



The Shock Doctrine:

Summary of the Symposium of Indigenous Human Rights and Environmental Activists Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada June 19 & 20, 2008

The symposium of indigenous human rights and environmental activists “**The Shock Doctrine – Indigenous Peoples Experience in Canada**” took place on June 19, 2008 in Vancouver, Canada.

Lix Lopez, spiritual leader, Mam Mayan Nation, opened the meeting by recognizing the traditional owners of the territories where the meeting was held. He said that according to the Mayan Calendar, the day was 9 Ix, the day of the Earth and sacred places and made an opening prayer asking the Great Spirit to guide this meeting.

Arthur Manuel, Indigenous Network on Economies and Trade (INET), welcomed participants to the meeting, meant to bring together indigenous activists and supporters. He recognized the number of indigenous activists arrested, the courage they displayed and the sacrifice they made. He noted that while national and provincial indigenous organizations and elected chiefs and councils receive a lot of funding and hold meetings, they have not achieved any progress in the recognition of indigenous land rights and human rights. He pointed to indigenous activists playing a key role in protecting the land and being the most dynamic force, albeit the most disorganized and called on them to work together on holding Canada responsible for indigenous and human rights violations in the lead-up to the 2010 Winter Olympics. Arthur Manuel then introduced Naomi Klein and her work on the Shock Doctrine and reflected how this applied to indigenous peoples, especially how the doctrines of discovery had disempowered indigenous peoples and been used to justify the theft of their indigenous lands. He invited indigenous activists to learn more about economic issues and how economists and their theories greatly impact their life on the ground. He also pointed to the difference between: indigenous economic thinking being more circular and seeing humans as part of the circle of all plant and animal life; and Western economic theories, focusing on exploitation of natural resources, commodification, consumerism, creation of profits and producing a lot of garbage. He stressed that the colonial doctrines of discovery had been countered by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in which nations recognized the human rights of indigenous peoples, with only Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US voting against it. He referenced the vote declaration of Canada listing opposition to indigenous land rights, prior informed consent and self-determination as the reasons for their vote against the Declaration. Manuel said that by putting in the bid for the 2010 Winter Olympics Canada and British Columbia put their human rights record under scrutiny and called for indigenous activists to focus on the 2010 Olympics and to become familiar with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and apply it on the ground.

Naomi Klein gave brief opening remarks, describing the Manuel family as teachers, recalling her tour of Sun Peaks and the Interior of BC, she highlighted the opportunity for scrutiny of Canada's human rights record presented by the 2010 Olympics, noting that the economic benefit of hosting Olympic Games comes with this scrutiny. She pointed to the precedents of the Sydney Olympics and how Australia had seized this opportunity, and how China is also currently undergoing this scrutiny. Highlighting the current crises to do with housing, food and the oil prices as signals that the existing economic model is not working, she proposed developing an alternative economic model not just for indigenous communities.

Councillor Sam McKay, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI), Big Trout Lake, a fly-in community 600 km North of Thunder Bay reported on his community's ongoing struggle against mining exploration in Canada. He pointed to the 1929 July treaty signed between KI and Canada, with Ontario having observer status, when his people did not understand English or the treaty they were signing; they believed it to be a treaty of co-habitation, but the government now argues that it took away all their rights, and this has been the underlying cause of today's conflict. He explained that following a long-term moratorium on any development, in 2006 a mining company commenced platinum drilling in their territory without their permission at a location some 17 km from Big Trout Lake (16 x 30 miles) where the tailing ponds drain into this lake on which his people depend for sustenance. He reported that after too much money had been spent on legal fees, his people blocked the winter road system in February to stop the mining explorations, since the permits had been issued without the consultation of the band, while the company argued that their contact with one individual with a trap-line had been sufficient. He explained that: KI had asked the mining company to leave, so they could to assess impacts; the company left, brought an action for contempt of court and sued the band for 10 billion dollars, although their unemployment is very high and they are very dependent on the land for sustenance; KI Tried to negotiate with them, but made no progress, since the company was not interested in real consultation; two years went by, but no progress, and the company was determined to drill, regardless of consultation outcomes.

McKay explained that in September 2007 the company sent KI band council their timeline and in turn the band blockaded them at the airport; the Ontario Provincial Police intervened, and charged band members with contempt. He further elaborated how they went to court, and in March they were sentenced to six months in jail, their chief and five council and community members were incarcerated until very recently. He explained how KI has been getting much more attention following their imprisonment and that the rest of the province erupted with activity surrounding their struggle, when prior to being arrested they had had no response from the Chiefs of Ontario and from the AFN national chief for assistance and it had been a lonely struggle. He reported that while in jail the council continued their business, they even signed agreements with the Department of Indian Affairs from jail, who did not initially want to recognize them because they were in jail. He explained that he and the other prisoners did not appeal the case they wanted to put pressure on the government and were working in solidarity with Robert Lovelace of the Algonquin Nation who was already in jail and also sentenced to 6 months. They finally appealed their sentences and were released, the Court of Appeal let them go pointing to the time they had already spent in jail, but has dates not delivered their written reasons.

The mining company was given five more mining claims while the KI chief and council was in jail. His band learned that isolation does not preclude infringement of their rights. Noting that amending the Mining Act will not resolve the basic conflict, he said the original treaty which is fraudulent must be revisited and the provincial government has been given notice that band will not recognize their authority. He reported that bones more than 5000 years old have been found on site, solidifying KI claims to the land, they are not opposing resource development per se, but it must be on their terms.

