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Policy Briefing Economic Reconciliation

Reconciliation isn't up to Indigenous folks

It is up to those reconciling the reality that their place in Canada has become what it is by the intentional and invisible acts of squashing Indigenous peoples' own economic abilities.

Signa Daum Shanks

What to say about two different concepts that keep coming up separately? As all of us ponder how to think about health and personal finances, we can and must also shift to the way our economic conditions and reconciliation are connected. And, by gum, we need to be honest and also realize that 'economic' is unfortunately also linked to race and racism in this country.

First, let's check our understandings of definitions. Economics is not just about the GDP or our bank accounts. It's about how items, immediate situations, and long-term trends are valued. The value will shift on how secure, attainable or memorable those things are considered. A credit score can be impactful, but so can a forest to an old member of a community. A car can define us, but so can whether a language is passed down from generation to generation. When we are accurate about the places where we attain a benefit, discussing economic conditions broadens.

In that broadening, then, we can also no-

tice how individuals, groups, and governments have decided to protect what is theirs. Whether a financial goal, a type of authority, or just the ability to state 'What I say, goes.' It is in admitting this quality of people and institutions where we can really see how official and unspoken decisions to use race as a weapon have happened. The Indian Act was an overt announcement. The rejecting of a rental application could be silently enforced. Whatever the example any of us can recall of when assumptions of race were impactful on an action by someone in power, we can yet again see racism in our history. That racism has inspired and then reinforced economic disparities for non-whites in this country, and Indigenous peoples have felt its wrath in daily and in incredibly significant ways.

To make reconciliation have any teeth, then, we have to be honest about the places where economic disparities have and continue to occur. For centuries, due to the imposition of religions, the impact of diseases, the threats of starvation, and the criminalizing of culture, Indigenous

Red Sky Performance dancers, pictured Sept. 30, 2019, honouring the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation ceremony at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Que. Until the rest of Canada realizes that instability, whether monetary or cultural, is so incredibly experienced by Indigenous individuals, families and governments, reconciliation will continue to be the pipe dream it has appeared to be over the past decade, writes Signa Daum Shanks.

The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

peoples have not been able to enter the early stages of circles with knowledge, incentives, and support. Being absent from those circles, like any family contacts or generational benefits, follow Indigenous descendants to today. When an Indigenous person is arrested, do we think the same assumptions about her are imagined by those who witness it? She is condemned by race, and she will be harmed in more ways than the details sheet at a police station.

So when you start having conversations about economics and reconciliation, don't think it's just about making employment circles' cultural makeup sta-

tistically similar to population percentages. Don't think it's about being kind on June 21 to someone you think is of Indigenous heritage. It's about realizing that when you can contribute to a pension, when you go on a weekend getaway, when you purchase Secret Path, true reconciliation would be to simultaneously impact Indigenous lives in a form valued to Indigenous peoples. Because reconciliation isn't up to Indigenous folks. It is up to those reconciling the reality that their place in Canada has become what it is by the intentional and invisible acts of squashing Indigenous peoples' own economic abilities. In the concept of truth and reconciliation, improving economic disparities means first and foremost spending more time on the truth of how frequently non-Indigenous peoples sail past Indigenous individuals.

We should want more equally spread economic stability. It is that stability, rather than a higher income alone, that helps all of us plan for the future, be mentally strong, and contribute to any circle we belong to. Indigenous peoples' instability, purposely constructed by non-Indigenous forces, is what non-Indigenous parties must work on if they truly want to be seen as democratic, economically driven, or just plain kind. Until the rest of Canada realizes that instability, whether monetary or cultural, is so experienced by intensely Indigenous individuals, families and governments, reconciliation will continue to be the pipe dream it has appeared to be over the past decade. Be honest about where your economic relations truly are, and then become closer to inventing better personal, political, and national efforts that can improve Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations.

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Opinion