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Cops raid Wet'suwet'en camps. Indigenous and allies respond: Shut Down Canada!

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Indigenous people and allies who support Indigenous sovereignty have taken to the streets throughout Canada in response to multiple raids on peaceful encampments in Wet'suwet'en territory in British Columbia.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) with guns, dogs and helicopters have conducted raids against Wet'suwet'en clan camps. The camps, located along a road in Wet'suwet'en lands, are part of an effort to block the Coastal Gaslink pipeline company from entering Wet'suwet'en lands.



Twenty-eight people have been arrested by police as part of enforcement operations in Wet'suwet'en territory. All have since been released, with some facing future court dates.

On Feb. 6, the RCMP launched a pre-dawn raid on the first Wet'suwet'en camp at kilometer 39 of the Morice Road. They arrested six people, detained journalists and dismantled the camp.

On Feb. 7, the RCMP—including tactical squad members with rifles—moved in via helicopters and vehicles on the Gidimt'en camp at kilometer 44, eventually arresting four people.

On Feb. 10, the RCMP entered the Unist'ot'en camp and arrested seven there who were in a prayer ceremony for Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women (#MMIWG2S).

All of these raids have included dogs, snipers, helicopters flying overhead, and removing or distancing journalists so that they often could not record what was happening.



Years of resistance

The RCMP raids have been in response to years of resistance by the traditional clans of the Wet'suwet'en Nation to TransCanada's Coastal GasLink pipeline. Their stolen

lands are unceded, not subject to any treaty. They do not consent to the destruction of their lands. Despite this, Coastal Gaslink has continued to violate environmental regulations and destroy archaeological sites that are sacred to the Wet'suwet'en. Canada and its partner corporations seek to exploit and destroy the lands and protect corporate profits.

The RCMP is enforcing their interpretation of laws and court orders to allow Coastal GasLink pipeline workers into the area. Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, title holders to the land, have refused to consent to the pipeline.

Canadian law had previously recognized the rights of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and five clans, in addition to recognition of the government-sanctioned "Indian Act" band council chiefs. A Supreme Court of Canada ruling confirmed the land's unceded status in 1997. Nonetheless, the British Columbia Supreme Court recently declared that Coastal GasLink lines could pass through their lands.

According to a Unist'ot'en statement, "Each clan within the Wet'suwet'en Nation has full jurisdiction under their law to control access to their territory. Under 'Anuc niwh'it'en (Wet'suwet'en law) all five clans of the Wet'suwet'en have unanimously opposed all pipeline proposals and have not provided free, prior and informed consent to Coastal Gaslink/TransCanada to do work on Wet'suwet'en lands."

The Wet'suwet'en have their own laws. Their laws and systems of governance predate Canada by thousands of years. The collective will of the people is the final law, not the signatures of single chiefs or band councils (Canada-approved tribal governments).

In addition to protecting the future of the lands, the Wet'suwet'en are also trying to protect their people from violence. Coastal GasLink was building a work camp that would house up to 400 men only 20 km. from the Healing Center on Wet'suwet'en

Yintah (lands). As a result, the hereditary chiefs had closed a road to protect the people from harm, since man camps are well-known to be dangerous to nearby Indigenous women.

“Just these past two years we’ve had two women from our own community of Witset go missing,” Dr. Karla Tait from the Healing Centre said. “One was discovered murdered. Despite being such a small Indigenous community, I think we’ve lost about seven women, that I’m aware of, that we don’t have any suspects or any leads on their whereabouts.” Witset has a population of about 815.



Red dresses symbolizing #MMIW

As the RCMP entered the Unist’ot’en camp, there were dozens of red dresses hanging from trees symbolizing Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women #MMIW. Coastal Gaslink workers and the RCMP tore them down.

The sight of Mounties (RCMP) invading Wet'suwet'en lands and of the peaceful defenders being arrested inflamed people across Canada and in other countries, as well. Many Indigenous people were already outraged by the December 2019 Guardian revelation that the RCMP had secretly been ready with snipers during previous Wet'suwet'en raids in January of 2019, with RCMP officers calling for "lethal overwatch" to protect the Coastal Gaslink project.

Calls to #ShutDownCanada rose up, and people around Canada engaged in fast and furious actions to intervene economically and politically so that Canada would take notice. Supporters of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs blocked roads and bridges in cities across Canada. Access to the busy Port of Vancouver was blocked for days before dozens were arrested. In Halifax, on the other side of the continent, part of the port was blocked for some hours. The Tyendinaga Mohawks in Ontario and other defenders elsewhere have blocked train tracks to shut down service on the CN Rail and Via Rail. "When justice fails, Block the rails!" From coast to coast, marchers round dance at public places, march, and demand that Canada back down from Wet'suwet'en and from its destructive defense of oil and gas extraction.

Youth-led occupations of the offices of federal cabinet ministers and members of Parliament have occurred across the country. Indigenous youth locked themselves down to the main entrance to the British Columbia Legislature, where hundreds more people later joined and blocked the doors on the opening day of the legislative session.



RCMP cops cross the bridge leading to Unist'ot'en Camp in Wet'suwet'en territory Feb. 10, 2020. The red dresses are part of the campaign to remember missing and murdered Indigenous women. Photo: Unist'ot'en Camp

Reconciliation Is dead

When the RCMP arrived at the gate to Unist'ot'en, the matriarchs were in ceremony and cremated a Canadian flag marked with the words "Reconciliation is dead." Matriarch Freda Huson threw the paper with the court injunction against the Wet'suwet'en into the fire, shouting "This is all it's worth, the paper it's written on."

The RCMP has a lengthy and bloody history as an occupying army whose role for generations has been removing Indigenous people from their lands, suppressing Indigenous resistance, breaking strikes and more.

While Trudeau and other politicians have sometimes paid lip service to Indigenous

sovereignty and the concept of reconciliation, it has become painfully clear that they are not interested in building better relationships with Indigenous nations and have not kept their promises to improve conditions for First Nations, Metis and Inuit people.

Indigenous children continue to be condemned disproportionately to foster care and experience suicide crises in all too many communities. Indigenous people are disproportionately imprisoned, impoverished and underhoused. Many reserves continue to lack basics such as clean drinking water. Indigenous women, girls and 2-spirit people continue to go missing and murdered. Colonialism and genocide have never ended.

Indigenous sovereignty is not respected, and the government and energy extraction corporations collaborate in trying to force Indigenous consent or ignoring Indigenous refusal of projects that impact them. Oil and gas companies and the government use economic and legal pressure and intimidation to force consent whenever possible. If they can't manufacture consent, such as with the Wet'suwet'en, they roll ahead with their plans anyway.

It has become increasingly clear that the British Columbia government and the RCMP do the bidding of energy corporations such as Coastal Gaslink, and that Prime Minister Trudeau is hand-in-glove with energy extraction and mining corporations that sustain the current form of the Canadian economy.

Please donate to the legal fund:
<https://actionnetwork.org/fundraising/Unistoten2020LegalFund>

