

Canada's Trudeau Accused of Violating First Nations Rights over Gas Pipeline

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Global Research, January 14, 2019

[Oil Change International](#) 10 January 2019

Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Oil and Energy](#),
[Police State & Civil Rights](#)

There are moments that define a politician. There are legacies that they leave. But the reality of high office is often so different from the easy promises of opposition.

As a poster boy politician, who entered office promising a new type of politics, Justin Trudeau, the Canadian Prime Minister, embodied fresh hope for many who wanted a distinctive difference from the toxic politics of his nefarious neighbour further south.

And one of those issues he promised a brighter future on is Indigenous Rights.

[Trudeau is](#) full of fine words and promises, for example, saying last year:

“Our government is working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to advance meaningful reconciliation and build a future where Indigenous peoples succeed and prosper.”

But Trudeau's actions have not lived up to his fine rhetoric. For most of last year he was embroiled in a bitter and expensive controversy about the [Kinder Morgan](#) tar sands pipeline (see [here](#) for more info).

And this year has not got off to a better start for him either. In early January 2019, there has been a major confrontation between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and First Nations about the building of yet more fossil fuel infrastructure: a \$6.2 billion gas natural gas pipeline by TransCanada's Coastal GasLink. The pipeline is due to transport fracked natural gas from northeastern B.C. some 670 kilometres to the coast where an LNG Canada facility is due to be built too.

Indeed Trudeau has another crisis on his hands and once again his administration seems to be siding with oil and gas. His political legacy is on the line once more.

As the [Globe and Mail](#) reported this week:

“On a forestry road south of Houston, B.C., members of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation are running checkpoints to oppose a pipeline being built on their traditional territory... Activity at the two camps - Unist'ot'en, which has been around since 2010, and Gidimt'en, which was built late last year and is named after one of the five clans - had been escalating after a B.C. Supreme Court ruling in December giving the builders of the Coastal GasLink LNG pipeline an injunction so they could use the road unimpeded.”

Members of the [Wet'suwet'en](#) Nation argue that they were never consulted about the pipeline and that it violates their constitutional rights.

The [Wet'suwet'en](#) clans “have rejected the Coastal GasLink fracked gas pipeline because this is our home. Our medicines, our berries, our food, the animals, our water, our culture are all here since time immemorial. We are obligated to protect our ways of life for our babies unborn.”

And this week the authorities responded with brute force and ignorance again. As the [Washington Post](#) noted:

“The pictures emerging from the scene of an anti-pipeline action in British Columbia could not be more off-brand for Justin Trudeau.”

Whereas Trudeau is all spin and shine, the images from earlier in the week were the opposite. [The RCMP](#) “used excessive and brutal force” to enter one of the fortified checkpoints where the Wet'suwet'en First Nation were blocking the workers from gaining entry onto their protected and unceded land.

Although they knew the Police were coming, they were taken aback by state brutality. As a spokesperson for [The Unist'ot'en](#) camp said:

“We expected a large response, we did not expect a military level invasion where our unarmed women and elders were faced with automatic weapons and bulldozers.”

Some fourteen people [were arrested](#). Reacting to footage of tactics by the RCMP, author and activist Naomi Klein tweeted “a shameful day for Canada, which has marketed itself as a progressive leader on climate and Indigenous rights.”

Klein added that this was all “for a gas pipeline that is entirely incompatible with a safe climate.”

A shameful day for Canada, which has marketed itself as a progressive leader on climate and Indigenous rights. It has just invaded unceded Wet'suwet'en territory and arrested land defenders, all for a gas pipeline that is entirely incompatible with a safe climate. <https://t.co/RpSy3fLg3H>

— Naomi Klein (@NaomiAKlein) [January 8, 2019](#)

On [Tuesday](#), there were over 60 protests in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en in Canada and around the world. [According to rally organizers](#),

“We oppose the use of legal injunctions, police forces, and criminalizing state tactics against the Wet'suwet'en asserting their own laws on their own lands. This is a historic moment when the federal and provincial governments can choose to follow their stated principles of reconciliation, or respond by perpetuating colonial theft and violence in Canada.”

Events are now moving fast. There are press reports in the last twenty four hours that the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs have struck a ["tentative"](#) deal with the RCMP on a compromise that allows Coastal GasLink through to start preconstruction on the pipeline. In return, the RCMP will not again raid the camp or enter the Unist'ot'en lodge without an invitation.

Yesterday, Trudeau had what was described as a fiery exchange with Tilly, a First Nations woman regarding his Government's handling of the protest, at a town hall meeting in BC.

Tilly asked what he was going to do "to stop oppressing and holding our people under your colonisation?" She continued: "When are you going to give us our rights back?"

[Trudeau replied:](#)

"Canada has a long and terrible history in regard to Indigenous Peoples. We have consistently failed as a country to live up to the spirit and intent of the original treaties. We have not treated indigenous peoples as partners and stewards of this land. We have marginalised., behaved in paternalistic, colonialist ways that has lacked respect for First Peoples' as stewards of the land. We have much to apologise for and much to work forward on together in respect."

Trudeau went on to say that his government was making "significant improvement in self-governance and new relationships in support that is moving in the right direction."

When further confronted by [Tilly, he replied](#) that he understood the

"anger and the passion you have to protect your land. I absolutely respect that. I can understand your impatience. I understand your frustration."

He added:

"We will work together to resolve these issues".

Many people might consider these fine words based on empty deeds after the last week.

Indeed, at the meeting another member of the public shouted:

"You're getting people arrested", before adding "[You're a liar and a weak leader](#). What do you tell your children?"

Meanwhile, the Wet'suwet'en also maintain that the "Hereditary Chiefs have by absolutely no means agreed to let the Coastal GasLink pipeline tear through our traditional territories."

[They contend](#) that they see through the Government's "attempts to further colonial violence and remove us from our territories. We remain undeterred, unafraid, and unceded" and add that "This fight is far from over."

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