

## Splitting a Nation Similar to Splitting an Atom

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When you split a Nation, you get the same effect as when you split an atom: Fallout ensues. Although it is well known that the Algonquin Nation has resided at the heart of what is now the Canadian Nation, through Colonial Law the Algonquin have been divided by the Ottawa River, the river that once united them. Today, provincial borders, language, religion, legal systems, and the land claims and self-government process further divide the Algonquin Nation.



The Algonquin have a long history of petitioning the governments for their land and land related rights. It was not until 1983 when the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation, through submitting a contemporary land claim, had their rights accepted as valid and legitimate by the governments of Canada. Although Pikwàkanagàn are the only federally recognized Algonquin band in Ontario, in actuality Algonquin traditional territory is home to several other non-status communities. Further, although there was some evolution where these non-status communities and their leaders were brought into the land claims and self-government process, this process has fallen apart three times. In 2002, Pikwàkanagàn as well as several other leaders and their communities, left the process because they were unhappy with particular individuals. While it has been argued that an election process in 2005 patched up the differences and that the process is back on track, this cannot be any farther from the truth.

What in fact happened was the establishment of a severely flawed protocol agreement and election process, which completely lacked structures of good governance and measures of gender equality. Despite Gathering Strength's, the official response to RCAP, recommendation that an effort must be made to include women in processes of self-government, the efforts of several women such as Melinda Turcotte, Leah Scott, and myself were undermined. For example, the candidates' meetings were scheduled with no discussion or consultation with us. As a result, Turcotte and Scott were unable to attend their own candidates' meeting. In addition, the process of selecting and electing leaders was skewed due to the Ontario Ministry of Natural

Resources shaping the process. In short, what the Ministry did was choose and offer particular individuals the responsibility of distributing hunting tags to non-status Algonquin.

Notwithstanding these issues, Bob LaValley of WHIMASAB, who opted not to run in the election process, had his community co-opted. LaValley is unhappy about the power that Pikwàkanagàn has in the process over the larger non-status body as well as other issues. In addition to LaValley's boycott, Ardoch First Nation under Chief Randy Cota refused to participate. Within this process there was also an attempt to co-opt Cota's community. Furthermore, the Kichesipirini First Nation under Paula LaPierre refuses to be involved in the negotiation process due to the structures or possibly, better said, lack of structures guiding the process. And further, more recently, Paul Lamothe, leader of Ottawa Algonquin First Nation, left the Algonquin negotiation table. Thus, the Algonquin process has not been patched up, as some may have us believe.

Ardoch First Nation who has been the strongest proponent against the current land claims and self-government process recognizes the many problems inherent. The current land claims and self-government process forces Indigenous Nations to negotiate under unilaterally drafted federal policies where tight parameters of negotiations are imposed, and where the only right they would have is the right to extinguish or release their land and land related rights. Succinctly, Ardoch refuses to be involved because it is a process that is firmly rooted in Colonial Law versus Algonquin Law and is truly not rooted in reconciliation as has been suggested by the state.

Fortunately for them, Ardoch First Nation has a long history in the Valley and a long history of maintaining their relationships to the natural world. Under honorary Chief Harold Perry, Ardoch First Nation is a community that continues to understand that what we as humans do to the earth we embody. Ardoch have, for example, proven successful in their efforts to protect the natural rice and the Tay River watershed. More recently, in June 2007, Ardoch First Nation, brave and committed as they are, set up a base camp to protest Frontenac Ventures Corporation from engaging in rock sampling to determine its uranium content. Through an antiquated Mining Act, the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines granted Frontenac Ventures an exploration permit to drill 200 holes with absolutely no consultation with Ardoch or the surrounding settler communities.

