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FIRE THIS TIME

MOVEMENT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE



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2nd Edition

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Introduction

Since 1997, the Sun Peaks ski resort has been expanding into the territory of the Secwepemc people. The continued struggle of the Secwepemc people to regain their stolen territory is a fight for self-determination, the basic right of indigenous people to decide how their land will be used. This fight for self-determination challenges the very foundations of the colonial Canadian government, and contains dynamics that give it the potential to ignite widespread mobilization among poor, working, and oppressed people in Canada against occupation and injustice.

The struggle in Skwelkwek'welt against the continued expansion of Sun Peaks is an example of the fight for sovereignty that is happening among different indigenous nations across North America. This fight to defend land and territory must be supported by indigenous and non-indigenous people to build a movement that can effectively challenge the continued theft of indigenous land and resources.

For this reason, *Fire This Time* has supported the Secwepemc people who have been resisting the continued expansion of Sun Peaks onto their territory, including participating in several actions against Sun Peaks, as well as running regular stories and updates in the FTT newspaper to draw the attention of working and oppressed people in Canada to this struggle and its importance. This booklet is a selection of articles on the Skwelkwek'welt struggle from past issues of *Fire This Time*.

End the Police Harassment of the Secwepemc Peoples!

The RCMP Target the Native Youth Movement and the Skwelkwek'welt Protection Centre Defenders

By Ivan Drury

Originally appeared in Fire This Time # 4.

On Tuesday, April 8th 2003, the RCMP Emergency Response Team (RCMP-ERT) executed simultaneous raids of the homes of Native Youth Movement, Westcoast Warriors Society (NYM) members. Three houses, a trailer home and two workplaces were stormed, doors kicked in and searched for "weapons" and "incriminating evidence". These NYM members have been actively involved in the defense of Aboriginal Rights and Title in the Secwepemc Territories known as the Interior of British Columbia.

Since the Sun Peaks resort, established in 1992 by Nippon Cable and Delta Hotels, began its government-sponsored \$70 million expansion project in 1997, they have been met with consistent and mounting resistance from the Secwepemc (Shuswap) people. The Sun Peaks Resort is situated on Secwepemc Territory known as Skwelkwek'welt. The Secwepemc people have never given up the title, sold, released or ceded Skwelkwek'welt Territory to the Canadian settler government. By Canadian law, these developers must first consult, obtain consent and accommodate the Secwepemc People's interests before the expansion of Sun Peaks can begin. Neither Nippon Cable, Delta Hotels nor any level of the Canadian Government have attempted to enter discussion or gain permission for the Sun Peaks development. On April 8th, the RCMP intervened on behalf of the developers of Sun Peaks to further the Canadian Government's agenda to destroy indigenous culture and resistance and to displace indigenous people throughout Canada.

In the struggle against this occupation, theft of land and destruction of resources, 54 Secwepemc people and their supporters have been arrested. On April 8th, two NYM members were arrested in the raid of their homes and swelled that count to 56.

In the April 8th raid, the RCMP seized computers, papers, files, computer disks, camcorder cassettes, phone books, and email lists. At one raid, in Nuxalt Territory (Bella Coola), the RCMP took pictures of the inside of the home of Aloosta Nuxalkmc (an NYM Warrior), arrested another NYM Warrior, "Hawk" and held him without charges and then proceeded on to Nuxalkmc's workplace to seize two computers and more phone books.

At the Neskonlith Indian Reservation (outside Chase), the RCMP-ERT stormed the house of NYM members with M-16 machine guns and a blank warrant. They corralled everyone in the house together and searched them, forcing women to lift their shirts before the male officers.

In all of these police actions, the focus was the collection of information. This information, namely contact information and communications, has been targeted to enable the RCMP's monitoring and control of the native sovereignty movement and, specifically, the Native Youth Movement throughout Canada and North America.

These sorts of actions by the Canadian government and their police forces are not uncommon. The maintenance of the rights of business and developers over indigenous people extends back to the very beginnings of colonization and the birth of Canada. The RCMP are attempting to criminalize this resistance in order to break indigenous struggle and resistance movements throughout BC and all of Canada.

