



LOGGING THREATENS FIRST NATIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by Susan O'Donell

International attention has focused on Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia, where the battle over clear-cut logging of an old-growth rain forest has resulted in hundreds of arrests in Canada and protests at Canadian embassies around the world.

Indigenous peoples make up about half the population in the Clayoquot Sound area. The First Nations oppose the Canadian government's decision to clear-cut the forest and want a solution that both preserves their natural environment and creates jobs for their people.

A November 1993 court decision stated that the government of British Columbia must consider Indigenous land rights when awarding logging contracts. A spokesperson for the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council said he hoped his people would now be given a share of the logging profits and a guaranteed percentage of the forestry jobs. About 70% of the Indigenous people in the area are unemployed.

Canada's new prime minister has said he would be willing to declare the Clayoquot Sound area a national park if the province and the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations agree. However, many Indigenous people in the area have reasons to be suspicious of his offer.

A similar fight over logging of traditional Haida land in the nearby Queen Charlotte Islands ended about six years ago when the federal government created a new national park on Haida territory. The government promised that tourism generated by the park



Giant redwoods such as this one on Meares Island are threatened by clear-cut logging

would create jobs for Indigenous peoples in the area but, six years later, the only new jobs have been given to white bureaucrats and the tourists have not appeared. Instead, an army of government bureaucrats arrived to tell the Haida how to care for forests they had been looking after for time immemorial. "It's like a new set of missionaries have been steaming in here to save us," a Haida woman told a reporter. "But we're not being converted. We know how to take care of our land."

Many other First Nations across Canada

are fighting the destruction wrought by logging companies on their traditional lands. In most cases, the First Nations are not seeking an end to logging but want sustainable logging practices and a share of the jobs created. First Nations have already won many court battles but still the logging continues.

Canada has been called the "Brazil of the North" because of its destructive forestry policies and a comparison between the two countries reveals many similarities. For example, trees cover about 40% of both. Nearly 100,000 Indigenous people live in Canada's temperate and boreal forest, and about 170,000 Indigenous people live in the Amazonian rain forest. In Canada, an acre of forest is clear-cut every 12 seconds while in Brazil, an acre is cut or burned every nine seconds. While the scale of devastation in both countries is similar, an important difference exists in the human motivation behind the destruction. In Brazil, a driving force for rainiest destruction is the poverty of the loggers, while in Canada, the driving force is the greed of multinational corporations.

For more information contact the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, which represents the 14 First Nations in the region:

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