

**Coroner's Inquest into the Death of Cpl Marcel Lemay  
(Kanatiao's Opening Statements)**

A Coroner's Inquest was held into the death of Cpl. Marcel Lemay, who was killed during the July 11, 1990 raid on the barricades in the Pines at Kanesatake. I monitored the progress of the inquest over the year following my first round of testimony. I watched the behaviour of those who claimed to be upholding our traditional ways.

I also watched the upswell of damning media coverage of the "economic activities" of some of our people. In the face of mounting animosity directed at all Aboriginal people, I contacted the inquest lawyer and told him I wanted to testify a second time.

The so-called Warrior Society and many others labeled me a traitor following my testimony. I've been living in self-imposed exile ever since, not wanting to expose my children to the increased hatred that has consumed Kanesatake since 1990.

***April 8, 1993***

The events which led to July 11, 1990 must be seen in their historical context, the effects of which are still being felt today. Kanesatake has no viable land or economic base. This has created serious problems in the community. Despite past decisions pertaining to our situation, Kanesatake still has a strong claim in the area.

Kanesatake has had a long history of internal political problems. This is due, to a large degree, to outside interference. If not for this interference, the traditional government would still be in place and we would probably have fewer problems today.

Since I began my testimony, I have been hesitant about answering certain questions put to me. I know that my hesitation has been obvious.

There are reasons for this:

- I don't see how this process promotes peace and healing. It is the primary goal of our government to concentrate on peace, friendship and respect. However, when our government was marginalized and disempowered, the people were also disempowered. This has led to a loss of culture, a loss of identity, and frustration.
- I have also been concerned about the safety of my family. I am still concerned at this moment. We have no protection in this process.
- The questions that have been put to me are very difficult to answer. I ask you to consider how you would act if the roles were reversed—if your family's safety were involved and you were being asked these questions.

***March 29, 1994***

Before I begin, I wish to say a few words. I understand that when my Sub-Chief, Curtis Nelson, appeared here, he offered condolences on behalf of the Bear clan to the family of Cpl. Lemay, who is the subject of this inquest. I wish to do the same this morning. I would also like to extend my condolences to the families of Joe Armstrong, Matthew Pyke, Jr. Edwards, to anyone who lost a friend or relative as a result

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of the so-called Mohawk crisis, and to the families of the 75 people who have died in Akwesasne over the past 8 years.

I have been following the progress of your inquiry. I acknowledge and commend your extraordinary patience and tolerance during this process. You have demonstrated, I think, some of the qualities we seek when considering candidates for title positions. It is unfortunate that you have, in some cases to date, been rewarded with deceit and disrespect. I have watched as so-called believers in the Great Law and the ways of the Rotinonsionni have misled you.

Some have come before you and conducted the traditional opening and wampum ceremonies. Then, they have proceeded to desecrate these ceremonies and the ways of the Rotinonsionni by answering your questions with lies and half truths, or by refusing to answer altogether. Some have led you to believe that the Great Law prevents them from providing you the information you require to fulfill your mandate. Some have said they must consult the Clan Mothers, Chiefs and people before they can speak to you.

To my knowledge, they never sought to consult the Confederacy. Had they done so they would likely have been told they don't need a mandate to speak to you, for they do so on their own behalf, not on behalf of the Confederacy. They would also have been told there is nothing in the Great Law that prevents anyone from telling the truth to anybody, anywhere at anytime. In fact, the Great Law and the way of life of the Rotinonsionni are based on truth, honour and respect.

Some of the people who have appeared before you would lead you to believe the summer of 1990 was a clash between the Mohawk Nation/Iroquois Confederacy and Canada. It was not. It is my view that the summer of 1990 was an insurrection by the so-called warrior society. These people would have you believe the warrior society is there to protect the legitimate rights of the Rotinonsionni. They took an honourable and legitimate cause and exploited it for personal gain in an attempt to gain legitimacy and control in our communities.

There is currently a debate within our society on the existence of, and need for, a warrior society. When people ask me to explain this debate, I use the analogy of Stormin' Norman Scwartzkopf, the US general who went to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein. When he was told by the president at the time to go in there and fulfill his mandate, he did that, and they fought for a number of days or weeks. When the president decided it was enough, he sent the order to the general to stop, and he did. Even though he did not agree with his boss' order, he stopped.

