

Although Idle No More began before Chief Spence's hunger strike, and will continue after, her strike is symbolic of what is happening to First Nations in Canada. For every day that Spence does not eat, she is slowly dying, and that is exactly what is happening to First Nations, who have lifespans up to 20 years shorter than average Canadians.

Idle No More has a similar demand in that there is a need for Canada to negotiate the sharing of our lands and resources, but the government must display good faith first by withdrawing the legislation and restoring the funding to our communities. Something must be done to address the immediate crisis faced by the grassroots in this movement.

I am optimistic about the power of our peoples and know that in the end, we will be successful in getting this treaty relationship back on track. However, I am less confident about the Conservative government's willingness to sit down and work this out peacefully any time soon. Thus, I fully expect that this movement will continue to expand and increase in intensity. Canada has not yet seen everything this movement has to offer. It will continue to grow as we educate Canadians about the facts of our lived reality and the many ways in which we can all live here peacefully and share the wealth.

After all, First Nations, with our constitutionally protected aboriginal and treaty rights, are Canadians' last best hope to protect the lands, waters, plants, and animals from complete destruction—which doesn't just benefit our children, but the children of all Canadians.

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## OCCUPY(ED) CANADA:

### The Political Economy of Indigenous Dispossession

*Shiri Pasternak*

The political economy of Canada rests on claims of ownership to all lands and resources within our national borders. So, what, in concrete terms, does it mean to talk about Occupy(ed) Canada to express the demands of the 99 percent?

Last week, *The Globe and Mail* reported that the Canadian Forces' National Counter-Intelligence Unit has been keeping tabs on the activities of Indigenous organizations. While the Department of National Defence—the unit that released the surveillance documents—is tasked with protecting citizens from espionage, terrorists and saboteurs, the content of these co-intel reports do not contain a single shred of evidence that Canadians' safety is at stake. In fact, what these surveillance reports starkly reveal is that the self-determination, well-being, and territorial heritage of Indigenous peoples are at the heart of Indigenous protest and land reclamation.

Even Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) confirm this observation. In a 2007 presentation to the RCMP, INAC states that “the vast majority of Hot Spots” of so-called Native unrest are “related to lands and resources,” with most conflicts “incited by development activities on traditional territories.” It seems, in other words, that “Native unrest” is largely a euphemism for bands that are protecting their lands from ecological damage, or in the case of land claim disputes, from dispossession. More broadly, “Native unrest” has become rhetoric of dismissal for the struggle to exercise inherent Indigenous rights. So why is the Department of National Defence spying on Indigenous communities in Canada?

It is the fear of economic disruption that is driving Canada to spy on Indigenous peoples. Moreover, in recent years, it has become the fear of an exceedingly more dangerous risk to business-as-usual in this country than paranoid phantoms of espionage. It is the fear of Aboriginal Title. Since 1997, Indigenous politics in Canada have unfolded against a changing landscape of economic consequence. In that year, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* that Aboriginal Title is the collective proprietary interest of Aboriginal peoples in their unceded traditional territories. Therefore, wherever treaties had not been signed, Aboriginal proprietary rights underlie provincial, federal, and private property lands. And in addition to unceded or surrendered lands, as Arthur Manuel and Nicole Schabus pointed out in an article in *Chapman Law Review* in 2005, “Many Indigenous Peoples argue that the ‘spirit and intent’ of the treaties also ensures Indigenous control over their traditional territories.”

Unceded and treated lands cover a massive amount of territory in Canada from coast to coast, translating into significant uncertainty for industry and government. There is no question that the active defence of Indigenous rights and lands has major economic consequences for Canada. In 1990, INAC commissioned a study by Price Waterhouse on the economic value of uncertainty associated with Indigenous claims in B.C., for example. The report concluded that around \$1 billion of capital expenditures involving up to 1,500 jobs in the mining and forestry sectors would likely be affected by the land claims process.

This problem is not going away. It is only intensifying with the current global scramble for energy, minerals, oil and gas. Key natural resource projects cannot proceed without Indigenous consent and co-operation. In the last few years alone, Kirchenhmaykoosib Inimuwug shut down Platinec mining in northern Ontario Ojicree territory, 64 B.C. First Nations threaten the development of the west coast Enbridge pipeline to the Pacific Coast from the Alberta tar sands, and local Tsilhqot'in Nation sank the Prosperity copper and gold mine at Fish Lake in B.C. Moreover, mega-projects like the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, Plan Nord in Quebec, and the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario have all been hampered by the failure of ENGOs, government and industry to recognize the land rights of Indigenous peoples.

These developments are hardly new. Indigenous peoples have been on the geographic frontier of capital accumulation for over 500 years of permanent resistance. Indigenous peoples' labour and lands have shaped the political economy of Canada, from the time of the fur trade to bankrolling industrialization with their lands and resources, and today, by confronting neo-liberal policy in the form of continental restructuring and intensified resource grabs.

