

Indigeneity, Sovereignty, Anarchy

A Dialog With Many Voices

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AA: Gord, I proposed we discuss the impact of Indigenous knowledge and activism on the broader anarchist movement in the territories encompassing ‘Canada’, including historical involvement in Indigenous struggles on the part of non-Indigenous anarchists from the 1980s through to today. Much of this history intersects with our own lives by way of shared participation in various actions as well as through anarchist and Indigenous publications: in fact, I was reading your first zine, *Endless Struggle* (1987–1990), as well as your first Indigenous-focused journal, *Oh-Toh-Kin* (1992–1994) when they came out in the late 1980s and early 1990s.¹ In the 1980s you were also in Vancouver, British Columbia and knew people involved with the anarchist journals *No Picnic* (1988–1990), *Open Road* (1976–1990), as well as the *Anarchist Black Cross*.² Were you reading anarchist publications that occasionally featured Indigenous writers and artists, including you, such as *Bulldozer/Prison News Service* (1980–1997) and *Kick It Over* (1981–2001)? Can you comment on how Indigenous perspectives were shaping anarchist conceptions of social/ecological liberation in the late 1980s?

GH: Well, I was reading journals such as *Bulldozer* and *Kick It Over* in the late 1980s but there wasn’t a lot of Indigenous writers contributing to these, I think *Bulldozer* probably had more content from Indigenous prisoners, POWs (prisoners of war) and political prisoners. Certainly, I do recall that Indigenous struggles had a fairly prominent place among anarchists in Canada in particular during this time, and some of that had started I believe with the arrest of Leonard Peltier³ in British Columbia and his subsequent deportation trial which occurred in Vancouver. A

¹ These and other publications mentioned in this discussion are housed in the Anarchist Archive, University of Victoria: www.uvic.ca. (Assessed 05/11/2020) For histories of many of the journals under discussion, see Allan Antliff, ed. *Only a Beginning: An Anarchist Anthology* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2004).

² The Anarchist Black Cross organization dates to the early 20th century. Originally formed by Russian radicals to support Russian political prisoners during the reign of the Tsar, its scope broadened with the rise of fascism during the 1920s and 30s to encompass anarchist political prisoners of many ethnicities, as well as those incarcerated in the Soviet Union. The organization continues its work to this day. See “About Us,” Anarchist Black Cross Federation: www.abcf.net (Assessed 09/09/2020)

³ American Indian Movement (AIM) member Leonard Peltier (Anishinabe, Dakota, and Lakota Nations) was caught up in a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) armed assault on a ranch on The Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota on 25 June 1975, in the course of which two FBI officers and one AIM member were killed. Subsequently, Peltier fled to Canada seeking asylum. He was arrested in Canada in February 1976 and underwent a four-week

number of American Indian Movement (AIM)⁴ members had come to the city for this and overall, I think the anarchists responded with a lot of solidarity and helped provide some resources for Peltier's defense team. There was also an incident with Dino Butler & Gary Butler (Confederated Tribes of Siletz)⁵ which involved a RCMP⁶ police car chase and their arrests in Vancouver in 1981, after which they became embroiled in several years of court and while in prison they began doing hunger strikes to demand that they have access to traditional ceremonies such as the pipe and sweat lodge, and this also saw anarchists providing a lot of solidarity.

And around this same time period I think there was a greater emphasis on ecological struggles within some sectors of the anarchist movement, and if you look at some of the communiques from the guerrilla group Direct Action⁷ that appeared around this time you can see the influence of this to a certain extent with the concept of Indigenous anti-colonial resistance and the defending of Indigenous territories. There were also some Indigenous peoples that were involved in the anarchist movement in Vancouver and this was partly a result of the previous campaigns of solidarity anarchists had carried out with Indigenous resistance movements. And this was to a certain extent a departure from a lot of what the anarchist movement was really focused on during this time, where you had some strong 'workerist' type currents that really looked to the Spanish Revolution (1936–39)⁸ as the starting point for any kind of anarchist revolutionary

extradition hearing in Vancouver, British Columbia, where anarchists rallied around his defence. In the end, Peltier was extradited to the United States, where he was tried on trumped up charges concocted by the FBI and sentenced on 19 April 1977 to two life terms in prison, to be served consecutively. He has remained in prison ever since. The International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee homepage has extensive documentation related to Peltier's plight: www.whoisleonardpeltier.info (Assessed 20/09/2020)

⁴ AIM was founded in 1968 to fight for recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and to demand the United States government adhere to its treaties with Indigenous nations. On the movement's founding and principles, see Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996). For interviews with important AIM members, see Antoinette Nora Claypol, ed., *Ghost Rider Roads: Inside the American Indian Movement, 1971-present* (Taos, NM: Wild Embers Press, 2011)

⁵ Cousins Dino and Gary Butler were associated with AIM and Dino Butler participated in events at the Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation in 1975. In 1981, while in Vancouver working with others supporting Leonard Peltier, the brothers were sentenced to four years imprisonment for "discharging a firearm and dangerous driving" after they challenged two armed Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers who were tailing their car (both charges were dubious at best). As Gord notes, during the ensuing four years (1981–84) in Canadian prisons, the cousins carried out a series of hunger strikes and protests in concert with other Indigenous prisoners that successfully established the right to hold "pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, and other traditional sacred rituals behind bars." They were released from prison and extradited to the United States in 1984, where they were then tried for the 1981 murder of a grave robber who had been violating Indigenous burial sites. The brothers were acquitted when it became obvious during the trial that they were being framed by the FBI. See "Butlers Acquitted!" *Open Road* no. 18 (Spring 1986): 5; 9.

