

Canadian Government Usurps First Nations Land Rights. Oil and Gas Fracking supported by RCMP against Elsipogtog

Seize the Moment, Stand with Elsipogtog

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“He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.”— George Orwell

Canada's colonial past is present, however much Prime Minister Stephen Harper seeks to obfuscate the reality of the history of this land. This week has served as a prime example of how denial of past colonialism helps to perpetuate ongoing colonial relationships. The [current flashpoint](#) is the small town of Rexton, New Brunswick, where the Elsipogtog First Nation and their supporters are facing down massive RCMP repression of their protests against activity by SWN Resources, a company that is carrying out seismic testing for proposed oil and gas fracking operations in the area. On October 17, hundreds of RCMP officers, including snipers and many heavily armed officers, moved in against Elsipogtog land defenders who have maintained a protest camp and presence in the area for months. Dozens were arrested, and there were reports of rubber bullets fired by police forces. Several RCMP vehicles were set ablaze.

Fracking may have been  the latest spark, but Harper's government has been fanning the flames for years – denying the true colonial history of Canada even while continuing to actively undermine the sovereignty and rights of First Nations. On Wednesday this week, the Conservative government presented their much-hyped Speech from the Throne, in which they asserted the founders of Canada:

“dared to seize the moment that history offered. Pioneers, then, few in number, reached across a vast continent” and “forged an independent country where none would have otherwise existed.”

This was no one off rhetorical flourish. This was just the latest expression of “Harper’s History.” In 2009, Harper, with a straight face, informed a press conference at a G20 summit that Canada “had no history of colonialism.”

Colonialism Denial

These seem like astounding and easily disproven assertions, but colonialism denial is real and useful because it serves colonialism present; it serves the primary purpose of the Conservative government today, which is to push through resource extraction projects – many of which are in direct contradiction with Indigenous peoples – at all costs.

The repression at Rexton and Harper’s latest bald-faced lie about Canadian history come in the same week that James Anaya, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights, issued a scathing report after a nine-day visit across the country. Anaya [concluded that](#) “Canada faces a crisis when it comes to the situation of indigenous peoples of the country.”

Rexton, New Brunswick – Elsipogtog – now takes its place in a long and shameful history, joining Oka, Ipperwash, Gustafsen Lake and so many more. At [Ipperwash](#), unarmed protester Dudley George was murdered by the OPP. At Gustafsen, 14 Sun Dancers asserting Indigenous sovereignty were met with 400 RCMP officers, troops, armoured personnel carriers and 70,000 rounds of ammunition. And this is just recent history.

“Contrary to the myth of seamless and peaceful nation-building, the modern Canadian state was built through the projection of force over and against Indigenous peoples. ”

Contrary to the myth of seamless and peaceful nation-building, the modern Canadian state was built through the projection of force over and against Indigenous peoples. The RCMP, and before it the Northwest Mounted Police, was formed with this express purpose. This is the colonial reality behind all assertions of the “rule of law,” past and present. It’s all about whose laws get enforced. Indigenous law? International law? Not in Harper’s Canada today, where the law of corporate profit rules. Only we can change that, and solidarity actions with the courageous land defenders of Elsipogtog are the first order of business.

Susan Levi-Peters, a former chief, [makes it clear](#) that they remain determined in the face of RCMP sniper rifles, rubber bullets and tear gas: “Nobody is leaving ... We don’t want shale gas here. We have been asking for consultations for three years now and nothing has happened. Instead they just put our people in jail.”

[IdleNoMore](#) has already shown us that creative, determined actions can reach across a vast continent, creating powerful movements where none would otherwise have existed. So let us seize the moment that history is offering. Let us stand with Elsipogtog.

Find your local solidarity action at www.wearepowershift.ca. •

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