One example of the economic role of Indigenous lands historically and today can be found in the case of railways, to which Canada maintained a pre-emption right to clear Indigenous lands, and that facilitated the industrial pathways for capitalist development. Over a hundred years later, authorities have become well aware of the risky correlation between Indigenous lands and the steel rails that cross the country from coast to coast. In an RCMP briefing to CSIS on operational responses to Aboriginal occupations and protest, the RCMP warn: "The recent CN strike [referring to the Tyendinaga Mohawk rail blockades in

April 2007] represents the extent in which a national railway blockade could affect the economy of Canada." In addition to these massive expanses of treaty areas and unceded traditional territories, Indigenous lands were historically fragmented into isolated and remote reserves by successive colonial administrations. There are over 2,600 Indian reserves across Canada today.

This forced settlement resulted in a unique spatial phenomenon that unwittingly placed Indian reserves on the frontier of vital national and regional boundaries: frontiers, for example, for natural resource extraction, suburban development, military training grounds, oceans and inland waterways, state borders, and energy generation. Despite their wealth in land and resources, economic racism prevents Indigenous peoples from obtaining financial benefits from their traditional territories. Their proprietary interests have been largely ignored and Aboriginal Title is extinguished through the land claims settlement process. Chronic underfunding of reserves has deepened the gap formed by deprivation from traditional subsistence economies due to land loss and ecological deterioration. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) commissioner stated in 1996 that "current levels of poverty and underdevelopment are directly linked to the dis-possession of Indigenous Peoples from their lands and the delegitimation of their institutions of society and governance."

In addition to systemic impoverishment, and where Indigenous populations join the 99 percent, austerity programs attack the weakest first. Murray Angus, in his slim but critical book "And the Last Shall be First: Native Policy in an Era of Cutbacks," gives three main reasons for why Indigenous people are the first ones out of the social security boat when austerity programs roll around: (1) funding—money for Indigenous people comes from the "social envelope," which is under attack; (2) demographics—Indigenous peoples are the fastest growing population—so even maintaining programs is expensive; (3) and racism—white people will look after their own first.

The government has been doling out austerity programs to Indigenous peoples for decades by downloading their responsibilities onto provincial and territorial governments, as well as through bogus self-government policies. But as bureaucrats cast around for deep cuts that Harper has demanded, austerity measures will trim whatever is left

in Aboriginal budgets that cannot be tied down. In 2010, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation lost funding, an organization that financed community-based programs to address abuse suffered at residential schools. That same year, Harper's Conservatives cut funding to the Sister in Spirit research project that brought to light hundreds of cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Most recently, Department of Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan announced upcoming budget cuts to his department amounting to a \$100 million slash.

The wealth of the nation still depends fundamentally on land. Financial investment for resource development projects is funneled through the same banks protested against across the U.S. and Canada, such as RBC Royal Bank that funds tar sands development on Treaty 8 lands. Global structural inequality can only be addressed then by questioning the sources of authority by which resources are bought and sold. If you don't own it, Canada, how can you give it away?

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## DECOLONIZING TOGETHER: Moving Beyond a Politics of Solidarity Toward a Practice of Decolonization

*Harsha Walia*

Canada's state and corporate wealth is largely based on subsidies gained from the theft of Indigenous lands and resources. Conquest in Canada was designed to ensure forced displacement of Indigenous peoples from their territories, the destruction of autonomy and self-determination in Indigenous self-governance, and the assimilation of Indigenous peoples' cultures and traditions. Given the devastating cultural, spiritual, economic, linguistic, and political impacts of colonialism on Indigenous people in Canada, any serious attempt by non-natives at allying with Indigenous struggles must entail solidarity in the fight against colonization.

Non-natives must be able to position ourselves as active and integral participants in a decolonization movement for political liberation,

social transformation, renewed cultural kinships, and the development of an economic system that serves rather than threatens our collective life on this planet. Decolonization is as much a process as a goal. It requires a profound recentring on Indigenous worldviews. Syed Hussain, a Toronto-based activist, states: "Decolonization is a dramatic reimagining of relationships with land, people, and the state. Much of this requires study. It requires conversation. It is a practice; it is an unlearning."

### Indigenous Solidarity on its Own Terms

A growing number of social movements are recognizing that Indigenous self-determination must become the foundation for all our broader social justice mobilizing. Indigenous peoples in Canada are the most impacted by the pillage of lands, experience disproportionate poverty and homelessness, are overrepresented in statistics of missing and murdered women, and are the primary targets of repressive policing and prosecutions in the criminal injustice system. Rather than being treated as a single issue within a laundry list of demands, Indigenous self-determination is increasingly understood as intertwined with struggles against racism, poverty, police violence, war and occupation, violence against women and environmental justice.

Incorporating Indigenous self-determination into these movements can, however, subordinate and compartmentalize Indigenous struggle within the machinery of existing leftist narratives. Anarchists point to the antiauthoritarian tendencies within Indigenous communities, environmentalists highlight the connection to land that Indigenous communities have, anti-racists subsume Indigenous people into the broader discourse about systemic oppression in Canada, and women's organizations point to the relentless violence inflicted on Indigenous women in discussions about patriarchy.

We have to be cautious not to replicate the Canadian state's assimilationist model of liberal pluralism, forcing Indigenous identities to fit within our existing groups and narratives. The inherent right to traditional lands and to self-determination is expressed collectively and should not be subsumed within the discourse of individual or human rights. Furthermore, it is imperative to understand that being