

An Open Letter of Solidarity with the Unist'ot'en Camp and Indigenous Sovereignty

May 27th, 2014

The TSSU reaffirms its support of the Unist'ot'en resistance camp and movements fighting for indigenous sovereignty against encroachments by extractive industries and the Canadian state.

In December 2013, Canada's National Energy Board conditionally approved Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline project. If completed, the pipeline would carry crude oil from Alberta's tar-sands across British Columbia to tankers on the Pacific coast. "Enbridge's victory" in front of the National Energy Board, as one Alberta MP put it, coincides with the establishment of a political framework for pipeline development between the provincial governments of Alberta and B.C. Nominal opposition from B.C.'s incumbent Liberal government during the 2013 election cycle gave way in November to political consensus between the Liberals and Alberta's Progressive Conservatives.

To the TSSU, opposition to the Northern Gateway pipeline and political consensus appear part of an emerging cycle of struggles against extractive industries and the Canadian state. For the better part of 2013, activists opposed to shale gas fracking and seismic exploration in New Brunswick confronted American firm Southwestern Energy (SWN) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in mobilizations to halt SWN's explorations within unceded Mi'kmaq land. Against SWN trucks and RCMP containment strategies, solidarities began to take shape amongst those exposed to the extractive sector of capital. These lines of solidarity manifested concretely in active resistance and blockade—encampments, roadblocks, confrontation. Around the country, December 2nd, 2013 became a day of action in support of Elsipogtog, with protests in Victoria, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Hamilton and Montreal. In Vancouver, activists expressed solidarity by blocking the federal port. Although its motivations for doing so remain unclear, in December 2013 SWN announced it would cease shale-gas exploration until 2015.

In April of 2014, TSSU members took to the streets of north Burnaby with individuals and collectives from across the lower mainland, part of the People's Procession against expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline running from Edmonton to Burnaby. In 2007, this pipeline ruptured in Burnaby, spilling at that time 234 000 litres of synthetic crude oil. In 2009, a spill occurred at Kinder Morgan's Burnaby Mountain holding facility, which sits about a kilometre from SFU's main campus, with some 200 000 litres of crude escaping in that spill. Organized by Burnaby Residents Opposing Kinder Morgan Expansion and the Unit/Pitt Gallery, the April protest upon unceded territory was welcomed by Carleen Thomas of the Tsleil Waututh Nation. During the early afternoon hours of April 12th, the People's Procession wound its way through suburban north Burnaby, following the path of the pipeline. Culminating in Westridge Park, the procession facilitated the coordination of a plurality of groups and individuals affected by Kinder Morgan's plans under the umbrella of anti-pipeline political organization.

The cycle of struggles against the extractive industry in Canada suggests to the TSSU burgeoning forms collectivity and solidarity amongst those exposed to its developments. In northern British Columbia, the region of the Wet'suwet'en stands in the path of the Northern Gateway pipeline. Threatened not only by Northern Gateway, Wet'suwet'en territory is to be bisected by the Pacific Trails pipeline, which will carry natural gas to Kitimat. Construction has begun on the Pacific Trails pipeline, and a proposed four pipelines will travel the route through Wet'suwet'en domain. Efforts to halt pipeline development are already underway. At the Unist'ot'en camp, cabins have been built to house activists and support the camp's blockade of pipeline development, including a pithouse that will house full-time activists at the camp year-round. As the Unist'ot'en argue, so long as the camp remains intact no pipeline can be built.

Teaching Support Staff Union

To aid their efforts, the Unist'ot'en camp has called for support and solidarity to block pipeline development. The TSSU has previously provided funds to the camp and would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its support of the Unist'ot'en and indigenous sovereignty movements opposing the antagonisms of extractive industries and the Canadian state.

In solidarity,

Melissa Roth
Organizer
Signing on Behalf of the TSSU General Membership
Located at Simon Fraser University