

NO BLOOD FOR JOBS!

A call for independent worker action in defense of Wet'suwet'en sovereignty

On Thursday February 6th, Canada began a renewed invasion of the unceded territories of the Wet'suwet'en nation. This colonial invasion was authorized by Canada's courts, carried out by Canada's domestic military forces in the RCMP, and is motivated by the corporate interests of the fossil fuels industry that Canada's government prioritizes and primarily represents. And although all these institutions and forces of Canada's political apparatus have been brought to bear against organized labour in the past, and even concurrently in the Regina Coop Refinery strike, the working class has been conspicuously absent from the mass movement that has swollen up to fill the streets of every major city in Canada in defence of Wet'suwet'en sovereignty.

Sovereignty is the issue; Canada is the problem

The mainstream media and politicians obscure the point when they mischaracterize the Wet'suwet'en defence of the Gidumten checkpoint and the Unist'ot'en healing centre and village site as "anti-pipeline protest." Yes, Coastal Gaslink trying to force a pipeline through the unceded territory of the Wet'suwet'en was the spark for this fire, but the fuel that is burning is Canada's racist, settler colonial relations with Indigenous people.

The BC NDP's insistence on forcing this pipeline through Wet'suwet'en territory has come to stand in for the total, coercive, colonial approach that Canada has brought to bear against Indigenous people since before Confederation. The BC NDP is determined to push the pipeline through despite the unanimous opposition of all 5 Clans of the Wet'suwet'en nation, the Province's adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and the NDP-Green government's stated commitment to transitioning away from fossil fuel extraction and production.

The BC NDP has demonstrated that their priority is the maintenance of BC's resource extraction industry, not "reconciliation." Under the NDP's leadership, it

has become clear to all that reconciliation is a buzzword; meaningless politicianspeak. Maybe Premier Horgan emphasizes workers' jobs rather than corporate profits when he makes his prepared statements in defense of the pipeline project, but even that is not so different from the policies and rhetoric of the BC Liberals.

Business union misleadership

Unfortunately, the BC NDP is not a renegade in the labour movement. Horgan's pipeline fanaticism is lobbied for by the narrow perspectives of a labour bureaucracy that acts singularly focused on jobs jobs jobs, no matter the social cost.

In January 2019, as the RCMP raided Wet'suwet'en territory the first time (this time around), Brian Cochrane, business manager of International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 115 wrote an OpEd in the *Vancouver Sun* saying the Coastal Gaslink pipeline is "a key opportunity to develop a skilled workforce... thousands of well-paying jobs will be created when construction gets underway." And speaking out against Jagmeet Singh's critical comments about fracking in May, Patrick Campbell, director of pipeline construction for the IUOE, said, "This is not only a province-building project, it's what we would consider a *nation-building* project."

The IUOE union bureaucrats are saying that the 2,000 to 2,500 *temporary jobs* that the CGL pipeline may create for members of their union is the only case needed for the pipeline to work. That *Rank and File* has found there will only be 16-35 permanent jobs does not seem to move them from their insistence on jobs at any cost that sets the interest of workers against the interest of the Wet'suwet'en and other Indigenous nations.

Some divisions are clarifying: Union bureaucrats are not workers and band councils are not Indigenous nations

In the days after the RCMP siege on Wet'suwet'en began, we took part in blockading the Vancouver and Delta Ports. Knowing that the leaders in the IUOE, as well as in the Teamsters and the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) were part of the industry-focused fanatical pro-pipeline chorus, we were not hopeful about how workers might respond to being blockaded out of their regular workday. We were surprised to find that most workers were not upset, that they respected the Wet'suwet'en struggle, and that a significant number of workers were actively supportive.

At the Vancouver Port, we mostly interacted with truck drivers. Although they were mostly independent owner-operators, we found many of them to be supportive of the Wet'suwet'en struggle because they saw the police attack as colonialism, and wrong. One trucker donated reflective vests to keep our leafleters safer. Another suggested tactics to increase the pressure of our action, including expanding the blockades to Deltaport.

We followed that advice, and at Deltaport we interacted with hundreds of port workers. Many of them, also, were supportive, even as we blocked them from their job and paycheque. One worker said, when we spoke with him through his window as he was leaving work after a 12 hour day, "the RCMP should get the fuck off their land." We were inspired and deeply moved when Local 502 of the ILWU told their members not to cross our blockade; to respect it as a picketline. We know that Wet'suwet'en land defenders also felt inspired because they responded to the news of this solidarity shared on social media with a plea for more labour unions to also stand up against the NDP-RCMP invasion of their unceded territories.

A call for worker action for Wet'suwet'en

The strategies and tactics of solidarity actions for Wet'suwet'en sovereignty have been, in a word, blockades. The movement has blockaded ports, railways, roads, banks, and government offices and legislatures. The pressure this movement has been able to bring to bear against a pipeline that is set up to steal land and destroy water in the name of corporate profits and temporary jobs, has been through the disruption of the regular flow of commodities. Workers can add to this pressure by withholding labour and stopping production and distribution, ramping up the pressure on the extractive system.

But isn't this an Indigenous issue? What does it have to do with workers?

Aside from moral, political, and historical arguments for the sort of world that workers' movements should dedicate their efforts to build, and which, at their best, they have fought for through the centuries, there is also an immediate argument for why Wet'suwet'en sovereignty is also a worker's issue: we have to fight against the incipient fascist currents in the working class.

There are two ways that the working class in Canada can respond to the pressure of decades of austerity, attacks on union power, increasing costs of living, and declining real wages. One way is to turn, as middle class and some working people have in the US, Brazil, and Europe, to a fascist, white nationalist politics that opposes migrants, calls for border controls, and to accelerate land theft through imperialist war and settler colonial resource extraction. The other way is to turn away from capitalist and colonial domination altogether and join the struggles of Indigenous peoples, led, right now by the Wet'suwet'en, against Canada's colonial power.

A call for worker activists to join #ShutDownCanada

We do not think that statements from some public sector union bureaucrats have much effect on the BC NDP's pipeline agenda. Leadership statements are better than nothing but also do not take on the political challenge of an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggle for workers' consciousness against the far right reaction.

Activist unionists and organic leaders in the working class are embodiments of the rank and file, and are able to do this work of education and struggle.

We invite you to join the Wet'suwet'en solidarity movement and organize walkouts of workplaces, teach-ins, and to craft and spread statements in support of Wet'suwet'en to be spread amongst workers. If an effect of this work is pressure on union bureaucrats who may make statements calling for Horgan to withdraw his troops, then all the better. But this struggle is not for passengers, it calls on us all to remake our communities and relations with Indigenous nations.

Resources

For more on the Wet'suwet'en struggle and the Unist'ot'en Camp, see the 2020 "supporter toolkit" here: <http://unistoten.camp/supportertoolkit2020/>

We would be glad to talk about strategies for engaging workers, and to help with this work inside and outside workplaces.

Red Braid Alliance for Decolonial Socialism
<http://redbraid.org>