

Supreme Court Bows in Face of Nuxalk Stand and Fear of International Outrage

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Vancouver, B.C. - Supreme Court Justice Smith was unwilling yesterday to put out arrest warrants for the 22 Nuxalk chiefs, elders and supporters who walked out of the Supreme Court on Tuesday. Again Justice Smith refused the crown prosecutor's requests to issue warrants for their arrest or try them in their absence. The trial was put over until January 15, 1996.

All 22 of the sovereigntists and their supporters stand in solidarity, unwilling to return to the colonial court because of the judge's refusal to acknowledge Nuxalk sovereignty and jurisdiction over traditional Nuxalk territory. The three hereditary Nuxalk chiefs held an impromptu press conference today to explain their actions. The chiefs explained how they had attended the court in hopes of establishing peace talks and educating the Canadian government about their sovereignty as a nation. They left after it became clear that the court was unwilling to recognize their rights as a nation. Instead the court sought to impose its jurisdiction by beginning a domestic judgement against the Nuxalk.

"The court was forcing us into their system and handcuffing our sovereignty," says Hereditary Chief Qwatsinas (Edward Moody). "The white man's court system cannot define our people. Our law allows us to protect our land; their law allows destruction. When we go out to protect our land and forests, we go out with the law given by the Creator." The 22 defendants, including three hereditary chiefs, elders, spiritual leaders and an expectant mother were charged with contempt of court in September while protecting unceded Nuxalk territory at ISTA (Fog Creek) from destruction by Interfor's clearcut logging.

The Forest Action Network (FAN), which jointly carried out the month long blockade at ISTA with the Nuxalk Nation, fully supports the Nuxalk legal position. "We have been deeply moved by the Nuxalk chiefs' and people's commitment to protecting their land, and so have many others around the world," said FAN spokesperson Simone Waters. "We are expecting hundreds of supporters to come join us next spring in continuing to prevent Interfor from destroying Nuxalk land. Interfor will no longer be allowed to profit from the destruction of the Great Coast Rainforest."

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