⁶ The RCMP were founded in 1873 (originally as the Northwest Mounted Police) to combat Indigenous resistance as the Canadian state expanded its control across the prairies and northern territories. It evolved into a Canada-wide Federal Police service and is the sole policing organization in much of the country. Since its founding the organization has been the blunt instrument of government repression, enforcing cultural genocide, land theft, child abduction by the state (the forced removal of Indigenous children from their communities, channeling them into "residential schools" or adoption programs), and other criminal acts against Indigenous peoples.

⁷ The Direct Action group (Garry Hannah, Ann Hansen, Doug Stewart, Juliet Belmas, and Brent Taylor) coalesced in 1981 and carried out two bombings and other actions before their arrest in 1983. The group were involved with supporting Indigenous resistance struggles and looked to traditional Indigenous relationships with the land as an ecologically-sustainable alternative to rapacious industrial-based exploitation under capitalist or communist-run states. See Ann Hansen, *Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerrilla* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 40–41; 98–108.

⁸ In Spain, anarchists organized under the umbrella of the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo/National Confederation of Labour), an anarchist-syndicalist union founded in 1910 whose membership numbered in the hun-

movement... whereas I think the association with Indigenous struggles had a profound impact on non-Indigenous anarchists in Vancouver, and also at this time Vancouver had a vibrant anarchist movement including the journal *Open Road*, which had a very large distribution and some influence on the larger anarchist movement internationally... and then by the late 1980s you had journals such as *Reality Now* coming out of Toronto which had a very strong focus on Indigenous struggles and this kind of solidarity has pretty much continued to this day in Canada...

AA: For sure, solidarity with Indigenous struggles was central for many non-Indigenous anarchists in Canada during this time. Reflecting on that, I would like to share some statements from *Reality Now* no. 6 (1986) that document how those involved in that journal were thinking through the relationship between anarchism, colonialism, and indigeneity. First, two passages, one from a collective statement, “What We Aim to Do,” and the second from a leading article, “Never Give Up:”

Our focus on many Native struggles is based on the belief that the Native people of North America also have much to offer. Native people have the longest history of struggle on this continent, from the time the Europeans landed and began their destructive practices here until the present. As such, we have much to learn from them about belief, resistance, survival, and dedication. Much of the philosophy the Native people of North America try to live is based on a deep connection and respect for our Mother Earth. What we have to offer them is our solidarity and our dedication and respect for this land.⁹

And further, in a self-reflexive statement calling on readers to rebel against North American industrial capitalist nation states and learn how to prioritize “the earth”:

We must learn how to heal the earth, in the clearest and most effective ways, in the short time that we have. We must be able to see the difference between life-positive and life-negative actions and effects. Our existence is life, but our support for the death merchants carries a heavy toll – the increasingly devastating impact of the power and death culture. It perpetuates emptiness in our own lives and the violence to, and destruction of, our people. We are a part of the Almighty Amerikkkan Imperialist Machine, and contribute to the genocide of our own people ... In a true sense we dig each other’s graves.¹⁰

The same issue features a special section, “Native News,” that covers a plethora of resistance struggles and actions.¹¹ There are also a number of articles addressing Indigenous issues, includ-

dreds of thousands by 1936, when the fascist general Francisco Franco mobilized the Spanish military in an attempted overthrow of the newly established (1931) Spanish Republican government. Spanish anarchists took up arms and halted Franco’s assault. They forged an alliance with the Republican government and joined in the fight against the fascists, but their efforts were constantly undermined by the Spanish Communist Party, aided by operatives from the Soviet Union. During the struggle with Franco, Spanish anarchists initiated a social and economic revolution behind Republican lines. The revolution was modelled on the CNT’s program for social transformation involving women’s liberation, workers’ ownership of industries, the formation of rural communes, and a decentralized federated structure of self-governance and administration. See José Peirats Valls, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution: Vols. 1–3*, Chris Ealham, ed. (Hastings, East Sussex, UK: Christie Books, 2005).

⁹ “What We Aim to Do,” *Reality Now* no. 6 (1986): 2.

¹⁰ “Never Give Up,” *Reality Now* no. 6 (1986): 2.

