



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

From Plymouth to Bolivia, Indigenous people resist

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50th National Day of Mourning: 'Capitalism is not going to save us'



Plymouth, Mass., Nov. 28 — On the fourth Thursday of November, for the 50th year on the U.S. “Thanksgiving” holiday, Indigenous people and their supporters gathered on Cole’s Hill to remember the brutal reality behind white nationalist mythology — and the heroic history of Native resistance.



In lashing wind and cold rain, an estimated 1,500 people gathered at the call of the United American Indians of New England (UAINE). They came from not only from Baltimore, Boston, Maine and New York, but from as far away as Louisiana, Manitoba, Mexico and Mauna Kea in Hawai’i. This reporter traveled on a bus organized by the Haitian community from Brooklyn, N.Y., for the 12th consecutive year.



Together, Indigenous and Black, Latinx and Asian, Arab and white, they respectfully observed the opening ceremony, listened to speakers representing many Native Nations and then marched in solidarity through the streets of Plymouth.



Moonanum James of the Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe, co-leader of UAINE, recounted how his father, Wamsutta Frank James, was invited to speak at an event celebrating the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrims' arrival in 1970. When the elder James [refused to censor the truth](#) about the invasion and its genocidal consequences for Native peoples, he was banned from speaking. This led to the first National Day of Mourning.



"Those who started National Day of Mourning could not have envisioned that generations would still be here, year after year, carrying on this tradition," said Moonanum James. "Many of the elders who stood on this hill and organized the first Day of Mourning are no longer with us, but we feel their spirits guiding us today."



James explained that the Pilgrims' arrival in 1620 was a capitalist venture, not a bid for religious freedom, as typically depicted. "It is also important to remember that the first official Thanksgiving did not take place in

1621, when the Pilgrims had a harvest-time meal provided largely by the Wampanoag,” he said. “Instead it was officially proclaimed by Gov. Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637 to celebrate the massacre of over 700 Pequot men, women and children on the banks of the Mystic River in Connecticut.



“So why does any of this matter?” he asked. “It’s simple: When people perpetuate the myth of Thanksgiving, they are not only erasing our genocide, but also celebrating it.



“In 1970, very few people would have given any thought to the fact that the Indigenous people of this hemisphere do not look upon the arrival of the European invaders as a reason to give thanks. Today,” James concluded, “many thousands stand with us in spirit as we commemorate the 50th National Day of Mourning.”



Elevating MMIWG2S



Banners on the speakers' platform and scattered throughout the crowd reflected a plethora of people's struggles embraced by UAINE and Indigenous communities: "Homophobia is not Native to these shores," "Defend Mother Earth" and "Free Leonard Peltier." Wampanoag elder Bert Water read a [message from political prisoner Leonard Peltier](#), imprisoned on frame-up charges for over 40 years. Sign language interpretation was provided for all the presentations.



Displayed prominently near the stage, a banner proclaimed: "Contra el golpe, en solidaridad con Bolivia. #ElMundoEsConEvo." Many speakers condemned the U.S.-backed coup against Bolivian President Evo Morales and the subsequent massacres of Indigenous protesters.



Another common theme was expressed in the banner that read: "No borders in the Indigenous struggle." From the platform to the crowd, people shared their outrage at the U.S. government's detention and deportation of migrants, many of them of Indigenous backgrounds, and the separation of families,

which echoed the horrific experience of many Native children forcibly sent to boarding schools that sought to strip them of their identities.



A striking red banner proclaimed “No more stolen sisters,” addressing the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people (MMIWG2S) in the U.S. and Canada.



“Trump announced on Monday that the federal government is creating a task force on missing and murdered Indigenous women,” said UAINE co-leader Mahtowin Munro. “Having extensively followed the many pitfalls of Canada’s MMIW task force, I do not believe that this task force will enact real change. This task force will be grossly underfunded. The families and tribes of the missing and murdered may not be sufficiently involved and centered in the process so that they can get answers about what happened to their loved ones.”



As Munro spoke, an empty red dress whipped in the harsh winds nearby, offering a poignant symbol. “Unfortunately, the many underlying

reasons for why MMIWG2S is a crisis will not be addressed.



“Attacking the Earth and attacking Indigenous women are intertwined,” she said. “The man camps and the resulting impact on Indigenous women is one of the many reasons why Indigenous people are fighting pipelines and mines and fracking.”



Fighting mega-dams



The theme of pervasive capitalist attacks on the planet, Indigenous sovereignty and people's lives was echoed by many speakers.



Several Indigenous activists attended from the North American Megadam Resistance Alliance in Canada. They are touring the northeast U.S. to build support against electricity-generating “mega-dam” projects that are destroying Native lands and livelihoods.



“I have witnessed islands disappear, lands disappear. I have witnessed our lands get really, really dirty,” said Carlton Richards of the Pimicikamak Cree Nation in Manitoba, Canada. “Our children cannot swim in our waters. We cannot drink from our waters.”



Ayeta Aronson, a member of the Houma Nation along the Louisiana Gulf Coast, reported on numerous challenges facing her people, including the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, “which is the tail end of the same pipeline that Standing Rock brought attention to, the Dakota Access Pipeline. That pipeline goes through a lot of communities of color.



"And now, another pipeline is being planned to cut through the already fragile swamps. LNG wants to put a 283-mile, across 14 parishes, natural gas pipeline in through the wetlands that help break hurricane destruction," Aronson said.



"The fact is that the land is changing. The climate is changing. We cannot replace what has already been lost. But we can, and do, try to preserve what is left, whether it be the land, our culture and traditions, or even just the memories of what was. We bring this knowledge forward with us, into the future."



'Don't give up'



Led by a massive banner proclaiming “National Day of Mourning,” the crowd marched from Cole’s Hill through the main tourist area of Plymouth, before converging on the waterfront at the Plymouth Rock monument — another myth that everyone knows, but that has no connection to historical reality since the Pilgrims didn’t land there.



En route, marchers passed the church that for many years hosted a community social following the Day of Mourning activities, but which was recently bought by the Mayflower Society in preparation for the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims’ arrival in 2020.



UAINE organizers explained that the Mayflower Society is heading a huge promotional effort to bring tourists to Plymouth and, more importantly, to shore up the white-supremacist “thanksgiving” mythology. The call was put out to protest next spring, when a Mayflower replica will arrive in Boston Harbor to kick off these warped “festivities.”



Instead, this year marchers boarded buses and cars and rode about two miles to a church on the town's outskirts that agreed to let UAINE use its facilities. Hundreds of people were able to have a hearty meal and fellowship with their siblings in the struggle before heading back home.



As I boarded the bus for the long ride back to Brooklyn, these words from UAINE's Mahtowin Munro stuck with me:



"Hoping that capitalism will get kinder is not going to save us. The Green New Deal is not enough to save us. Only by listening to Indigenous people and dismantling the capitalist system which allowed climate collapse to happen in the first place will we be able to save the planet.



"I don't want anyone who hears this to give up," Munro concluded. "We can fight for climate justice. We can end settler colonialism. We can reclaim our lands. We are not vanishing. We are not conquered. We are as strong as ever."



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SLL photos: Miranda Etel and Greg Butterfield



Video by Sunny Singh: 50th National Day of Mourning (Full Speeches)



<https://youtu.be/dKJmD8oNXHw>



<https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2019/12/04/50th-national-day-of-mourning-capitalism-is-not-going-to-save-us/>