to be inconsistent with the fact that Manitoba Hydro had earlier acknowledged the representative role of the MMF in an October 10, 2002 Memorandum of Understanding which states that the “MMF is the Metis Nation’s representative for the Metis within Manitoba for the purposes of Hydro to Metis Nation negotiations and agreements” including those for consultations and decision-making that may affect, or are intended to benefit, the Metis within Manitoba.

Both Minister Lathlin and Mr. Schneider’s statements are also contrary to established Manitoba Government policy. The Manitoba Government has accepted and has committed to implement the June 2001, Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (AJIC) recommendation #4.1.

This AJIC recommendation says that “any future, major, natural resource developments not proceed, unless and until agreements or treaties are reached with the Aboriginal people and communities in the region, **including the Manitoba Metis Federation and its locals and regions**, who might be negatively affected by such projects, in order to respect their Aboriginal, treaty, or other rights in the territory concerned.”

On November 2001, the Manitoba Throne Speech made a commitment to carry out the AJIC recommendations. There was then a June 2002 public statement by Minister Eric Robinson on behalf of the Manitoba Government to accept all the AJIC recommendations including recommendation #4.1.

“Nothing could be clearer. According to this recommendation, Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro both have a responsibility to work with the MMF as the representative of the Metis people,” said President Chartrand. “To date, despite the promise of recommendation 4.1, the MMF has not been consulted on Wuskwatim. There has been no agreement to respect our Aboriginal rights. The Manitoba Government and Manitoba Hydro are trying to back out



Scale version of proposed dam

of a promise to the Metis people. This is unacceptable.”

According to the MMF, to fulfill this recommendation, a Metis-specific consultation and accommodation plan needs to be jointly designed by the MMF, Hydro, and Manitoba, and implemented according to a negotiated agreement. This agreement would enable full and effective participation of the Metis Nation in northern hydro development.

“We must make it clear that proper and meaningful consultation is a mutually agreed-upon process undertaken in good faith and done in a way that is acceptable to the Aboriginal people concerned, to address infringements of Section 35 rights,” explained President Chartrand. “It is not merely last-minute technical discussions about training, nor is consultation merely one or more invitations to open houses which will be attended by all Manitoba Citizens for the purposes of distributing general information.”

It now appears Premier Doer’s Ministers, and Manitoba Hydro’s staff might be entangled in a web of their own making or in a web spun by Manitoba Hydro. This pattern of broken promises goes back to the time before the northern flood agreement. In 1975 the Interchurch Task Force on Northern Flooding was told by then NDP Minister Sidney Green that the Manitoba Government would treat the Metis “in the same manner as it did Treaty Indians.”

Despite Minister Green’s assurances, the Manitoba Government’s words were never kept and the policy to treat the Metis fairly was never fulfilled. Contrary to the Minister’s words, the Metis were not allowed to be full and active partners in the subsequent Northern Flood Agreement, nor in any other agreement in which the First Nations were parties.

Metis Elder Senator Ed Head explained that, “the Metis asked to be at the Northern Flood negotiation table. We were told that we could sit at the table but we could only be observers and could not speak. We were to be bound and gagged. That was unacceptable treatment. We took the position that the Metis were going to be impacted like everyone else and that our voice must be heard and respected. We were refused and discarded!” Clearly the Government said one thing at the Interchurch Task Force inquiry and in practice did another.

“We have made known the Metis Nation’s willingness to work with Manitoba, Manitoba Hydro, and NCN to ensure we were properly consulted, accommodated, and fully involved as partners in northern hydro development including Wuskwatim,” President Chartrand said. “Therefore we cannot understand how Manitoba Hydro and NCN staff can now suggest at the Clean Environment Commission Hearings that Manitoba Hydro was unaware of the need to consult with the Metis Nation.”

“We’ve met with Manitoba Ministers responsible for Hydro, Greg Selinger and Tim Sale, Hydro President Bob Brennan, and Hydro Chairman Vic Schroeder, to deal with past grievances, and in the attempt to get us involved in future consultations, including those needed for the Wuskwatim Projects,” Chartrand said. “Based on their actions to date, Metis concerns appear to have fallen on deaf ears.”

“We’ve also met with NCN Chief Primrose,” said President Chartrand, “At our August 7, 2003 meeting we appreciated his acknowledgement that proper and meaningful consultation of the Metis, by proponents and by government, will require full MMF participation. We also appreciated his promise for assistance in ensuring that the MMF would be fully involved in the upcoming consultations as part of the

licencing and permitting process for the Wuskwatim projects.”

In contrast to the Chief’s assurances to the Metis Leadership, recently there have been contradictory statements by NCN Councilor Elvis Thomas at the Clean Environment Commission Hearings, and by NCN staff in the media, suggesting the Metis do not have an Aboriginal right to be consulted.

According to President Chartrand, these statements by Councilor Thomas are “in complete opposition to assurances given by NCN Vice Chief David Spence to the Metis when he attended a January 5, 2004, MMF meeting in The Pas Region.” President Chartrand explained that “Vice Chief Spence said that NCN is open minded and willing to work with the Metis, that they want to engage the Metis more appropriately, that our concerns would be dealt with, and the Metis consulted properly.”

In response to the contradictions now apparent in NCN’s statements, President Chartrand has said, “to date, the MMF has not taken a position against the proposed Wuskwatim Projects. In fact, we have supported NCN, and other First Nations, in their struggle to provide much-needed social initiatives through wise economic investments. Despite our support, rather than work together to ensure both our peoples are treated fairly and equitably, recent NCN public statements appear to be an attempt to deny us our respect and dignity, as well as our constitutional protection, that is expected by all Aboriginal peoples.”

There are no clear reasons as to why the statements being made by Government, Hydro, and NCN, should be so contradictory in nature, and opposed to earlier statements. Why on one hand are the Metis being told they will be consulted, while on the other hand their right to be consulted is being totally denied? Is this a pattern that will affect only the Metis? Or, is this an indication that the web of false promises and outright denial that began in the 1960’s and 1970’s will continue into the future? If the Metis are being treated badly today, what does this mean for other Aboriginal peoples, including the NCN Membership, in the future?

President Chartrand has publicly stated that if their request for consultation is not fulfilled, “the MMF will consider all options in our future response to a denial.” The MMF President has indicated that these options may include going to court to protect the rights of the Metis people and the future of the Metis Nation.

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