¹¹ “Native News,” *Reality Now* no. 6 (1986): 6–7.

ing “The Case of Leonard Peltier”¹²; “The Deafening of Labrador” (on Innu resistance against NATO military jets conducting low-lying flight exercises in their territories)¹³; and “The Screaming in Our Hearts,”¹⁴ calling for people to support Indigenous resistance at Big Mountain¹⁵ against strip-mining for coal on Navajo and Hopi lands.

This last article is particularly revealing. It declares the pending destruction of Indigenous lands integral to Navajo and Hopi cultures a “Crime of Genocide” and states “the Earth cannot afford to lose these voices, the voices of the Indigenous peoples who continue to live in harmony with the Earth.”¹⁶ It also observes that Hopi prophecies teach what climate experts are warning against: that “such mining and ecological destruction would cause shifts in the weather systems of the entire world.”¹⁷ Another Big Mountain-related article – “The Eagle Takes Wind” – records the journal entries of ‘David’ chronicling a “journey into the occupied territory of the United States: a part of what is known as Turtle Island.”¹⁸ David and two other Toronto anarchists connect with various anarchist communities and resistance movements until arriving at the “Big Mountain Survival Camp” to “meet comrades [most non-Indigenous camp members are anarchists] and Indians and talk about plans and support for their struggle.”¹⁹ David seeks to “find a synthesis between animal liberation and the Native struggles and their lifestyles” by volunteering to help a Navajo family tend to their sheep and learning from them.²⁰ He notes the differences between the Navajo’s relationship with animals, which is “in harmony with the planet,” and factory farming.²¹ David also participates in butchering a sheep for food and the cleaning up afterwards. He writes, “I’ve had a chance to explain why I don’t eat meat and, as well, about my anarchist politics. We agree on a good amount.”²²

Gord, could you comment on the engagement from Reality Now with Indigenous struggles/perspectives? Are they on the right track? Are there lessons here for anarchists in the 2000s?

GH: Yes, I think *Reality Now* was on the right track. At the time they were one of the only anarchist journals & groups to seriously place Indigenous struggles at the forefront of resistance & acknowledged the reality of colonialism. I think they were influenced by the anarchist movement in Vancouver, which in turn had been profoundly influenced by the Leonard Peltier extradition case & the solidarity movement that arose around that. Members of *Reality Now* also were deeply involved in the struggle of the Lubicon Cree²³ in northern Alberta and, with the “Friends of the

¹² “The Case against Leonard Peltier,” *Reality Now* no. 6 (1986): 16.

¹³ “The Deafening of Labrador,” *Reality Now* no. 6 (1986): 20–21.

¹⁴ “The Screaming in Our Hearts,” *Reality Now* no. 6 (1986): 17.

¹⁵ Big Mountain (Black Mesa) lies in territories shared by Navajo (Dinéh) and Hopi peoples in the Southwestern United States. The United States government attempted to pit the Navajo and Hopi against each other by imposing a partition of the land and forcing the Navajo population to relocate, thus clearing the way for coal mining development.

¹⁶ “The Screaming in Our Hearts,” 17.

¹⁷ “The Screaming in Our Hearts,” 17.

¹⁸ ‘David,’ “The Eagle Takes Flight,” *Reality Now* no. 6 (1986) – Dissident News (insert): 1–4; 12–13. Reprinted in Antliff, *Only a Beginning*, 175–178.

¹⁹ ‘David,’ 12.

²⁰ ‘David,’ 12.

²¹ ‘David,’ 13.

²² ‘David,’ 13.

²³ Lubicon Lake Cree territory is located in northwest Alberta, Canada. The Lubicon’s territory remained unceded until 2018, when the Nation signed a treaty agreement with the federal Canadian and provincial Albertan governments that included monetary compensation and designated a 240 square kilometre parcel of the Lubicon’s traditional ter-

Lubicon,” helped to carry out a successful boycott of Daishowa,²⁴ and some members carried out this work for many years. I think in some ways they were ahead of their time and really contributed to the level of solidarity being expressed with Indigenous struggles today, such as the Wet’suwet’en,²⁵ Six Nations,²⁶ etc. So today I believe that non-Indigenous anarchists, whether they realize this or not, are in many ways continuing this type of solidarity work that people around *Reality Now* laid the groundwork for.

