

Infrastructure Exposé

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Colonialism, Protests, and Logging at Fairy Creek on What is Now Vancouver Island



(Instagram, Aya Clappis @dreamsincoastal as cited in Lalonde, 2021)

If you have been keeping up with social media you have probably seen updates and announcements about the ongoing protests at Fairy Creek which are being conducted in order to stop the logging of old growth forests on what is so-called Vancouver Island in British Columbia (Renner & Yunker, 2021). It has now recently become the largest act of civil disobedience since the time of colonization in what is currently Canada and the amount of protestors has grown largely due to the influence of social media and impact the events which are taking place have had on such platforms (Rothbauer, 2021).

Protestors have been trying to prevent and put an end to resource extraction in the area which has been taking place through the practice of clear-cutting and logging by the “company Teal-Jones” (Renner & Yunker, 2021). The RCMP have responded to peaceful protestors with brutality, violence, and countless arrests which have been documented and posted online (Little, 2021; Rothbauer, 2021; van der Zwan, 2021). Such violence has included but is not limited to

spraying protestors with pepper spray and wearing symbols of White supremacy on their uniforms despite police being instructed not to do so (Little, 2021; Rothbauer, 2021; van der Zwan, 2021). The reason for these arrests is that an injunction was “granted” (Lindsay, 2021) in “April” (Lindsay, 2021) 2021 so that the company Teal-Jones could continue their logging business and practices in the area making it illegal for “protestors” (Lindsay, 2021) to continue to prevent them from doing so (Williams, 2021). However, on September 28, 2021 a “[British Columbia] Supreme Court judge” (Lindsay, 2021) “[ended this] injunction” (Lindsay, 2021) as a result of human rights violations due to the conduct of the RCMP (Lindsay, 2021). But, soon after on October 8, 2021 this decision was reversed and the injunction was put back in effect and protests and arrests continued (Dickson, 2021).

Despite these protests, the project is still ongoing and draws many parallels and connections to the long history of other colonial infrastructure projects.

In mainstream media and across social media these protests are being referred to as the Fairy Creek Blockade however, they are taking place on the unceded land of the Pacheedaht First Nation and Ditidaht First Nation who in fact did agree to the company Teal-Jones taking up logging practices in this area due to economic reasons (Baker, 2021; Cox, 2021; Renner & Yunker, 2021; Williams, 2021) The majority of these protestors do not come from either of these Indigenous communities and for the most part are settlers with few being from other Indigenous communities (Baker, 2021; Cox, 2021). According to members of both of these First Nations communities these protestors are being disrespectful and it seems that in many ways are reinforcing colonialism and the erasure of Indigenous communities as they are asserting their

authority over lands which are not their own just as the first settlers did when they first came to what is currently called Canada (Baker, 2021; Little, 2021; Renner & Yunker, 2021). Ultimately, despite the Pacheedaht and Ditidaht First Nation band councils legally and officially approving of the company Teal-Jones taking up logging on their land it seems that members of the communities are “divided on the issue” (Williams, 2021).

Through analyzing this infrastructure and the history of this project with a critical eye there appears to be several layers of colonial roots to this project. More broadly, there are the colonial roots of resource extraction projects in general where settlers have used, stolen, and taken from Indigenous lands such as through pipelines which can be seen happening in other parts of what is now called the province of British Columbia as well as Alberta as companies and settlers come onto Indigenous lands and feel a sense of entitlement to property which is not their own (Pritchard, 2021; Spice, 2021a). Sometimes consent is given for resource extraction such as in this case however, usually it is not (Little, 2021). Additionally, there is the layer of White-washing involved in the environmental movement in the media where White environmentalists who typically have many other forms of socioeconomic privilege like financial stability do not take into account or acknowledge the opinions, thoughts, voice, and work of Indigenous land defenders across the globe and of those whose land they are residing on and taking up space in which is what is largely taking place here at the Fairy Creek Blockade (Renner & Yunker, 2021). Furthermore, there are the colonial roots of the current government systems in this territory which is for the most part run by settlers of European descent who do not have the knowledge which Indigenous communities hold who have been taking care of their lands and this land since time immemorial (Ditidaht First Nation, Huu-ay-aht First Nations, & Pacheedaht First Nation,

2021). These government systems are supposed to be helping to fund and provide support to Indigenous communities however, the Pacheedaht and Ditidaht First Nations band councils who have sovereignty over this area as it is unceded land have chosen to allow Teal-Jones to conduct logging operations and business within their communities and on their land as they require the funding which comes along with it as they are not receiving this adequately from the settler and colonial governments (Renner & Yunker, 2021). Yet, the financial stability and wellbeing of both these First Nations communities is being even further threatened and harmed by settlers and members of other Indigenous communities who are protesting on their lands and preventing business from taking place (Little, 2021). Furthermore, there have been several documented cases of police brutality and violence towards the blockade which is happening at Fairy Creek which is not enforcement that is coming on behalf of the Pacheedaht and Ditidaht First Nations communities even though it is occurring on their land (Little, 2021; van der Zwan, 2021). Such brutality and violence from police is often not seen occurring towards those who are not identifying as Indigenous or when it is not in relation to Indigenous disputes and issues (Little, 2021; van der Zwan, 2021). For example, a protestor who identifies as “Coast Salish... suffered a broken foot while being arrested” (Little, 2021) at the Fairy Creek Blockade (Little, 2021). Thus, with this comes several further layers of how settlers police and enforce their own policies and regulations onto Indigenous communities and their lands (van der Zwan, 2021).