The battle between the Secwepemc Peoples and the Sun Peaks Resort is an issue of land and right to self-determination that is a key struggle for all poor and working people. The Federal government, the Provincial government and the RCMP are fighting to retain their control of the land, resources and politics in BC without any recognition of their own laws. All poor and working people must struggle in solidarity alongside the Secwepemc people for all charges to be dropped against Secwepemc Peoples and their supporters and for an end to all racial violence against Indigenous Peoples by the Canadian government. We demand the immediate return of all seized properties and that the RCMP pay for all damages done to the properties of the Secwepemc Peoples. We must demand the occupying RCMP get out of Skwelkwek'welt, and, together, demand the right of the Secwepemc Peoples, and all Peoples, to control their own destiny.



Rally against the continued expansion of Sun Peaks ski resort on Secwepemc territory, 29 August 2004.

Interview with Ska7cis:

FTT: As a young Secwepemc person, why do you oppose the expansion of Sun Peaks ski resort?

To maintain our culture, to maintain our way of life. It's just genocide. It's a third party extinguishment of aboriginal title. That's what it comes down to. We can't practice our right to occupy any land we want or cut any trees we want or hunt wherever we want. Right now there's the injunction that stops us from doing that, right, it's the beginning of extinguishing our aboriginal title and the loss of our culture. That's why I oppose it.

FTT: What do you think the effect of not only this injunction, but also the expansion of Sun Peaks Ski Resort will have on the future of Secwepemc people, the Secwepemc youth?

Well, we've been here for 10,000 years, the Secwepemc people, and we'll be here for 10,000 more years. And it's displacement, right? Basically that's a "No Indian" zone now. It's a "No go" zone. No Indians allowed in the base land area of Sun Peaks which is 8.74 hectares, right, so that's just about 9 square kilometres of Secwepemc territory that the courts don't want us to occupy. They don't want us to be Indian in these areas.

FTT: Why do you think it's important for indigenous as well as non-indigenous people to support this struggle against Sun Peaks?

Well, first of all it's for the environment. It's for the water. It's for the animals. It's for the oxygen. To have clean water, everyone should have the right to clean water, because in Europe, for every glass of water you have to pay a dollar. You go to a restaurant and you pay a dollar for a glass of water and you pay for the water in your house. I don't want it to be like that here in Secwepemc where we have to pay for our own water, and eventually it might come to that if we keep on letting developments happen like Sun Peaks, mass tourism and mass logging.

FTT: Thank you.

Skwelkwek'welt Vs. Sun Peaks! The Struggle of Native People to Regain Their Stolen Land in British Columbia

By Aaron Mercredi

Originally appeared in Fire This Time # 18-19.

On August 29th, over two hundred protesters marched on Sun Peaks Ski Resort, located 30 minutes north of Kamloops, to rally against its continued expansion on to Secwepemc (commonly known as Shuswap) territory. The demonstration, which brought out indigenous people and their supporters from all over the country, brought attention to and built solidarity with the struggle against the resort's relentless expansion and development on to unceded Secwepemc land.

The march stopped at various parts of the resort for speakers from different indigenous nations and solidarity groups to speak, including a stop at Delta Hotels, which is one of the main companies involved in the expansion of the resort. The march ended at a higher point on the mountain, where a new Sun Peaks village and an 18-hole golf course are in the process of being built. At this location, the Skwelkwek'welt Defenders began to build a foundation for a building that would act as their monitoring centre. Secwepemc people exercised their rights to their land by felling two trees in a traditional way to begin the construction of a permanent structure. The structure will be used to monitor environmental damage at Skwelkwek'welt, to inform tourists and potential investors of the on-going land dispute, to assert and exercise Secwepemc rights and title to their land by occupying it, and to act as a cultural centre.

How Colonial Expansion in Secwepemc Land Started

The \$70 Million expansion of the resort that was approved by the government of BC in 1997 without the consultation of Secwepemc people has been increased to a \$285 Million development. This development now includes its expansion to 20,000 bed units, and the development of Mount Morrissey which had previously been untouched. With utter disregard for Secwepemc rights and title to the land in question, this expansion would continue to destroy the natural habitat of the mountain area and continues to infringe on Secwepemc land.

Sun Peaks ski resort was originally purchased in 1992 by the Japanese holding company, Nippon Cable. Since then, the size and scope of the resort has expanded ten-fold from a capacity of 100 beds to 4000, along with other projects like the construction of an 18-hole golf course. Secwepemc people never agreed to the construction or expansion of the ski resort, and have responded by building the Skwelkwek'welt Protection Centre to occupy their own land and put an end to the illegal development. Since this began, more than 54 people have been arrested for defending the unceded territory, including youth and elders, and more than 8 Secwepemc homes and traditional sweatlodges have been destroyed by bulldozers. Despite this, Secwepemc people have continued to fight back.