AA: I recall the *Reality Now* collective’s engagement with the Lubicon Cree’s struggle against oil exploitation, pipeline building, and logging in their unceded territories. Building on relations with the Lubicon Cree established while they were publishing *Reality Now* in the late 1980s, *Reality Now* collective member Kevin Thomas and others who had been visiting Lubicon Cree territory formed the Toronto-based “Friends of the Lubicon” in 1988 to launch a boycott campaign and legal challenges to Daishowa Inc.’s clearcutting.[27]

You mentioned the anarchist Direct Action group, which blew up a hydro substation on Texada island (unceded Tla’amin territories)²⁷ and a cruise missile guidance system plant in Toronto, among other things.²⁸ They were part of a network that included another out-standing example of anarchist/Indigenous relationship building you mention, the journal *Bulldozer*. *Bulldozer* was sent to prisoners across North America and served as a venue where they could share their visions, struggles, and art with other prisoners and the world beyond prisons. A lot of the contributors were Indigenous, as you state. After the Direct Action group was arrested during a commando style police ambush outside Vancouver in January 1983, the Canadian State intensified its focus on the anarchist movement with harassment, verbal threats, and raids. *Bulldozer* was targeted with a warrant empowering the police to seize material intended for its next issue. The

ritory as theirs. See “Lubicon Lake Band Reaches Historic 121 million land claims settlement with Canada, Alberta,” *The Edmonton Journal* (2018): edmontonjournal.com (Assessed 05/11/2020)

²⁴ Daishowa Paper Manufacturing is a Japanese pulp and paper company founded in 1938. A Canadian branch of Daishowa was established in 1969 and the company ran a major pulp mill operation in Peace River, Alberta that exported the bulk of its product to Japan for processing into paper.

²⁵ The Wet’suwet’en Nation’s unceded territories lie in northwest British Columbia. The Wet’suwet’en have been asserting sovereignty over their lands and waters since British Columbia was incorporated into Canada in 1869. Most recently, beginning in 2010, they constructed a series of camps and check points on their territory obstructing the path of a planned pipeline (Coastal Gaslink) to transport fracked gas from the interior of British Columbia to the coast, where it would be shipped overseas (See Jeff Corntassel’s article in this issue). Anarchists in Victoria began participating in this resistance struggle in 2010 and Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have mobilized across Canada to support the Wet’suwet’en. See Unist’ot’en Camp: unistoten.camp; Gidimt’en Yintah Access: www.yintahaccess.com (Assessed 07/12/2020); and Wet’suwet’enSolidarity Victoria: www.facebook.com)

²⁶ The Six Nations reserve in southern Ontario, Canada is the territory of the Kanien’kehá’ka (Mohawk), Cayuga, Onondaga, Onida, Seneca, and Tuscarora peoples of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Federation. In recent years, Six Nations have been asserting sovereignty over lands designated to them by treaty with the British colonial government in 1784 through direct action blockades, occupations, and other measures. See “Haldimand Treaty,” Six Nations Land and Resources: www.sixnations.ca (Assessed 06/01/2021) See “Interview with Kevin Thomas, Friends of the Lubicon,” *Corporate Crime Reporter* 10 no. 14 (8 April 1996): sisis.nativeweb.org (Assessed 05/11/2020)

²⁷ Texada Island is located between the British Columbia mainland and central Vancouver Island.

²⁸ The Dunsmuir hydro substation was a step toward plans to build a series of regional hydro dams to supply power to pulp and paper mills as well as mining operations in northern British Columbia. Litton Systems’ cruise missile guidance system plant, located in Toronto, was integral to the production of nuclear armed cruise missiles, which the United States government was preparing to deploy in West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and the United Kingdom to ramp up its cold war confrontation with the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. See Hansen, 58–61 (Dunsmuir) and “Litton Bombing Communique” reprinted in Hansen, 477–486.

collective regrouped and put out that issue in summer 1983, despite the raid.²⁹ It included letters, statements, and artwork from Indigenous prisoners, “Vancouver Five for Life” by two members of Direct Action,³⁰ “Anarchy Can’t Fight Alone” by imprisoned Black Panther anarchist Kuwasi Balagon,³¹ “Survival Network,”³² by the editors of *Bulldozer*, and “Against the Corporate State,” by Gary Butler.³³

As you’ve noted, Butler had been involved in the Vancouver anarchist scene with his cousin, Dino, during the early 1980s. “Against the Corporate State” was written from a Medium Security Prison in Bath, Ontario. Butler opens characterizing the Canadian government’s arrest of Direct Action activists as an “attack on the human race.” The Canadian State has accused them of “terrorist acts” and he responds by inverting the accusation:

I cannot agree with this allegation because I know for a fact my friends were not a part of this insane government, nor members of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), nor part of Kaplan’s secret service agents.³⁴ Therefore, I declare in the name of the people, my friends should be freed. In Toronto, on June 13th, ’83, more of my friends and associates were attacked and charges laid. *Bulldozer* is an international publication for people on the outside to see and read of the numberless injustices done to the people caged in human workhouses across the land and a chance to educate the people about who are in these workhouses and why they were put there...*Bulldozer* put out many statements for men and women throughout the hemisphere, gave us inside these dungeons a sense of compassion, of unity, of solidarity – when we could read this publication... I’ve been in for many years and *Bulldozer* is by far the best publication for us inside. Our voice can be heard through words. Our struggle inside is not a forgotten one. It comes as no surprise to me that the enemies would do whatever they have to do to intimidate, threaten, terrorize and imprison and yes, crazy as it may sound, even neutralize, to get what they want.³⁵

In the same edition of *Bulldozer* the editors state:

Mother Earth is in deadly peril. All life upon her is threatened by the rapid deterioration of the eco-systems of our Mother by maximum growth economy which assumes that the resources of Mother Earth are unlimited ... To achieve maximum growth these economic systems must have ever-increasing amounts of land and resources. This has meant genocide of the Indigenous people as they are living on

²⁹ See the in-depth analysis of police actions targeting anarchists, including the Bulldozer collective, in “Introduction,” *Bulldozer* no. 6 (1983): 2–5; 47.

