

Discussion Paper on Trauma

Synopsis

If Manitoba Hydro is to find a sustainable presence in Pimicikamak territory it needs to understand the environment it is creating in terms of the Pimicikamak people's experience. The concept of trauma engages a holistic view that may aid in building a new relationship.

A Brief History

An ongoing national trauma afflicts the Pimicikamak people. It began almost 140 years ago. Entered into in good faith to protect the settlers, Treaty 5 was soon revealed to be a genocidal fraud. Like other indigenous peoples in Canada, Pimicikamak endured governmental policies that were designed to exterminate it as a people and separate it from its territory. Plainly this trauma did not begin with Manitoba Hydro.

Pimicikamak survived better than some of Canada's indigenous peoples. Thanks in part to the situation of its territory, some of the worst afflictions largely passed it by. Then in the 1960s Manitoba Hydro built Kelsey. Its dam and generating station began to ruin Sipiwesk, the ancient heartland of the Pimicikamak people.

By the 1970s Manitoba Hydro was taking over the upper Nelson River including Cross Lake, a spectacularly beautiful place where many generations lived. It promised that its operations would cause no serious problems. The Premier of Manitoba wrote to every resident promising that life with Manitoba Hydro would only get better. In 1977 Manitoba Hydro (backed by the two Crown governments) undertook to deal with any problems that might arise. Soon the sparkling clear waters, spectacular white-sand beaches and smooth ice of Cross Lake were painful memories and it became clear that the Crown parties had no intention of carrying out their undertakings.

Three times since then the Pimicikamak people has acted peacefully but with increasing vigor to compel a change of Crown-party behavior. Three times the parties undertook to change their ways. And three times there has been no real change. The Crown parties have shown themselves to be locked into genocidal policies.

The last action, in 2014, created fundamental change for Pimicikamak. Its citizens now know that by collective action it can evict Manitoba Hydro from its territory.

Trauma

Manitoba Hydro is an uninvited guest in Pimicikamak territory. For five decades it has been the principal agent of trauma for the Pimicikamak people. Experts can dissect the trauma into categories such as national, spiritual, ecological, psychological, social, physical, emotional or economic. They can focus on specific aspects with labels like governance, health, transportation, exercise, diet, family life, self-respect, morbidity, suicides, criminality, recreation and employment. But Pimicikamak citizens do not

experience the trauma as categories or labels. For them it is a catastrophic presence that dominates their lives and contributes to their deaths. For Pimicikamak, Manitoba Hydro is the lead agency of ongoing national trauma.

Today the national trauma caused by Manitoba Hydro's presence and operations in Pimicikamak territory *increases* over time. This presence is unsustainable. Understanding the situation in terms of national trauma offers a window of opportunity. Manitoba Hydro can partner with Pimicikamak to reverse the trend and *decrease* total trauma. This offers a foundation for a new and potentially sustainable relationship.

This will need vigorous and conscientious action of a kind that until now has been entirely lacking. The question for Manitoba Hydro is: Does it have an alternative?

Evolution of the Problem

The NFA might have been workable if the effects had in fact been minor and if the Crown parties had begun an honest effort to address them in 1978. But in hindsight, being founded as treaties tend to be on precepts like the Honour of the Crown, it was a bit naïve. It paid insufficient heed to institutional behavior.

Federal officials (it later emerged) procured ratification of the NFA by certifying to Cabinet that there were no financial implications for Canada. This prevented any budgetary provision, leaving the other two Crown parties holding the bag. And departmental officials, seeing NFA communities had access to "NFA benefits", cut access to normal programs, thus exacerbating trauma. Band-based genocidal policies proceeded unabated.

The NFA soon became the Northern Flood Disagreement. It provides an arbitration instrument to resolve disagreements. This instrument cannot handle wholesale failure to implement. Manitoba Hydro came to view the NFA as a set of disputable obligations, most of which could never be litigated. Based on this view it estimated its liability to "Cross Lake Band" at \$6 million per year. Its approach rests on a premise that the Pimicikamak people would indefinitely lend countenance to it.

In 1985 the NDP government of Manitoba adopted a policy of refusing to implement the NFA and of buying out its beneficiaries (as it conceived them) under duress. "They are poor. They'll take the money," Minister Wilson Parasiuk said.

The Crown parties made common cause in implementing "the Manitoba scheme". Poorly-disguised buy-out schemes kept showing up even after the 1997 *Pimicikamak NFA Implementation Law* denounced the then-latest as fraudulent and directed the Band Council not to sign it. Paragraph 8 of that law reads: "The Nation apprehends a course of conduct involving systematic denial, by representatives of the parties, of rights under the Agreement, amounting to a conspiracy to commit genocide by

depriving the Nation and its citizens of their human rights, their aboriginal and Treaty rights, and their means of survival as a people.’

Nonetheless successive Boards and CEO’s of Manitoba Hydro dug themselves deeper into the hole by approving financial statements that assume it can rely on this approach indefinitely, and thus understate its liabilities and fail to disclose huge risks its chosen course of conduct is creating for its assets.

A New Framework

The old rights and liabilities framework is in collapse. What can replace it?

Pimicikamak proposes that both parties should focus on responsibilities. They should build a new relationship by working together on reducing national trauma with a focus on existing operations and future opportunities.

The immediate objective—needed by both parties—is for Manitoba Hydro to transition from unwelcome intruder to accepted guest.

This should shift Manitoba Hydro’s decision-making onto a firmer policy foundation. That is, it should aim to do what is in its own best interests and to become more aware of where those interests lie.

The Opportunity

A key benefit of seeing trauma as a whole is that it offers opportunity to find solutions as a whole. There are reasons to expect this to be far more effective. In the medical analogy, the need is to address the traumatized patient as a whole person. Thus viewing an evolving inter-related mix of jointly-planned solutions such as

- (a) cleaning up shorelines,
- (b) new health facilities,
- (c) Ininiwi Pimatisiwin,
- (d) restored governance,
- (e) improved Kelsey operating rules,
- (f) archaeology,
- (g) a forestry venture . . .

as a coherent whole offers a way for both parties to begin reducing total trauma and to build a sustainable relationship.