



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

National Day of Mourning 2021: 'Don't give up. We can fight!'

written by Mahtowin Munro

December 3, 2021



National Day of Mourning march in Plymouth, Mass., Nov. 25. Photo: Jimmy Powell



United American Indians of New England co-leader Mahtowin Munro. Photo: Chuck

Rosina

Talk given by the co-leader of United American Indians of New England at the 52nd National Day of Mourning in Plymouth, Massachusetts, on Nov. 25, 2021.

So much has happened in the past year.

We lost our co-leader Moonanum James back in December, and dear Bert Waters back in August. We have lost thousands upon thousands of Indigenous relations to COVID-19. Many of us have been out on the streets marching against white supremacy. White supremacists are still walking free while Indigenous, Black and Brown people continue to die.

But Indigenous struggles never die. They can ebb and flow, though. Currently, we are in a time of Indigenous resurgence with things happening on so many fronts.

We will cover as many issues as we can in the time we have today. In addition to our speakers here in Plymouth, we will also have an online pre-recorded program that will follow this livestream. The pre-recorded program will have information and speakers from many important struggles, including speakers from the Mapuche struggle in Chile, the Northeast Megadam Resistance Alliance, Devin Attallah and Ahmal Bishara speaking about Palestine, Uahikea Maile speaking about the kanaka maoli Native Hawaiian resistance, and Elena Ortiz from The Red Nation.

I hear a lot of people talk about reconciliation. Reconciliation is when you try to repair an existing relationship, like when you go to marriage counseling to work things out. I don't feel like we have ever had enough of a good relationship with settlers to think that something that has been so ugly can be reconciled or repaired. For example, can the damage done by Residential Schools ever actually be repaired?

Not schools, internment camps

Not just on September 30 — Orange Shirt Day — but every day, how can we stop thinking about and mourning for the Indigenous children in Canada and the U.S. that were forced into internment camps called [Indian residential schools](#) or boarding schools. (People say they should not even be called schools because of what happened there.)

Hundreds of these schools were run for decades by governments and missionaries that made it their mission to “kill the Indian to save the child,” all too often abusing or killing the child in the process. Thousands of the children died at these institutions, from tuberculosis, from medical experiments including starvation, from abuse, from broken hearts. All of them were scarred.

In Canada, some of the school grounds have been searched this year, and the remains of more than 7,000 children have been found. More than 7,000 children buried in unmarked graves! How can that be reconciled? How can you possibly make amends to the Indigenous communities that lost their children?

And there are many more places left to search. The residential school survivors had long said that there were mass graves at the residential schools, but the government took no action.

Here in the U.S., the Interior Department has now said that they are going to try to find out how many children lie in graves at the boarding schools, and every child they find, and every child whose remains have already been found, needs to be brought home to their families and tribal communities. We cannot rest until this happens. Bring the children home!

Residential schools are not just a thing of the past. Indigenous children continue to be put into residential schools in some parts of Latin America, often run by missionaries. Adivasi tribal children in India are also frequently forced to attend residential schools where they too are stripped of their cultural and familial ties.

The residential schools in the U.S. and Canada may be closed, but our Indigenous children are instead disproportionately placed into foster care. Evangelicals and right-wing organizations like the Goldwater Institute have been leading the charge to get rid of the Indian Child Welfare Act that protects our children from being adopted out of their own communities. These groups want to push us back to the 1960s, when at least a third of Native children were stolen from their families and put into white homes, losing their tribal connections and cultures.

A third of all Native children stolen from their families. How can that be reconciled?

Land back and self-determination

We do not need empty words of reconciliation or apologies. It is too late for that. What we need is land back and reparations. And when I say “land back,” I mean land back! Give the land back to Indigenous people! What we need is a brand new way of thinking and be able to move properly into the future. Native self-determination, land back, decolonization and Black liberation are the only way forward!

Land back is not a new concept that someone recently invented. Our ancestors always taught us to demand the return of our lands. The land and water are in our blood and bones, part of our bodies, and we have never forgotten that. As a starting point, return the national parks and state-held lands to the Native nations, so that Indigenous people can be free to caretake the land properly.

And all these months into the Biden administration, the Mashpee still have not had their land trust issues resolved by the Interior Department. So we say to President Biden: Resolve Mashpee’s land trust issues and respect the sovereignty of all Native nations!

Year after year, we stand on this hill and demand an end to the colonial borders, that ICE be abolished, and that Customs and Border Patrol stop detaining undocumented

Immigrants. We think not only of the Native nations whose homelands have been divided by the arbitrary settler-colonial border, but also of the many thousands of Indigenous people impacted by the U.S. policies that have led them to flee their home countries in Mexico, El Salvador and elsewhere, and of our Haitian and many other relatives who have been attacked and rounded up and abused by border control. As always, we say, “No one is illegal on stolen land!!”

This year we will also talk again about [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit people \(MMIWG2S\)](#). Biden says he cares about MMIWG2S, but then why will he not shut down pipelines and turn his back on the energy industry? It is well-known that the man camps that these pipelines bring with them are a major factor in MMIWG2S, yet his administration does not stop these projects.

Whether Republicans or Democrats, Conservatives or Liberals, the politicians uphold colonial rule and work hand in glove with energy corporations. They engage in intense, heavily militarized police repression against pipeline resisters. Divest from all these corporations and the banks that are funding these projects!

