

Nuxalk House of Smayusta



Phoney Great Bear Rainforest Deal

By Chief Qwatsinas

11 February 2009

I understand why forest activists are frustrated about the ongoing logging in the so-called “Great Bear Rainforest.” For me it is more concern and worry. There should be more support for the forests, and the life in and around it. The animal life, marine life, and bird life; the environment and its integrity. Then, there is support needed for sovereign First Nations who believe in saving these things. Logging practices and forest management policies have not changed. I believe the so-called “Ecologically Based Management” and “Great Bear Rainforest” Agreements were only to buy some time for the industry and wait for the resistance to the clearcut logging to stop. Of course neither of these phoney deals save the forests: they are a farce because logging continues as before.

Through the BC Treaty and other agreements many First Nations are giving in to the logging industry. When they are bound to such processes, First Nations cannot badmouth logging practices; timber markets; logging companies; or the official agreements. The process on the table is a legal contract with an official gag order. The First Nations who are caught up in these processes have essentially relinquished their sovereignty and historical status as a First Nation. They become bound by legal and contractual routes whereby they try to get as much as possible, financially and economically. What they possessed becomes a social and economic bargaining chip: part of a “business” arrangement. The ancestral and historical connections to their Lands and Rights are lost and a new definition or term must be adopted. Sovereign powers to protect Indigenous Lands and Rights are confined and become a matter only of “business” such as logging or mining. Within these restrictions, First Nations must then negotiate jobs, monies, or a status with the companies. Many get caught in the pitfall of a joint venture status.

Government and industry use contrived figures to show how many First Nations are involved in this corrupt process, just as they do with the number of grizzly bears that are killed during the annual trophy hunts. It is left up to the public or individuals to figure out the real figures. A lot of the contrived information is used as public relations or propaganda to serve the status quo – also to show how much they are doing to keep the Indian happy and well. Although greed and corruption may drive some First Nations to ignore their responsibilities to the lands, not all Indian citizens and leaders are susceptible.

It is disappointing that big environmental groups go against their word and say negative things about First Nations. I don't believe that this representation is good for their campaigns as environmental groups nor is it good that they are signatories to the disreputable Great Bear Rainforest Agreement. Of course, many First Nations are being bought off through their leaderships and accept the corruption. Historically this has been bred by the Canadian government's bureaucracy, the "Department of Indian Affairs," where Indian leaderships learn what is needed to advance their communities. Discretion is used to determine which direction is the "correct" one and not surprisingly, the batting average is not good. Corruption is difficult to pin down and prove but it can be seen, read between the lines, and determined by lucrative or surprise deals. . . . this would be an awesome project for an Indian detective. These sorts of corruptive tradeoffs and deals are also used on the environmental community, for example in the case of the so called Great Bear Rainforest Agreement. These are parallel tactics to those used historically against the First Nations.

The recently exposed corruption of the ex-councilor of the Mount Currie Indian Band (or Lil'wat First Nation) of the St'at'imc People is one of the many instances whereby Indian leaders have made deals. Some make a lot of money, especially with the 2010 Winter Olympics as in the case of the Mount Currie Band. It is difficult to have recourse to justice within the legal systems in BC. I think industry and government do not like to have this kind of thing exposed because of their desire to profit from developing Indian lands. In a quirky sense, one could ask "Why not?" The British Columbia (BC) Treaty Process is supposed to deal with these things. . . There are also other processes but all lack the confidence of the true sovereign Indian leaders. Such corrupt processes always take the shortcut route. There is no honesty in the Indian Lands and Rights dealings, not even in 2009.

The BC government likes to quote that 70 percent of First Nations are working with them on the Land and Rights Question but the truth is more like 47 percent. Out of the 200 First Nations in BC there have been four treaty completions. In other processes First Nations are giving consent to development and industry even though the BC Treaty Process is ongoing. Canada is becoming more known internationally for its record of indigenous rights abuse. This is kept quiet within \Canada and national attention to the issue is avoided.

Today, while Canada and BC are stumbling through their own legal systems, it is likely that their lies and untruths will eventually catch up with them. It can only last so long. But meanwhile officials are able to railroad through many lucrative development and resource extraction projects before they can be stopped or contested by First Nations.

Much attention and publicity is given to First Nations who are co-opting by accommodating and complying with government and industry. It is similar to a reward system or a promotion that gives the impression, i.e. the "illusion," of compliance so that unjust tactics and lucrative deals are easier to make with First Nations. Ever since the BC treaty process was contrived, it seems that this kind of negotiated tradeoffs have been made with certain Indian leaders. A large book could be written exclusively about these kind activities. The phoney Great Bear Rainforest deal is yet another example. Like most of Indian history; it is hidden or concealed so that the general public is not aware of it.