

# By What Right Does Canada and Its Gendarmerie Invade Wet'suwet'en Territory?

People need to see what the government of Canada is doing!

By [Kim Petersen](#)

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Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

*In the nineteenth century, **Gilbert Sproat**, a colonial official, wrote an account of his time among the Nuw Chah Nulth people on the west coast of Vancouver Island. He noted that the original inhabitants have “known every inch of the west coast for thousands of years.”<sup>1</sup>*

Despite this acknowledgment of long-term habitation, the mindset of settler-colonialists toward the Original Peoples was condescending. This comes across clearly in a conversation between Sproat and a Tseshaht chief:

**Chief:** “We see your ships, and hear things that makes our hearts grow faint. They say that more King-George-men will soon be here, and take our land, our firewood, our fishing grounds; that we shall be placed on a little spot, and shall have to do everything according to the fancies of the King-George-men.”

**Sproat:** “... [I]t is true that more King-George-men (as they call the English) are coming: they will soon be here. But your land will be bought at a fair price.”

**Chief:** “We do not wish to sell our land nor our water; let your friends stay in their own country.”

**Sproat:** “My great chief, the high chief of the King-George-men, seeing that you do not work your land, orders that you shall sell it. The land is of no use to you.... The white man will give you work and buy your fish and oil.”

**Chief:** “Ah, but we don't care do to as the white men wish.”

**Sproat:** “Whether or not, ... The white men will come. All your people know that they are your superiors...”

**Chief:** “We do not want the white man. He will steal what we have. We wish to live as we are.”<sup>2</sup>

Sproat was fine by the outcome. He and other settler-colonialists

often talked about our rights as strangers to take possession of the district [of Alberni]. The right of *boná fide* purchase we had, for I had bought the land from the Government, and had purchased it a second time from the natives. Nevertheless, as the Indians denied all knowledge of the colonial authorities at Victoria, and had sold the country to us, perhaps, under fear of loaded cannon pointed towards the village, it was evident that we had taken

forceful possession of the district.<sup>3</sup>In a paeen to white supremacy,<sup>4</sup> Kleecoot, a large lake on Vancouver Island,<sup>5</sup> was renamed in Sproat's honor.

This colonial past points to widespread racism and an egregious moral mindset of white ancestors. This belongs to the distant past. Or does it?

### **Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose**

A 7 February email from the Unist'ot'en Solidarity Brigade headlines with: "RCMP Have raided the Gidemt'en Checkpoint with Helicopters, Snipers, Police Dogs, and Tactical teams."

The invasion was carried out by heavily armed RCMP despite the Wet'suwet'en having made it clear that they are unarmed and peaceful.

They have also made it clear through the unanimity of the hereditary chiefs that they do not want a Coastal GasLink pipeline going through their unceded territory.

The state and corporate media in Canada do not delve into how it is that Indigenous peoples who have never relinquished their territory or their rights to the territory have, nonetheless, had their territory claimed by settler-colonialists.

If Martians landed on Earth and populated Turtle Island with Martian colonies, and if the Terran resistance succumbed to superior Martian weaponry and epidemics caused by Martian pathogens, would the unsundered territories now belong to Martians? What if the Martians had a Doctrine of Discovery that recognized Terrans as uncivilized savages?<sup>6</sup> Morally? One would think not. Legally? Depends on whether Martian law now trumps Terran law.

Why then does the Canadian state and corporate media refer to BC court decisions as requiring the Wet'suwet'en to allow Coastal GasLink to lay a pipeline across their unceded territory? Why is Wet'suwet'en law not primary?

Is this what Canada means by reconciliation? Is this [what prime minister Justin Trudeau meant when he said,](#)

It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with First Nations peoples, one that understands that the constitutionally guaranteed rights of First Nations in Canada are not an inconvenience but rather a *sacred obligation*. [emphasis added]

### **Resistance**

Unist'ot'en Solidarity Brigade has issued a call for support: "While the actions of the RCMP have been grotesque and unconscionable the power on the frontlines and in the streets has been beautiful! Keep up the pressure!"



People are holding all three entrances to the Port of Vancouver for the third day in a row

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

**THIS IS WHAT WE'VE HEARD DIRECTLY  
FROM THE CAMP:**

- **A CALL HAS GONE OUT FOR MAJOR SOLIDARITY ACTIONS**
- **OCCUPY GOVERNMENT OFFICES**
- **OCCUPY THE OFFICES OF THOSE FINANCING THIS PROJECT**
- **IF YOU ARE IN NEW YORK: THE HEAD OFFICE FOR KKR (THIS IS THE INVESTMENT GROUP THAT BOUGHT OUT TC ENERGY'S 65% EQUITY INTEREST IN THE CGL PIPELINE LAST DECEMBER) IS BASED IN NYC.**
- **PLAN AN ACTION**
- **SUPPORT #INDIGENOUSYOUTHFORWETSUWETEN'S CALL-TO-ACTION**
- **WRITE AND CALL THE B.C. GOVERNMENT**
- **DONATE TO THE CAMPS!**
- **SHOW UP IN PERSON AND OFFER PHYSICAL SUPPORT**

FOLLOW @GIDIMTEN\_CHECKPOINT & @SEEDINGSOVEREIGNTY FOR UPDATES

#MEETTHEFRONTLINES

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## Notes

1. Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, *The Nootka: Scenes and Studies of Savage Life* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1987; originally published in 1868): xv.

2. Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, 4-5.

3. Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, 7.

4. As evidenced by Sproat's own words, "The mind of the savage then appears to rock to and fro out of mere weakness, and he tells lies and talks nonsense. I do not doubt, however, that in the course of time the mental powers of the Indian could be greatly improved by education. The chief difficulty is that the people would vanish from before the white man during the polishing process, as so many tribes of savages have done in other parts of the world." (p 84-85)

"In one part of his character the savage resembles the lowest members of civilized community — such as outcasts in large cities. But another part of his character, inherited through the long succession of moral degradation, unchecked by any surrounding counteracting influences, is unlike anything that can be witnessed even in the most brutalized individual in civilized community." (p 103)

5. George Vancouver, imperialist who immodestly named the island after himself, although he magnanimously included the name of a fellow navigator, the Peruvian-Spaniard Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra.\

6. The United States Supreme Court has used the Doctrine of Discovery to support the superiority of white Europeans and their right to dispossess the Original Peoples and to slaughter them. In Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (InterVarsity Press, 2019): 104-116. [Review](#).

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