The BC government has continued its colonial policy towards indigenous nations like the Secwepemc, in spite of recent precedent-



Skwelkwel'welt Defender Janice Billy (middle).

setting victories for indigenous people in Canada's own colonial courts. Despite the recognition of inherent land rights of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal title in the Delgamuukw case, and the result of the Haida case (which required provincial and private interests to have consent from and accommodate Aboriginal interests before developing on Aboriginal territories) the BC government has undermined the self-determination of Secwepemc people and ignored the legal right and title of Secwepemc people to the area currently occupied by Sun Peaks.

The Struggle Continues

On September 3rd 2004, members of the Skwelkwel'welt Protection Centre appeared in BC Supreme Court in Vancouver after they received a trespass notice from Sun Peaks Resort. During the hearing, the judge agreed to an interlocutory injunction by Sun Peaks that ordered the defenders out of the base area occupied by the resort, which would effectively remove them from their own land. This injunction was followed up by an enforcement order that would give the RCMP the authority to arrest anyone who violates that injunction. The defenders have refused to leave, and continue to 'occupy' their land despite police harassment. The monitoring centre that began to be constructed on August 29th remains next to the 16th hole of the golf course and continues to be used by Secwepemc people.

The resilience of Secwepemc people has been shown to the people of BC, Canada and to a certain degree the world. Since the Skwelkwel'welt defenders have taken on Sun Peaks and the BC government, they have inspired acts of solidarity by indigenous and non-indigenous activists, from Toronto to Germany, building international solidarity against the illegal occupation of their land. With the current direct struggle over Secwepemc land, the BC government's long-standing policy towards indigenous people, a policy of theft and extinguishment, has been exposed. The convergence at Sun Peaks Ski Resort on August 29th represented the importance of people uniting against this policy, against Sun Peaks and the BC government who have been working together to undermine the sovereignty and borders of the Secwepemc nation, and who have relied on brute force to act it out. With the level of anger and frustration that exists over this colonial dispute, indigenous and non-indigenous people must unite with the Secwepemc people in a broad mass movement to directly challenge this theft of indigenous land.

SUN PEAKS OUT OF SKWELKWEK'WELT!

We'll Just Keep Challenging It Over And Over Again

Two Interviews with Skwelkwel'welt Defenders, Janice Billy and Ska7cis

By Aaron Mercredi

Originally appeared in Fire This Time # 18-19.

Interview with Janice Billy

FTT: Last Friday, you and other members of the Skwelkwel'welt Protection Centre were in court in Vancouver. What was the issue at stake?

Well, we were presented with an injunction and a trespass notice. The trespass came first, then we went to court there were two things brought up: the injunction to remove us from where we are, the trespass charge and the enforcement order to remove people.

FTT: Is it related to the protest rally that you had on August 29th?

Well, it's not directly because it is an occupation of our lands that we actually just started the same day as the demonstration.

FTT: What was the result of the court hearing?

The judge granted the injunction and said that we had to leave immediately, I guess. And then she granted an enforcement order and said that we had to leave immediately, which was Friday at around 4:30pm, when the judge made the decision.

FTT: What impact will the court's decision have on Secwepemc people?

Well, we've refused to obey all injunctions, all trespass notices, everything they give us. We refuse to obey it.

FTT: Now that this injunction has been put in place, what is going to happen to this Protection Centre currently being built by the Swelkwel'welt defenders?

Well, it's still there and it will stay there as long as we keep it there. And if people are willing to be arrested, if that's what it's going to take then we'll just keep challenging it over and over again in court and by whatever other means we have. And it's not a protection centre, it's a monitoring centre. It's also a cultural learning centre because we have people there, the elders, that come up and the people there that teach our youth and even the non-Secwepemc people about our way of life, about the culture, about the environment, about our land rights, so it's also an education centre too.

FTT: How do the Secwepemc people plan on responding to this injunction?

Well first of all, by refusing to obey it. Refusing to accept those laws that are imposed upon us. That is the first thing- we just absolutely do not recognize them. We do not recognize the BC Land Act that the trespass notice was issued under and we do not recognize the assumed ownership of Sun Peaks resort or the government of BC. And then, also looking at all other means of challenging those court decisions imposed on us.

FTT: Thank you, Janice.