From Line 3 to Wet'suwet'en

Many of you may have heard of Line 3 in Minnesota; some of you even went out there to join the frontlines. Hundreds of water protectors are currently facing criminal charges in Minnesota for standing in defense of the water, the climate and the treaty rights of the Anishinaabeg people. They put their bodies on the line to stop Enbridge's Line 3 pipeline, a massive tar sands project that threatens the state's lakes, rivers, aquifers and wild rice beds.

Police forces — funded by Enbridge — responded to this massive movement with surveillance, rubber bullets, harassment, “pain compliance” and trumped-up charges, including felony charges. In this time of climate catastrophe, governments must listen to water protectors instead of criminalizing and prosecuting them. Even

as the oil is now flowing through Line 3, the fight is not over. Please do what you can to support this struggle and all those arrested.

You may not have heard about Line 5, which is opposed by all the tribes in Michigan. Enbridge's Line 5 pipeline transports 22 million gallons of crude oil and natural gas liquids from Superior, Wisconsin, through Michigan's Upper Peninsula, under the Straits of Mackinac, and down to refineries in Sarnia, Ontario. Originally built in 1953, this aging line has significantly deteriorated over the course of the last several decades and poses catastrophic risks to the tribal lands and other areas that it cuts through.

Two parts of Line 5 are particularly concerning: a portion that traverses the Bad River Reservation in Wisconsin and another five-mile stretch that runs under the Straits of Mackinac through the Great Lakes. Line 5 puts the region's wildlife, wetlands and people at risk.

You also may not have heard about Thacker Pass in Nevada, where the Paiute, Shoshone and others are trying to stop a lithium mine that is situated on land where an 1865 massacre took place. The construction is scheduled to begin early next year at what would be the largest lithium mine in the U.S. and the biggest open pit lithium mine in the world.

We raise our voices today in solidarity with the [Wet'suwet'en struggle](#) in so-called British Columbia to stop the Coastal Gaslink project from going through their lands. Last week, there was an unprecedented cascade of climate events in the province, with flooding, mudslides and communities cut off from food deliveries. Despite this, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) made it a priority to move in and arrest unarmed Wet'suwet'en elders, leaders and other land defenders as well as journalists who were at blockades on unceded lands. Wet'suwet'en strong!

On Vancouver Island, more than a thousand people have been arrested for trying to

defend the old growth trees at Fairy Creek.

Secwepemc tiny houses warriors continue their fierce resistance to Kinder Morgan's Transmountain pipeline, and they continue to be harassed and sometimes arrested by the RCMP.

In eastern Canada, violent settlers and the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans continue to harass Mi'kmaq fishers who are exercising their right to trap lobsters.

U.S. intervention and multinational corporations continue to wreak havoc in many countries. Indigenous people are being displaced and killed in Colombia, Mexico and other countries for trying to stop mining and megadam projects. In Bolivia, Indigenous people are forced to continue to resist the efforts of the U.S. to overthrow their government and reinstall an anti-Indigenous puppet government.

Capitalism vs. climate justice

I want to say that individual actions are not going to save us when corporations and the U.S. military account for 70% of the world's pollution. Promoting a narrative of individual responsibility is not going to save us. Recycling and REDD and carbon offsets are not going to save us.

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

Indigenous peoples have always been caretakers of the land, water and the life therein, despite intense efforts of settler governments to stop us from doing so. For generations, Indigenous people have been warning about the climate crisis.

It is not too late to achieve some climate justice on this planet, but Indigenous voices must be acknowledged and centered.

One of many ways that people are working to center Indigenous voices is through education and legislation. We have been successful in getting Indigenous Peoples Day resolutions passed in many cities and towns, [including Boston](#) this past fall.

Here in Massachusetts, we have a MA Indigenous Agenda that is supporting five bills: a bill to ban the use of Native mascots in public schools, a bill to redesign the racist state flag and seal, legislation to celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day statewide instead of Columbus Day, an education bill and a bill to protect Native heritage. There's a lot you can do to help us get those bills out of committee. Please go to MAIndigenousAgenda.org for more information.

I end by returning to the concept of Land Back, something on the lips of many Indigenous people. Treaties need to be honored. Lands, including the sacred Black Hills and many more, need to be returned. A proposal, a starting place for the decolonization of our lands and a way to address climate collapse:

First, ensure that no projects can go through any Indigenous nation's land without free, prior and authentic informed consent.

Second, take all of the land that is currently being mismanaged by all settler governments, such as the National Parks or the Amazon rainforest, and let Indigenous nations manage that land. That would mean the restoration of millions of acres of our lands to us. It would also mean the end of the desecration of our sacred sites, such as the Black Hills or Mauna Kea.

Third, cancel the leases, the pipelines, the mining and the corporate contracts and start over.

Finally, since we all live here on this planet together, and since it is the only planet

we have, everyone needs to support and listen to Indigenous peoples all over the world who are on the frontlines of dealing with climate change.

I don't want anyone who hears this to give up despite how hard 2021 has been. Our ancestors are behind us every step of the way. We can fight for climate justice. We can do our best to mask up and reduce the spread of this plague. We can end settler colonialism. We can reclaim our lands.

We are not vanishing. We are not conquered. We are stronger than ever.

