

Canada's Colonial Settler Policies Alive and Well

By [Jim Miles](#)

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Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [History](#)

There is a lot of obfuscation and sloganeering about the Canada wide protests in support of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation of British Columbia and their resistance to corporate and governmental greed in pushing a natural gas pipeline through their traditional territory. Last night (Monday, February 17, 2020) a CBC reporter cited – and probably paraphrased closely – Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as saying his “most important relationship is with indigenous people.” This morning I listened to parts of the press conference with the indigenous First Nations leaders and then listened to the Parliamentary leaders make their comments the House of Commons.

Ethnic cleansing

The phrase the “most important relationship is with indigenous people” does not ring true, other than perhaps for the publicity factor. The reality is the proverbial “forked – tongue” – saying positive things to the indigenous people concerning reconciliation, and then acting indifferently to long standing problems while corporations supported by Canada's military and militarized police continue to grab land for their own profit.

Yes, some water systems have been upgraded, and a few homes have been built, and corporations have built some reserve infrastructure as a way to successfully buy over various Indian bands. But the reality is not the superficial mechanical fixes for problems on reserves that have been created by the colonial-settler policies of the Indian Act and its incorporation into the Canadian constitution; the reality is of a people being pushed off their own lands, treaties ignored, land annexed for railroads, highways, agricultural land, in other words: ethnic cleansing, and if the residential school system is added on to the diseases and starvation created by the white settlers (originally fur traders and gold seekers), genocide.

The solutions are actually quite straightforward but fly in the face of the people who in reality have the “most important relationship” with Trudeau – the CEOs of the corporate-financial world whether they are Canadian or from the U.S. or Europe.

The solution is to give title to the indigenous people within those areas where no title has ever been ceded and to honour the treaties of those who mistakenly signed treaties with the British colonial settlers many decades ago. From then and then only will the governments of Canada and the provinces be able to “discuss”, to “negotiate” towards solutions to other problems resulting from the ongoing colonial-settler mentality of corporate officers, politicians, and security services of various kinds.

Rule of Law

An oft cited platitude from the Prime Minister is his fondness for the “rule of law”. In his speech this morning Trudeau warned against conflict in the present circumstances and not

to “boil it down to slogans” “Rule of law” is certainly the most overused slogan in both Trudeau’s liberal lexicon, and even more so with the opposition Conservative party.

Most laws are made to benefit those making the rules and are not necessarily made to apply justice. Rule of law also is served up differently by the courts and the police, with the wealthy and powerful – individuals and corporations – generally receiving more favorable interpretations than the poor – and the natives.

The Wet’suwet’en have not ceded their traditional tribal lands. The band council operates on the ‘rule of law’ as propagated by the Federal government today and historically. The ‘law’ is highly discriminatory, setting up different categories of “Indian” and controlling who can be on the councils and what their actual powers are. The ‘law’ decided on where the reservations were to be placed – most commonly on unproductive land. The ‘law’ kidnapped native children to send them to Christian operated schools in order to deny them their cultural heritage through their language and learnings from their elders. The ‘law’ annexed large tracts of land for white settlers, and significantly for the railways – which makes them an obvious target for demonstrations.

The hereditary chiefs are in charge of traditional lands, those not “given” to the bands as reservations (can you give people their own land?). The only way the government can have jurisdiction over unceded territory is through wilful acquiescence of the indigeneous people – most commonly received through individual greed or communal duress – or by militarized force. Both are common in Canada.

For Justin Trudeau to demonstrate “his most important relationship” he would pay attention to justice and not to the rule of law. Justice for the Wet’suwet’en would recognize their title to their traditional lands. Justice for the Wet’suwet’en would be a quick removal of the Indian Act and allowing them to govern themselves within their territory. That removal would open up immense areas for discussion across Canada, but that is exactly what all parties in Parliament are calling for – except of course the Conservatives who want more ‘rule of law’ police and military action against the natives land protectors.

Natural gas is not ‘green’

The environmental arguments for B.C. natural gas production are not valid. While the gas remains in the ground it is clean, the fracking process – the fracturing of the landscape using huge amounts of water poisoned with extractive chemicals – is very environmentally destructive. These costs to the environment are not considered by the corporations or the government when assessing the economic benefits of the project – otherwise there would be no economic benefit in the long term, only short term job creation benefits and short term extraction profits for the corporations.

Natural gas may be a cleaner carbon energy source to transport and then to burn, but it does not benefit the atmosphere. More carbon is still being pumped into the air, adding to the ever increasing load of carbon dioxide. Methane, eighty times more effective at trapping heat than carbon dioxide, is a significant problem stemming from the production, storage and transport of natural gas.

This issue is where the CBC, Canada’s national broadcaster, failed the public at the end of the above presentations. First off, when it came time for Green Party leader Elizabeth May to speak in the House, they turned their cameras away to the newscaster, who then put his

own interpretation on – erroneously in my mind – what the Bloc Québécois leader Yves-François Blanchet said. Elizabeth May is the most informed person in the House when it comes to environmental concerns and is probably equally well informed on indigenous issues, especially in British Columbia where the majority of unceded land is located.

Most important relationship

It would be wonderful if Justin Trudeau's most important relationship was with the indigenous people rather than with the corporate world. However until he actually does more than talk, and then talk some more, making vague promises and emitting nice sounding homilies, he is simply extending the colonial settler practices of all Canadian governments: bypass the indigenous people and ignore harmful effects to the environment.

He is not the only one to blame, but he is Canada's current leader. This is an issue that affects all Canadians both from an historical perspective as a colonial-settler society imposed on an indigenous people, and from the perspective of current events, where 'rule of law' conflicts with justice and environmental issues.

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