³⁰ Ann Hansen and Juliet Belmas, “Vancouver Five for Life,” *Bulldozer* no. 6 (1983): 8–11.

³¹ Kuwasi Balagon aka Donald Weems, “Anarchy Can’t Fight Alone,” *Bulldozer* no. 6 (1983): 30–31. Balagon received three consecutive life sentences in 1983 for his actions during an armed robbery of a Brinks truck on October 20, 1981. He died in an United States prison from AIDS-related complications in 1986. See Matt Meyer and Karl Kersplebedeb, eds., *Kuwasi Balagon – A Soldier’s Story: Revolutionary Writings by a New African Anarchist* (Oakland, CA and Montreal: PM Press and Kersplebedeb, 2019).

³² “Survival Network,” *Bulldozer* no. 6 (1983): 36.

³³ Gary Butler, “Against the Corporate State,” *Bulldozer* no. 6 (1983): 12–13

³⁴ Up to 1984, the RCMP operated a special branch, the “RCMP Security Service,” to conduct surveillance and disrupt organizations or movements deemed to be a threat to the establishment. Robert Kaplan served as Solicitor General in charge of overseeing RCMP operations for the Canadian government from 1980–84.

³⁵ Butler, 12.

their traditional lands and they become a threat to the powers of industry and war is declared upon them. Realizing this, it is understandable that resistance of the Indigenous peoples is in the forefront of the battle for survival ... It is not for humanity to rise above Nature, humanity is Nature ... we must learn to cooperate and live in solidarity with Nature, through systems of mutual aid, appropriate technology and tribal-community work-place autonomy ... We are concerned with the survival of Mother Earth and her children, so we are seeking to build a network of support of land and survival struggles, to organize on-site support in the form of food, clothing, and supplies; to maintain communications with and between various struggling peoples; and to organize support for those who are jailed in resistance.³⁶

What I detect here is solidarity premised on foregrounding the resistance of Indigenous peoples in defence of their territories, cultures, and ways of being as the critical nexus in a battle for survival that is global, a battle founded on a basic truth that indigeneity embodies – “humanity is Nature.” Hence, when the Canadian State attacks Direct Action, it attacks defenders of “the human race,” in Butler’s words. Do you have any thoughts to share about strategies for building and sustaining this type of mutual solidarity?

GH: I think these statements speak for themselves and they are even more true today than in the past as we see the impacts of environmental destruction & climate change over the past 30 years or so. Again, I think the non-Indigenous anarchists of this generation, the late ‘70s up to the mid-80s, were ahead of their time and were fairly advanced in their analysis of the western industrial system, of capitalism as well as colonialism. And I think today we see some of that vision coming into reality, such as the mass movement that arose around Indigenous opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline³⁷ in the United States, or the one that arose in solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en opposition to the Coastal Gaslink pipeline in northern British Columbia (see endnote 20). In this way I believe these anarchists and anti-authoritarians, a term many preferred at this time, contributed to the movements we see arising today. Their politics were maintained through the 1990s, by which I mean the centering of Indigenous resistance & ecological struggles,

³⁶ “Survival Network,” 36.

³⁷ The Dakota Access Pipeline (United States) was intended to transport oil from North Dakota to southern Illinois for processing. Indigenous resistance to plans to channel the pipeline under Lake Oahe and the Upper Missouri River, thus threatening the only water supply of the Standing Rock Reservation (Lakota Nation), erupted in Spring 2016. Thousands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people rallied to aid Lakota “Water Protectors” obstructing pipeline construction through protests, blockades, and other forms of direct action. See Nike Estes, *Our History is Our Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso, 2019) and Gord Hill’s coverage of Standing Rock posted at *Warrior Publications*: warriorpublications.wordpress.com (Assessed 05/11/2020)

and of course that decade began with the Oka Crisis of 1990,³⁸ which further expanded the ideas of anti-colonial resistance & solidarity with Indigenous peoples' struggles.