So, if we are going to have a debate within our society about the existence of a Warrior Society and we decide that, yes, maybe we do need some sort of military component within our society, then it has to be part of a structure within our society.

Unfortunately, the reality today is that's not the case. There are people who have taken it upon themselves to try to usurp the traditional government. We do have honourable men and women who work hard to further the cause of the Rotinonsionni. Some of them are also supportive of warrior society. The main people behind the warrior movement, however, have more personal and greedy ambitions in mind—they want power and control. This may not be obvious to some people.

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I do believe they wanted a confrontation. What leads me to this conclusion is when we were in Dorval in late August, when the Confederacy intervened after negotiations with the “warriors” had broken down. At one point, one of our negotiators was approached by people who are involved with the “Warrior Society”. Our negotiator was chastised for “ruining everything” with these negotiations. They told him they wanted negotiations to break down. They wanted the army to attack the barricades in Kanesatake and Kahnawake and that, when the shooting stopped and they dragged Canada back to the table, the only issue to be negotiated would be the unconditional sovereignty of the Mohawk Nation. This was the thinking at the time.

During the height of the recent media frenzy over the cigarette trade, the news was filled with rhetoric of how people involved in that trade were asserting their sovereignty and their inherent right to trade. I have tried to put myself in the place of average Canadians who are faced with this superficial media coverage.

Average Canadians probably related this rhetoric to something they are beginning to understand because it has been the focus of much attention—the exercising of our inherent right to self-government.

They have probably wondered, is that what the Mohawks mean by self-government – the right to trade whatever they want, the right to build up an arsenal and equip a private army, as they have bragged? Canadians have probably wondered, is that what my governments are asking me to support and help pay for? Is that what all Mohawks are striving for?

Today, I'm telling you that my answer to that question is no. Not all Rotinonsionni agree with the actions of this relatively small, but powerful element in our society who flout all law, including their own—the one they claim to be upholding and respecting.

They are not practicing traditional ways. They have taken capitalism to new depths. They have exploited collective rights and responsibilities to justify their involvement in the tobacco trade and other activities. The only thing the communities share equally is the danger and hardship that results from outside forces intervening to stop these activities. In so doing, they have abdicated all responsibilities towards their people.

The truth is, true believers in the ways of the Rotinonsionni respect law. I have been taught that, if you respect your own law, you will respect all law and you will act accordingly. Also, if you respect yourself, you will respect all life. These people turned their backs on their own law.

Indeed they turned on their own people. Their recruiters have sought out the dysfunctional in our society for they are the easiest to manipulate. They know there is much frustration, despair and anger among today's youth and they seek to exploit it.

I have put this poster up behind me to illustrate their message. This is a poster they have brought out in recent years. It is a very powerful poster that is very well done. But the message, to me, is twisted and this poster is very dangerous. You will notice—the thing that disturbs me the most—is the little baby in front holding what appears to be a gun.

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I have shown this poster to different people their reaction has largely been the same—that it is appalling. It sends a generational message of condoning violence as a means to an end. It implies hatred and racism and it is not productive.

There are things that strike me about this poster which I would like to share with you. The first thing that struck me is that the protector in this poster is not standing between the threat and what he is protecting. Indeed, he is standing behind it. He is standing behind the future generations. That is one message.

One person who saw the poster—who is not aboriginal—commented that it seems to disempower women, because the only one who seems vulnerable is the girl who is sitting there. That is another message. The other thing that disturbs me in that poster is there are no elders. I do not know how to explain that but those are my feelings about the poster.

Many of those who have appeared before you have demanded a full, independent, inquiry into the causes of the 1990 crisis. In essence your investigation meets—to an extent—that demand. Your mandate is broad enough to permit you to consider the historical context of the Kanesatake situation.

Earlier I mentioned the Mohawks who have died in recent years. If an investigation is ever launched into these deaths, should our people expect that witnesses tell all they know so that the truth may be known?

Do the families not have the right to know the truth to the fullest extent possible? The warriors and their supporters speak of honour and how noble it is to defend our rights, people and territory.

If their cause is so honourable and legitimate, why then do they now act as they do?

I am here today to set the record straight. I have had time to reflect and to think about the events I was involved in. Many of the questions put to me last year were unexpected and I was under some stress due to the nature of your process.

Many things have come back to me since and I realize I was mistaken in some of my answers. In closing my opening remarks, I want to point out that I have not asked anyone for a mandate to speak as I speak for myself only. I want to point that out for the record.