

Sun Peaks: Indian Land For Sale

This is an excerpt from an email letter written by Arthur Manuel on 30 September 2007 from Sydney, Australia, where he was taking part in an OXFAM conference. The letter is in response to a pro-development story in the Kamloops This Week newspaper - 30 September 2007 - titled "The European Indian Fascination" by Markus Ermish. The writer was reporting on the fireside press conference held on 21 September 2007 by the Secwepemc Native Youth Movement against the occupation of indigenous land by Sun Peaks Resort.

Sun Peaks is selling Secwepemc Aboriginal Title Land right from under our feet. Money at Sun Peaks Resort is not made selling ski passes but in selling off recreational property to the richest people in the world, who can afford these kinds of accommodation to live in for only a few weeks a year. The ski resort provides the basis for the high priced value of the property. It is the Secwepemc hunters and their families who have to pay the price for the recreational value by not getting game in Sun Peaks area because of human activity in the expanding development. In fact Sun Peaks is taking food off their tables.

Divide and Rule Strategy

Sun Peaks' Spin is to try and justify its sale of Sun Peaks Lands by the powerlessness of the elected chiefs to address this issue. I know there is a lot of misconception of Indian peoples and the general public about what is the power and authority of the elected chiefs are. Unfortunately the elected chiefs are creatures of the Canadian government Indian Act. They are a creature of the Canadian Parliament. What little power the elected Chiefs applies to ON the federal Indian Reserves they are elected from.

Elected Chiefs Strategy

I made it very clear at Sun Peaks that I really wanted to hear what the strategy of the elected chiefs on Stopping the Expansion of Sun Peaks. I want to know how the elected chiefs were going to stop the sale of our land to recreational land users right from under our feet. I want to know because I have a right to know. My father, the late George Manuel fought very hard to have the power of the elected chiefs respected when he was the president of the National Indian Brotherhood (now Assembly of First Nations) and president of the Union of British Columbia Chiefs. He used to tell me stories of how the Indian Agent in Kamloops used to get our chief and council to sign Band Council Resolutions (BCRs) and the Indian Agent would fill them out in Kamloops. He deeply resented that kind of dictatorship by the Department of Indian Affairs. My father worked really hard to get the chiefs recognized and respected but when he was re-evaluating his efforts at the end of his days, he told me that he thought that the Band Administrator was taking control over the chief and council. I felt he felt that the money and programs and services from the Department of Indian Affairs was taking control over our self-determination as indigenous peoples.

We need to define a new direction based on recognition and coexistence of Aboriginal Title

and Treaty Rights. All revenue generated in Canada are earned from using our natural wealth and resources. We have never benefitted from this. All we have been given is the crumbs from the table of the federal and provincial governments. We are the owners of our land. We need to live that. We are responsible for our future generations. We need to keep our elected leadership in line with our beliefs. They are either responsible to us or responsible to the federal and provincial governments.

Sucking and Blowing Strategy

Sun Peaks and other federally and provincially approved developments always ride on the coat tails of the Sucking and Blowing Words of some of our elected leadership to justify themselves. Of course the federal and provincial government expect the elected chiefs to say something because they give the chiefs and the chiefs organizations lots of money to be in control. Words need to be measured in terms of impact. Saying you agree with the goals but not the strategy is like sucking and blowing at the same time and can only be justified if a solid and acceptable strategy does exist that will stop the 3rd party alienation of our traditional territory

Traditional Forms of Government

Sun Peaks is inside Neskonlith Indian Reserve 1862 and north of the present DIA Neskonlith Indian Reserve. Secwepemc people who have been fighting for Sun Peaks to Stop Expanding are primarily from the Neskonlith, Adams Lake and Little Shuswap Indian Reserves and some are from Kamloops, Skeetchesten and Barrier Lake. These people support the traditional land users who used the land at Sun Peaks and have access to it under provincial law.

Opposing Austrian Ski Team Using Sun Peaks

I oppose the Austrian Ski Team using Sun Peaks because they are being used to promote the sale of the new developments happening up at Sun Peaks. It is simple as that. It is clear that Sun Peaks and Kamloops feel it is very important to Kamloops and following this story is ample proof of that. This is an international story because it involves Austria, Canada and Indigenous Peoples Human Rights. The story involves meetings with the Austrian government, Austrian Ski Team and a Press Conference in Vienna, Austria. And it involves the 2010 Winter Olympics. All these things make this an international story and it will carry on to November 2007 when the Austrian Ski Team will come to Sun Peaks.

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