AA: You've played no small part in sustaining and building this consciousness through your publications, your art, and your leadership working with non-Indigenous anarchists in Canada and beyond through the 1990s and 2000s. To take one example, in 2003, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) declared the 2010 Winter Olympics would be hosted by Vancouver. This decision ignored an "Official Complaint" submitted to the IOC in 2002 by representatives of the Interior Salish St't'imc and Secwepemc peoples whose traditional territories have, like the rest of the province of British Columbia, never been surrendered through treaties with the colonizing British Empire or the Canadian government. The IOC was told the Interior Salish St't'imc and Secwepemc peoples³⁹ exercise sovereignty and stewardship over "diverse ecosystems including highly sensitive alpine areas" and that an obligation to protect land and wild life is integral to Indigenous cultures and "traditional knowledge."⁴⁰ 2010 Olympics-related sports developments, which would disturb a hither-to untouched mountain valley habitat (home to grizzly bears, mountain goats and other animals) in Interior Salish St't'imc territory, went against the IOC's so-called commitment to environmentally sustainable games and were part-and-parcel of British Columbia's and Canada's on-going colonialist violation of Indigenous sovereignty.⁴¹ While the Olympic bid was on, radicals in Vancouver had organized against it, but you took resistance to the next level once the Vancouver Olympics were declared. You came up with the double-edged slogan, "No Olympics on Stolen Land" (and its oft-used variant, "No Olympics on Stolen Native Land"), which asserted Indigenous sovereignty by criminalizing the Canadian state for land theft.⁴² And you played a leading role organizing a cross-Canada Olympics Resistance Network (ORN) – with a 'home base' in Vancouver – infused by your anti-authoritarian analy-

³⁸ From March 11 to September 26, 1990, the Kanien'kehá:kas of Kanesatake, a Kanien'kehá:ka community adjacent to the town of Oka, just outside of Montreal, Quebec, occupied and successfully defended their territory against the town's Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies, 2021.1117 plans for a golf course expansion. Over the course of this defence, the situation escalated from a blockade into an armed standoff and siege involving the Quebec provincial police (Sûreté du Québec) and Canadian military. The Kanien'kehá:kas of Kanesatake were supported by their counterparts in the nearby Kanien'kehá:ka community of Kahnawake, who blockaded major commuter routes to Montreal that traversed through their territory (in response, racist mobs regularly converged on the other side of the blockades: they shouted insults, threw stones and Molotovcocktails, and attacked any Kanien'kehá:ka they could get their hands on). Additionally, armed warriors from other Kanien'kehá:ka communities in Canada and the United States joined the standoff. On July 20, in a show of unity, over 100 Indigenous leaders from across Canada convened at Kahnawake and threatened total disruption (downing hydro power lines, blockading highways, shutting down rail transport, etc.) if the Quebec police or Canadian military assaulted the Kanien'kehá:kas. In addition, non-Indigenous activists, including anarchists, mobilized in many towns and cities (Montreal, among them) to support the Kanien'kehá:kas through demonstrations, blockades, and other actions. One of the best publications produced immediately after the standoff (created by a photographer and two reporters who were with the Kanien'kehá:kas during the siege) is Craig MacLaine and Michael Baxendale, *This Land is Our Land: The Kanien'kehá:ka Revolt at Oka*, photography by Robert Galbraith, (Montreal and Toronto: Optimum Publishing International Inc., 1990).

³⁹ Their unceded territories lie in southern interior British Columbia.

⁴⁰ "Sutikalh and Skweikwek'welt 2002 Submission to the International Olympic Commission: Official Complaint, June 2002," reprinted in *No Olympics on Stolen Land: Resources for Anti-2010 Resistance* (Vancouver: Warrior Publications, 2007), 10. Italic is the authors' emphasis.

⁴¹ "Sutikalh and Skweikwek'welt 2002 Submission," 11.

⁴² Both derived from an older slogan, "No Justice on Stolen Land" which emblazoned a special issue of Gord Hill's journal, *Oh-Toh-Kin* (1992) analyzing the criminalization of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous resistance in the prison system. "No Justice on Stolen Land," *Oh-Toh-Kin* 1:2 (1992), cover.

sis of the state-capitalist nexus,⁴³ in which Indigenous sovereignty and ecological responsibility toward the land were understood as indivisible. Could you comment on how, during the lead up to 2010, non-Indigenous anarchists stepped up to participate and how anarchist infrastructures – I am thinking of print-based and internet-based media to spread the message, venues where workshops could be held, networking for actions, that sort of thing – aided your efforts?

GH: Anarchists played an important role in the anti-2010 Olympics campaign. Many participated in the Olympic Resistance Network (ORN), which organized public education events such as workshops and seminars, as well as rallies & direct actions. Anarchists also carried out dozens of clandestine direct actions including arson attacks and other sabotage of Olympic corporate sponsors. During the Olympic Games in February 2010 anarchists organized autonomous actions including the 2010 “Heart Attack” rally, which featured a sizeable black bloc and some property destruction in the downtown shopping & financial district.⁴⁴ As far as infrastructure & media, anarchists published a number of zines against the Olympic industry including communiques from direct actions. The anarchist social space “12th & Clark”⁴⁵ hosted numerous events leading up to the games, and during the Olympics there was an impressive multi-media space established through the Vancouver Media Co-op, much of it organized by Submedia,⁴⁶ which featured videos as well as a daily newsletter (*Balaclava*).⁴⁷