(Hunter, 2021)

To avoid the reinforcement of settler colonialism through the practice of policing and police violence which should be avoided and stopped altogether it should be determined how Indigenous communities and in this case how the Ditidaht and Pacheedaht First Nations communities would like to regulate how their lands are treated by others and those who have not been welcomed onto their territory because as mentioned in the Hišuk ma ćawak Declaration “it is [their] responsibility to decide what is best for [their] lands” (Ditidaht First Nation et al., 2021) not that of others as very often this decision-making is taken away (Ditidaht First Nation et al., 2021; van der Zwan, 2021).

Consequently, it seems that the protests surrounding the resource extraction of logging which are taking place are continuing to perpetuate the ongoing cycle where the voices of privileged economically powerful settlers (who are usually White) are being amplified and not of those who are actually members of the Pacheedaht and Ditidaht First Nations communities whose opinions and thoughts are the only ones which truly should matter and that must be listened to regarding this project considering that it is *their land*. However, when Indigenous

communities establish sovereignty and autonomy over their land and communities it seems that this is an all too common trend especially when it comes to for-profit resource extraction projects.

According to an article written by Renner & Yunker the Pacheedaht First Nation band “council isn’t opposed to old-growth logging” (Renner & Yunker, 2021). However, given the information provided in this same article it seems that members of the Pacheedaht First Nation do not unanimously agree and support the decisions that were made by the leadership within this First Nation which leads to yet another point about the colonial roots of this infrastructure resource extraction project (Renner & Yunker, 2021). Populations within what is currently Canada do not expect for political leaders in settler colonial governments to represent the views and ideals of all settlers, for example, the majority of people would probably agree that Doug Ford does not represent a united view of all the settlers living in what is now the province of Ontario when it comes to policy-making therefore, it should seem obtuse that this is the case that must be made for First Nations communities within their leadership’s decision-making (Spice, 2021b). This strategy and expectation which is being upheld to justify the protests at Fairy Creek is known as that of “divide-and-conquer” (Rotz, Rück, & Carleton, 2020) whereby it is not the majority which rules but, that it must be that everyone within a First Nations community who comes to the same conclusion and decision which can be best described as “an outrageous and impossible hurdle” (Rotz et al., 2020).

The sole member from the Pacheedaht First Nation who has been involved in the protests has been the “Elder Bill Jones” (Renner & Yunker, 2021) who has stated that “[difference]”

(Renner & Yunker, 2021) of opinion within the Pacheedaht First Nation “is a good thing” (Renner & Yunker, 2021) and according to an article written by Baker this is why protestors are remaining in the area (Baker, 2021; Renner & Yunker, 2021).

Although protestors who identify themselves as the Rainforest Flying Squad might not think or even have the intent to repeat the practices and strategies of divide and conquer which discriminating colonial governments participate in they are in many ways repeating these same tactics towards the Pacheedaht and Ditidaht First Nations by preventing logging practices (Rotz et al., 2020). Although they are there because of the Elder Bill Jones, they are causing disruption, destruction, and placing an even larger financial burden onto these Indigenous communities who are already systemically oppressed thus, further revealing the colonial roots and connections of this project (Rotz et al., 2020). As previously stated, this is unfortunately not a unique case; it can be seen replicated throughout the history of the colonial state and government within what is now known as Canada as well as through other recent infrastructure resource extraction projects such as with the “Coastal GasLink” (Rotz et al., 2020) pipeline (Rotz et al., 2020).



(Hunter, 2021)

Above all, it seems that the opinions of everyone other than the First Nations whose land this is on are being amplified in the media which reconfirms and reinforces that settler and colonial power is not something that is only enforced in government systems and courts but that it is ingrained into the mindset and culture of the Canadian population. This contributes to the ongoing erasure of the Pacheedaht and Ditidaht First Nations communities as well as that of the many other First Nations communities across what is now referred to as the Canadian landscape.

In conclusion, the colonial roots of this specific infrastructure resource extraction project and of many others refer back to the many and continuous attempts of erasure of First Nations communities and their own jurisdiction over their lands. Whilst, the emotions and perspectives of others are brought to the forefront the First Nations communities who have been on their own land since time immemorial and who still continue to be there are not. It is this reinforcement of entitlement over stolen land which has been ongoing since the first settlers colonized what is

now called North America which is at the heart of this issue because it continues to perpetuate cultural and colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples and communities (Pritchard, 2021).

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