



Dustin Brant, 19, is prepared to stand up for "my land and my people", doing what he believes is right.



A sign warns against unauthorized people entering an area occupied by the Mohawks near the 401 and Belleville.

# 'Fight for your rights'

Natives are preparing to stand up and make a "spectacular statement" tomorrow for what they believe in.

Shawn Brant, the now prominent spokesman for the Tyendinaga Mohawksright, talks to Jim Peets, 54, from Napanee.



PHOTOS BY JORGE BARRERA/SUN MEDIA

Someone picks up a small drum and begins to sing, others join around a growing fire bursting from large log stumps cracking in the stillness of the dying evening.

Night settles as Mohawk songs blanket the fields that surround this place with the wooden hand-scrawled sign: "Authorized Mohawks Only." It is fastened to a stop sign that hangs from the open iron entrance gate. Above, the defiant red warrior and purple Confederacy flags hang limp.

The nearly four month-long occupation tucked out of sight, not far from Hwy. 401 near Belleville, might have gone unnoticed were it not for last April's 30-hour blockade of the nearby main CN line. The OPP charged several Mohawks involved and CN sued.

The Tyendinaga Mohawks moved in after the Ontario government refused to pull a licence given to a local businessman to mine the quarry. The federal government has admitted the land is Mohawk territory, but the land was allowed to be quarried while negotiations were ongoing.

The territory belongs to an area called the Culbertson Tract, which includes a large chunk of the nearby town of Deseronto, given to the Mohawks by the British after they fought side by side against the Americans during the Revolution.

Memories are fresh here of last April's OPP raid on Six Nations in Caledonia and of the sniper bullet that killed Dudley George in Ipperwash during a land reclamation operation such as this one. It has influenced the layout of the forward compound.

There is an unfinished wall of large boulders along the fire pit. Near the entrance three trailers sit for the comfort of the night watchmen. Nearby, a large flower sits atop a plastic toddler play-set next to a large trampoline and several haystacks.

There is talk of preparing for anything "they" might bring.

"We are worth seven of them," says one young warrior.

"We are worth a hundred of them," responds another.

The Mohawks here say they are preparing to make a spectacular statement on June 29. Highway, railways and bridges are all on the hit list.

OPP Commissioner Julian Fantino admits his force faces a difficult job if blockades or other similar actions flare up. The bullet that killed George

hangs from the force's neck like a millstone and Fantino says the OPP won't enforce the law "at all cost."

"There will be a need for us to intervene in circumstances where there is a law and order mandate," he says. "It will be according to a tempered, reasoned approach as opposed to going in there and creating more anxiety or escalating the situation."

All day, conversations on the site have veered toward the Ipperwash report on Dudley's death released the day before. The report's recommendation that the land be given back to the Stoney and Kettle Point First Nations falls flat here.

"Is that the new standard? That someone has to die?" says Shawn Brant, the now prominent spokesman for the Tyendinaga Mohawks.

It seems the site's roots extend deep into the community. The cycle of people is constant throughout the day. Some bring food, firewood, flowers and visitors from northern Ontario.

Brant, long wispy hair streaming from his trademark military-style cap, wearing a T-shirt that reads "get up, stand up, fight for your rights," breaks away from a long conversation with a group of teenagers who dropped by for a visit. He is smoking a cigarette and sitting on a white plastic chair, one foot up on a picnic table just inside a three walled shack. He doesn't mince words describing what is unfolding around him.

"I think for the first time in Indian history they are waiting of us to attack them. We are on an offensive strategy ... this is a campaign about creating victims and not being victims ourselves," says Brant.

"I would refer to it as a revolution, absolutely, an insurrection, an insurgency. I think

those are legitimate terms and they apply politically."

Brant says Friday will provide a forum for Natives to express their frustration over historic injustices that include the thousands of children who died in residential schools, police brutality and government indifference to calls for an end to misery and poverty.

"It can give us an opportunity to deal with this shit in our minds once and for all so we can look forward to the future without the monkey on our minds," he says.

"If on June 29 there are Indians dead and dying on the highways and railways across this country then so f---ing be it. It will still be a benefit for our children and at the very least it will demonstrate what people are capable of, that we f---ing stood up ... no matter what happens, whether it be successfully shutting down the economy or laying on the road with a bullet, there are going to be benefits."

Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte band chief Donald Maracle is worried about what could happen. He says the band has been negotiating hard with the federal government to settle the land issue.

"People have been saying enough since the beginning. But ... I don't want to see any of our people die for (the land)," says Maracle.

"We live in a country that prides itself as being just an fair and we need to see justice and fairness in the Crown's relationship with us ... I hope the government will listen to what the chiefs have been saying."

On a muggy Friday afternoon, day 72 of the reclamation, Dustin Brant, 19, is the only one guarding the entrance. He is sitting on the picnic table in the three-walled shack.

"I wasn't someone growing up that knew about the stuff at Ipperwash with Dudley George. I didn't become aware of the situation and the facts about aboriginal discrimination until recently," says Dustin, who is articulate and exudes a maturity beyond his years.

"I am standing up for my land and my people and I am doing what I believe is right and no one else is going to do this, no one else is going to come out and fight for me."

Later, sprawled on a couch inside the shack, Matt Weldon, 16, says he is doing this for the generations to come.

"It's about getting the land back for my children and their children," says Weldon. "I hear a lot of people saying we are standing up for the right thing and they are proud of us. My parents are proud of me."



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Matt Weldon, 16, wants to get the land back for generations to come.

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