AA: I’d like to discuss Mel Basil’s concept of anarchy as it relates to indigeneity. We both know Mel. He is Gitxsan⁴⁸ and Wet’suwet’en, and he identifies as an anarchist and an Indigenous sovereigntist. I’d like to share some passages from a talk he gave at the Victoria Anarchist Bookfair in 2012. At the time he was deeply involved with the Unist’ot’en camp (end note 25), which he helped initiate:

All peoples in the world were Indigenous at one point. All peoples come from an Indigenous origin: a beautiful origin! An origin where human beings were closely related to the world around them. And colonization has impacted each one of us to some degree or another: violations run deep. Many of you may feel that colonization impacted you much longer ago. For us, it’s maybe a couple of hundred years that colonization has impacted our peoples. And, yes, it has been very deep because it came along with genocide, with ecocide...

⁴³ I am referencing Gord Hill’s definition of capitalism as “a socio-economic system in which a wealthy elite control the means of production (land, resources, industry), and who use the state to organize and maintain this system. It arose from colonialism and imperialism. It differs from other economic systems in that it is modern, high-tech, and nearly all-encompassing of the mass society it has constructed. It is also the dominant economic system in the world today.” Comrade Black, “Drawing (A) Militant Resistance: Interview with Indigenous artist and author Gord Hill,” *Profane Existence*, September 18, 2012: vancouver.mediacoop.ca (Assessed 05/11/2020)

⁴⁴ The Heart Attack march took place on February 13, 2010. “Blocking the arteries of capitalism” during the opening day of the Olympics, it certainly upended business-as-usual in downtown Vancouver. See Scott Harris, “2010 Heart Attack: Vancouver Olympics Opening Day” (February 14, 2010): vancouver.media-coop.ca (Assessed 05/11/2020)

⁴⁵ “12th and Clark” was an anarchist social space in downtown Vancouver that opened in September 2009 and closed some years later.

⁴⁶ *Submedia* is a web-based anarchist video/podcast/radical news collective, based in Canada. See sub.media (Assessed 05/11/2020)

⁴⁷ *Balaclava* was a daily broadsheet published during the 2010 Anti-Olympic Convergence in Vancouver (February 10–13, 2010) to protest and disrupt the launch of the Olympic Games.

⁴⁸ The unceded territories of the Gitxsan Nation are adjacent to Wet’suwet’en territory in northwest British Columbia. The Gitxan and Wet’suwet’en peoples have a long history of anti-colonial resistance, mutual aid, and cooperation.

We saw a great hope at our recent camp in August, August 6–10, at the Unist’ot’en camp in our territories. What I intimated with all the anarchists that came to our community, into our camp, was ‘you’ve taken that step of decolonization, denying the colonial state and looking at your own lives, and how you want to live your own life.’

The elders in our territories in our communities have shown us for thousands and thousands of years how to live on our territories. We do not decimate the territory. We do not over-fish, we do not over-hunt. And we made mistakes over those thousands of years. That’s why we have trickster legends. We have trickster legends telling us what mistakes our ancestors made which transformed the world around us. So, in a trickster legend, it looks like the world transformed because of their mistakes[in few days’ time] when, really what happened was ... when our ancestors broke Natural Laws, this had consequences ... over thousands of years. So, trickster legends developed over thousands of years of observation of our interactions with the natural world around us. One of the most important Natural Laws I’ve learned from trickster legends and from people that showed us how to live is: take what you need and leave the rest. Unfortunately, Capitalism, Corporatism, and Democracy don’t understand that concept: Capitalism says, ‘I want it all and I want it now.’...

In traditional societies, we take responsibilities. In our language, our word for ‘Law’ is the same word we have for ‘Responsibility.’ The way we say that is “anuc niwh’it’ën”⁴⁹ and how I see that with anarchy, and what I say about anarchy, is that anarchy wishes for social order, but not at everybody else’s expense. Nobody else should feel degraded because you’re comfortable. Everybody’s equal, you organize horizontally ... Traditional societies are no different...

I’m not going to tell myself that I’m decolonized. I’ve freed my mind, I’ve kept a freed mind, [but] I’m still impacted [by colonization]. I am not decolonized. Now why I say that is because settler society also must get a sense of what decolonization is – and you’re on that path as anarchists. You’ve taken that step to decolonize... How does that relate to Indigenous societies? [In] traditional societies, you [as an outsider must] ask permission to be on our land. On our territory, in our camp, everybody went through a protocol, but it wasn’t police standing at the bridge telling you [that] ‘you have to ask us for the right to be here.’ We didn’t say that. We stood there very openly and welcoming, but stern – not cold, not really warm, but [asserting, as sovereign Indigenous people in our territory], ‘I’m not going to get erased. I’m not going to get bulldozed. I’m not going to get railroaded.’ At the same time [we indicated]: ‘I’m thankful you are here. This is the protocol we’re going to go through first.’ Before you enter the territory [you need to] not just to state you need permission first. You’re asking the chiefs: ‘how can we share responsibility to be on the land?’ Sharing responsibilities, sharing the Law: self-regulation. To me that totally relates to anarchy...