When mediation failed, Frontenac Ventures achieved a court injunction to stop the Algonquin and settler protestors who have united against the cause. Despite this, concerned about their safety, their land, and their water supply, the protest continued. Uranium, with its atomic weight of 238, 235, and 234, is the heaviest metal that can be mined from the earth. The dangers of uranium mining and subsequent gamma radiation due to radioactive decay are real and have been well documented. Uranium mining can cause cancer of the trachea, bronchus, lungs, and bones, as well as leave behind mountains of radioactive tailings and scar the earth horribly. As a result of their refusal to stop protesting, in February 2008, Chief Paula Sherman and Robert Lovelace have been fined and imprisoned, respectively, for their participation in the protest. While Sherman was fined \$15,000, Lovelace was fined \$25,000 and imprisoned for six months with an additional \$2,000 added for every day he operates under Algonquin Law and

thus refuses to abide by the court injunction. Further to this, Ardoch First Nation was fined an additional \$10,000.



**Robert Lovelace**



**Paula Sherman**

It was through confederation in 1867 when Indigenous people became the jurisdiction of the federal government, and when the land and resources became the jurisdiction of the provincial governments. Today, approximately 10 Algonquin communities are negotiating with the federal and provincial governments. Although this table issued a moratorium on mining, it should be clear that the process of negotiations is merely a mockery. Obviously, the governments of Canada are not negotiating in good faith when issuing permits to corporations such as Frontenac Ventures. Obviously, the leaders at the table and the Algonquin people they represent have no collective power in the process of negotiating. Otherwise, they would simply shut the negotiation table down and demand a better deal and their right to protect the natural world.

Regardless of this disappointment with the façade of an Algonquin negotiation table, the governments of Canada will never achieve the finality and closure they desire through their severely flawed land claims and self-government process. Just as our Algonquin ancestors worked hard to establish a historical archive of their resistance to Colonial Law, the resistance by Ardoch First Nation is clearly documented. The resistance of Ardoch First Nation and their desire to maintain jurisdiction and their relationship with the natural world under Algonquin Law has achieved international attention. The jailing of Robert Lovelace, fining of Chief Paula Sherman and Ardoch First Nation is no way for the governments of Canada to achieve finality or engage in reconciliation.

Just as the fallout of uranium mining has a half-life of billions of years, the fallout from fracturing the Algonquin Nation will continue to plague the Canadian Nation for time immemorial. Political prisoner Robert Lovelace has clearly become a contemporary icon of Algonquin resistance to colonial oppression that will leave a dark imprint on Canada's history. I am truly humbled by Robert's commitment to who my ancestors were, who I am, and to all future people of the Ottawa River Valley.

This article is dedicated to Ardoch First Nation as well as my friend Barbara Kanabe who's father, Albert Kanabe (1938-2007) has recently passed away due to the effects of uranium mining, and who herself suffers for uranium poisoning and thus has great difficulty breathing. Both Barbara and her father worked as uranium miners in Elliot Lake.

Ardoch First Nation is sometimes known as Ardoch First Nation and Allies

Randy Cota is a father of four children, is co-Chief of Ardoch First Nation. He is employed with the Ontario Provincial Police.

Robert Lovelace who is a well-respected adopted Algonquin through Algonquin Law is a single father of four minor children, is the Aboriginal Counsellor at Fleming College in Peterborough, and a Sessional Lecturer at Queen's University, Global Development Studies.

Paula Sherman is a single mother of five children, is co-Chief of Ardoch First Nation and an Assistant Professor at Trent University, Indigenous Studies.

Bonita Lawrence and Susan DeLisle are Ardoch First Nation allies and dedicated friends of Robert Lovelace covering his academic responsibilities at Queen's University while he is incarcerated in Lindsay, Ontario at the Central East Correction Centre.

Photos of Robert and Paula are borrowed from the Community Coalition Against Mining Uranium (CCAMU) website, which can be found at <http://www.ccamu.ca/>.

To support the Ardoch First Nation cause please sign the following petitions:

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/ccamu/>

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/aafn/>

Many people have asked how they can help Robert and his family in this difficult and stressful situation. You can make donations to be held in trust by sending a cheque made out to C. Reid, in trust for the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation. The cheque should be mailed to:

**Christopher M. Reid  
Barrister & Solicitor  
154 Monarch Park Ave.  
Toronto, ON M4J 4R6**

**Tel: (416) 446-9928  
Fax: (416) 466-1852**

*Lynn Gehl is a PhD candidate at Trent University, Indigenous Studies. Her dissertation work situates the Algonquin Nation within the history of the treaty and land claims process in Canada.*