Our challenge is to work with the difference, not disengage from it.

By National Indigenous Times

guest columnist Scott Gorringe

Mithaka man, Scott Gorringe ... “Just because there are opposing views on the ways to approach Indigenous challenges it shouldn’t mean one is more legitimate/real than the other.”

If only they could use their power to broker talks between government and other Indigenous people who have different aspirations to those of their political masters, rather than strive for control over them, and not impose their will. Today’s current leadership represents a grab at power and is not determined by the political masters and the agendas of the mainstream media, rather than a genuine and sincere attempt to engage meaningfully with Indigenous people.

The way government continues to selectively engage with Indigenous people and leaders, on behalf of all Indigenous peoples needs to be seriously challenged. While I assume it is easier and less challenging for a government with a smaller number of people it should never be used as an excuse to engage only with leaders who think the same way they do. This is not democratic, this resembles more of a dictatorship.

As I have stated in the previous article, this challenge is about a discourse of deficit and a discourse of deficiency, it’s not about who are the “real First Nation leaders” and who isn’t. We are different and our leadership must embrace the diversity and strength from these views. “Real” and “legitimate” leaders should not be the major focus of Indigenous affairs.

Further, the National Indigenous Times gets headlines right; “Scott Gorringe says it’s time legitimate leaders take back control of Indigenous agenda”. While the reader may draw that conclusion from the context, the perception is one of “real First Nation leaders” and “legitimate leaders” are examples of the very constructs of deficit discourse I am attempting to eliminate from the Indigenous space.

While I admire Indigenous people who support other Indigenous people’s aspirations; I loathe the perception they know what is best for all. Unknowingly we participate in it as well, we don’t attempt to engage with Indigenous to reinforce a perception that exists in the formulation of disunity amongst the “blacks” – or not. As well, they can provoke a strength-based discourse.

The power is within the difference, not the other. The real tragedy here is that, if these are the aspirations of Indigenous leaders, and who Indigenous people consider are the “real” or “legitimate” Indigenous leaders. It indicates that Indigenous leaders are not working in their communities to engage and create a stand-off between who a government represents, and who has the power to speak for whom. The “never ending fight” between Indigenous and Indigenous, and the real question about who has the right to speak for whom.

The “never ending fight” is a distraction that assists in silencing the voices of Indigenous people, and disempowers them. Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike need to work with Indigenous, and devalues the positive contributions we can all make to end them.

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