⁴⁹ The Wet’suwet’en people speak Wit’suwit’en, which is a dialect of the Babine-Wit’suwit’en language. Mélanie Morin of the Witsuwit’en Language and Culture Society explains: “anuc niwh’it’ën” refers to “laws and responsibilities related to the territory, which by extension connects the people to both the natural and spiritual worlds. It’s a complex relationship that is the foundation of Wet’suwet’en governance.”

I should add that Mel underlined non-Indigenous anarchists at the camp had much to learn from Indigenous peoples if they were to dismantle the capitalist industrial economy they grew up under and establish a right relationship with the natural order.

Mel's conception of anarchy and its relationship to indigeneity as well as paths to decolonization reminds me nineteenth-century European anarchists grounded their opposition to state-based industrial capitalism on the idea that humanity needs to construct a social order attuned to the natural order, to realize freedom through the affirmation of natural law, beginning within ourselves.⁵⁰ As Russian-American Emma Goldman put it in her statement, "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For," "natural law is that factor in man which asserts itself freely and spontaneously without any external force, in harmony with the requirements of nature."⁵¹

This, and Mel's assertion of Indigenous sovereignty as the path toward free federation that could encompass non-Indigenous settler-based society, strikes me as a transformative basis for movement building as a dismantling of colonialism: aligning non-Indigenous anarchism with Indigenous sovereignty in a manner that aids and abets the growth of anarchy in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. What do you think? It strikes me that the trajectory of non-Indigenous anarchism in Canada that we have been discussing leads to this point, when anarchist-Indigenous leadership comes to the fore.

GH: I agree with Mel's observations and the concept that Indigenous sovereignty is a path towards liberation from the state & capital, not just for Indigenous peoples but for non-Indigenous people as well. Indigenous peoples & cultures have survived through centuries of European colonization and can serve as models of mostly non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian forms of social organization. These were societies organized without any centralized state or authority, and which lived in balance with the natural world. The main things I would add to this are that Indigenous societies were not just a collection of individuals grouped together but were, and are, comprised of extended family units. This gives the community very strong bonds, stronger in many ways than intentional communities which come together based on ideology, etc. And these Indigenous communities, for the most part, provided a great degree of personal freedom & autonomy but at the same time there are many rules or regulations about what is appropriate behaviour. And I say this because I think some non-Indigenous anarchists have the view that the most important thing is their personal freedom & autonomy, while in Indigenous societies this is counter-balanced with the overall safety & security of the collective, or community. Many of these rules, or protocols, around personal conduct are based in traditional culture. Then there is the matter of hereditary leaders & the role they played in the traditional social organization, something that would be, I think, somewhat alien to the broader anarchist movement... For example, among many Indigenous nations there are territories that are claimed by families or clans & only individuals from these groups are permitted to gather resources from them, such as salmon or berries. So while Indigenous sovereignty & culture can serve as a model for an autonomous & de-centralized society

⁵⁰ See, for example, Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1988) and Elisée Reclus, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus*, John Clark and Camille Martin, eds., (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2004). Kropotkin (1842–1921) and Reclus (1830–1905) were key theorists in the European wing of the anarchist movement, born in Russia and France, respectively.

⁵¹ Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For" in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing, 1910), 64. Goldman is one of the most well-known figures in the American anarchist movement. I discuss Indigenous ways of being and struggles for autonomy as they impacted American anarchism during the era of World War One in Allan Antliff, "Decolonizing Modernism: Robert Henri's Portraits of the Tewa Pueblo Peoples of New Mexico," *The Art Bulletin* 100:4 (2018): 106–132.

there are some aspects of it that are different from what we find in anarchist self-organization, and a part of this is the fact that anarchists for the most part form intentional communities that do not include a larger extended family forming the basis of that community.

AA: Thanks for your thoughts Gord, and for all you've contributed to the movement.

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Allan Antliff & Gord Hill
Indigeneity, Sovereignty, Anarchy
A Dialog With Many Voices
May 17 2021

Retrieved on 2023-12-18 from <journals.uvic.ca/index.php/adcs/article/view/20173/8931>
This discussion between Kwakwaka'wakw carver, graphic artist, and anarchist sovereigntist Gord Hill and anarchist activist, archivist, and art historian Allan Antliff was conducted from Victoria, Canada, located in southern Vancouver Island on the unceded territories of the WSÁNEC & Lekwungen (Songhees & Esquimalt) peoples, and Yalis (Alert Bay, Cormorant Island), part of the unceded territories of the Kwakwaka'wakw Namgis Nation. Unceded Kwakwaka'wakw territories encompass northern Vancouver Island and its island archipelago, as well as the adjacent mainland of British Columbia. The dialog includes other voices, past and present, who have addressed the issues the two discuss.

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