Oscar Dennis, Tahltan, from the Raven Clan was himself arrested in 2005 and acts as a Spokesperson for the keepers of his land. He explained how his father who was strong on his traditional uses was then used as a “puppet leader” but then came back to represent the band. Dennis protested against the leadership and Shell wanting to extract coal-bed methane in his territory to date fifteen protesters, nine of them elders have been arrested. He presented a DVD used to shock people into realizing what is going on within Canada, in it Wade Davis, National Geographic, shows the ecological fragility of the Sacred Headwaters Basin, particularly the lichen and water which the caribou and other species depend upon. It also show the blockade of mining companies , including an open pit coal mine, by the Kla’bona Keepers. They also oppose Shell’s coal-bed methane exploration threatening salmon streams in the Nass/Skeena system, where Telegraph Creek band has been left out of consultation.

Rick Quipp, Pilalt Nation from Cheam, who had provided salmon for lunch and who is a provide for his nation hunting and fishing for his elders, noted that supply of salmon is about 5% of what it used to be, resulting in health problems, such as diabetes, associated with moving away from traditional foods. He pointed to the millions of taxpayer monies paid to restrict Aboriginal fishing.

Kanahus Manuel, Secwepemc, said her people opposed the expansion of Sun Peaks Ski Resort and that the Japanese owner plans to cut forests on four mountains for ski runs and to develop a year-round resort. The expansion has been going forward despite protests, they had feasts at the entrance to Sun Peaks road with elder Irene Billy, and others, then the arrests and charges commenced (intimidation, mischief, trespass). The Native youth started construction of a cordwood house and were issued trespass and seizure notices, several participants were arrested and warrants issued for her arrest. Sought refuge in Bella Coola because she was pregnant and did not want to give birth in jail. Sister came to visit her but the baby got sick and died while there, they declined to have an autopsy, warrants issued for their arrest, computers were seized, it was a smear campaign and dirty tactics were used to intimidate and undermine the movement. After her arrest, she was in jail for 75 days without her newborn baby, there was no recognition by courts that she was a mother and an indigenous activist. She called attention to the number of indigenous people in jail for standing up for rights. Any action helps, no matter how small. The Secwepemc also made a submission to the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne Switzerland, presented by Ska7cis and Irene Billy, requesting that the Olympic Games not be held in BC, but that was not respected. Large corporations are backing the Olympic Games. Mining is happening everywhere, in increasingly remote areas, even close to the Adams river Sockeye run they are exploring for a diamond (Selkirk) mine. Canadian mining companies are a destructive force worldwide, but also at home. She called on people to unite and rally the youth and elders together.

Naomi Klein laid out the basic thesis of her book: *The Shock Doctrine – the Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, presenting an alternative history of how we ended up with the current extreme form of capitalism, now attacking the last hold-backs of public control, such as education, health care and water. Noting that it is often argued that the change to extreme capitalism and globalization was a peaceful process, she pointed out that this system operates on the basis of shocks and privatization of public goods often happens in moments of crisis or when a state of emergency is imposed. She also pointed to positive shocks and pivotal moments, such as the change in rule in South Africa, a period of accelerated, fast-forward life and excitement, when the people focused on political change, but bad deals were made in the back room on the economic front that has led to the impoverishment of more people now than then. She said that in Latin America this economic model is referred to as neoliberalism and the second colonial pillage, the first having been the opening of the veins of Latin America for natural resources and now that attack on what has been held by the public and by indigenous peoples in the hardest to reach areas. She pointed to out that what now becomes privatized is the war itself, even the prison system, border control, and the army are being privatized and corporations stand to gain as the “War on Terror” continues, with the Global Homeland Security Business being estimated at 200 billion dollars annually. She also noted that response to disasters is becoming privatized and the same corporations are seeing a market in natural disasters and climate change, for example Blackwater the private mercenary company came to New Orleans within days of Hurricane Katrina to act as a private police force. Naomi Klein stated that the Olympic Games also mark times when the normal rules do not apply, they are used to justify extra police forces, cross-border integration and private security forces: at the Athens Summer Olympic Games the security budget was 1.5 billion and for the Games in China it is expected to be 13 billion. She noted that we are already seeing similar preparations in Vancouver. She then addressed the effect of shock tactics: people get disoriented when something they cannot understand happens, because there is a gap between event and narrative; colonial settler societies are especially vulnerable to those tactics because they are built to be a historical; if you do not know your rights you are more likely to understand them. She pointed to resistance, especially amongst indigenous peoples, since they maintain a collective narrative and identity and collective memory is one of the of the ways to resist and overcome shocks, since it can help recognize destructive patterns. Noting that the American dream is built on having no past and starting over, she pointed to how the Bush Administration following 9/11 was talking about starting history over again, in an effort to reboot the brains of the public. She referred to the methods of erasure, severing of roots and blanking, as principles on which the colonial dream is built, such as the colonial myth of the empty land; torture has been used in this reinvention process, including residential schools. Naomi Klein warned that mankind is on the suicide stretch, selling rescue to the rich and containing the poor, and that there are no magical solutions, although those have long been promoted by the scriptures: you can really screw up and a boat will come or you can catch the “elevator to a gated community in the sky” as if there was an eject bottom for life and the planet. She noted that institutional religion and colonialism are perfect partners - they mutually reinforce each other and aid and abet the capitalist process. She warned that we are trapped in a dangerous story that we do not have to live with the consequences of our actions; we are rationalizing, dangerous myths. As we think about resistance, we know that memory is a form of resistance, but we also need stories to fight back. She called for a different way of understanding our place in the world, stressed that memory is a form of shock resistance and that people need to fight back on the basis of their own stories.