

## The Role of Algonquin Allies or An Ally Bill of Responsibilities

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As most people know I have been quite vocal about the contemporary land claims and self-government process. I have spoken out about how it is that final agreements are pitiful and about the limitations of unilaterally constructed and imposed federal policy that guide the process. I have also critiqued the Algonquin land claims and self-government process in Ontario in terms of governance matters such as: the lack of a non-partisan administrative arm to disseminate all interim benefits; the lack of gender balance; and as a process that fails to harness qualified and bondable leaders. I have also spoken out about the moment when particular Algonquin “leaders” projected a reactionary anti-intellectual campaign to discredit those Algonquin people who carry important and useful theoretical, historical, and political knowledge.

Recently, I was really perturbed when a cultural organization where I was a non-voting member (because I am non-status Algonquin person), asked non-Indigenous and non-Algonquin allies to help organize a “Unity Assembly” under the Algonquin land claims and self-government mandate. I was floored by the practice of allies facilitating the Algonquin land claims and self-government mandate, the very process that is rooted in poor governance practices. Allies, I instinctively knew, are not supposed to be relied on in this way.

In Indigenous people’s efforts in moving toward greater liberation, self-government, and thus wellness, many Indigenous Nations, communities, and organizations are beginning to rely upon allies and ally groups. Indigenous people need help in eliminating oppressive power structures and as such this assistance is very much appreciated. Despite this, because many allies fail to engage in critical thought about what they have to contribute, many allies merely serve in furthering the oppression Indigenous people are faced with, or undermine Indigenous organizational mandates – the very mandates that they claim to be working within. We must, and our allies must also, keep in the forefront of our minds that the road to colonial oppression was paved with the good intentions of others. Worse yet, Indigenous people must also keep in mind that many allies may merely be fulfilling their own needs or the needs of a personal friend versus that of the Indigenous Nation, community, or organization they claim to be working with.

Whatever decision and actions an ally may take will undoubtedly be thought-provoking and potentially controversial. Regardless of this, allies must critically reflect and act within these critical reflections versus think they know what is best or that their needs are more important. Although admittedly not without controversy, possibly these “**Ally Bill of Responsibilities**” will help allies and Indigenous people from falling into the trap of good intentions. This list primarily relies on my personal experience as well as readings by Anne Bishop.

## **Ally Bill of Responsibilities**

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A responsible ally:

- ✓ must understand that they are secondary to the Indigenous people that they are working for and that they seek to serve. They must take a back seat and listen more than speak;
- ✓ is aware of their privileges and discusses them openly. This action will serve to challenge larger oppressive power structures;
- ✓ does not act out of guilt, but rather out of a genuine interest in challenging the larger oppressive power structures;
- ✓ is fully grounded in their own ancestral history and culture. They need to sit in this knowledge with confidence and pride; otherwise the “wannabe syndrome” could merely undermine the people’s efforts;
- ✓ reflects on and embraces their ignorance of the group’s oppression and always holds this ignorance in the forefront of their mind. Otherwise, their ignorance could merely perpetuate the oppression;
- ✓ is aware of and understands the larger oppressive power structures that serve to hold certain groups and certain people down. One way to do this is to draw parallels through critically reflecting on their own experiences with oppressive power structures. Reflecting on their subjectivity in this way they ensure critical thought or what others call objectivity. In taking this approach, these parallels will serve to ensure that allies are not perpetuating the oppression;
- ✓ constantly listens and reflects through the medium of subjectivity and critical thought versus merely their subjectivity. This will serve to ensure that they avoid the trap that they or their personal friends know what is best. This act will also serve to avoid the trap of naively following a leader or for that matter a group of leaders;
- ✓ strives to remain a critical thinker and seeks out the knowledge and wisdom of the critical thinkers in the group. Allies cannot assume that all people are critical thinkers and have a good understanding of the larger power structures of oppression;
- ✓ ensures that a community consensus, or understanding, has been established in terms of what their role as an ally is. Otherwise, the efforts of the people will be undermined due to a lack of consultation and agreement;
- ✓ ensures that the needs of the most oppressed – women, children, elderly, and disabled – are served in the effort or movement that they are supporting. Otherwise, they may be engaging in a process that is inadequate and thus merely serving to fortify the larger power structures

of oppression. Alternatively, their good intentions may not serve those who need it most. Rather, they may be making the oppression worse;

- ✓ understands and reflects on the prevalence and dynamics of lateral oppression and horizontal violence on and within oppressed groups and components of the group, such as women, and seeks to ensure that their actions do not encourage it;
- ✓ ensures that they are supporting a leader's, group of leaders', or a movement's efforts that serve the needs of the people. For example, do the community people find this leader's efforts useful, interesting, engaging, and thus empowering? If not, allies should consider whether the efforts are moving in a questionable or possibly an inadequate direction, or worse yet that their efforts are being manipulated and thus undermined possibly for economic and political reasons;
- ✓ understands that sometimes allies are merely manipulatively chosen to further a leader's agenda versus the Indigenous Nations', communities', or organizations' concerns, and when this situation occurs act accordingly;
- ✓ does not take up the space and resources, physical and financial, of the oppressed group, to avoid undermining the process of liberation;
- ✓ does not take up time at community meetings and community events. This is not their place. Allies cannot perceive the larger oppressive power structures as clearly as members of the oppressed group can – that is if they are aware and understand; And finally,
- ✓ accepts the responsibility of learning and reading more about their role as an effective ally.

### **Works Referenced**

Bishop, Anne. "Becoming an Ally." July 2009 <<http://www.becominganally.ca/>>.

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