Clayoquot & Discontent
1994

Takin' it Back

TZEPORAH BERMAN

To brand as criminal many of our best and most conscientious idealists, can only increase the distance between people of conscience and the state. That would be very bad for our future.

— Victoria Times-Colonist, Editorial, Oct. 20, 1993

The protests in Clayoquot Sound represent one of the largest civil disobedience actions in Canada's history. In the summer of 1993 over 800 people were arrested for standing on a logging road in one of the largest areas of temperate rainforest left in the world. Many were there for less than ten minutes. Hundreds have gone to jail. The people who protested in Clayoquot Sound have been referred to as "spoilt children," "welfare bums," "hippies" and most recently by Patrick Moore of the industry-funded "B.C. Forest Alliance" as "wacked out nature worshippers who pray to the moon." They have also been called heroes. In reality they were courageous grandmothers, children, students, seniors and others from all walks of life who found freedom in incarceration and strength in the ability to stand together and make change.

In 1969 the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews wrote that, "Law and order, though vital for society, can often be used to cover injustice. It is no longer sufficient merely to advocate

obedience to law. The attainment of justice is first; without it, law is merely a facade."[1] Law is the product of an evolving process and as such it should reflect issues important to society. As values and perceptions change, the law must be recast to reflect new realities.[2] Throughout history, social conflict has proven necessary to attain dramatic social change. At one time blacks were treated as slaves and women were considered their husband's property. For many people who stood on the road in Clayoquot Sound, viewing "nature" as a commodity which humans have the right to exploit seems equally as absurd. Before thousands of black people were given their freedom or women were given the right to vote, there were the lunch counters and buses in the South and thousands of women jailed for picketing polling stations and chaining themselves to legislatures. Any attempt to reevaluate our basic perceptions of worth and value will not be easy and will not come without a dramatic struggle. For many, the catalyst necessary to begin to see the forests for the trees and to reevaluate our relationship with "nature" was the summer of 1993 in Clayoquot Sound.

Located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, Clayoquot (pronounced Klak'wat) Sound is one of very few areas of coastal lowland temperate rainforest left on the planet. It is a unique and beautiful region of white sand beaches, deep green valleys with rich salmon spawning streams, fjords, fresh water lakes, and snow-capped alpine mountains. Clayoquot Sound is home to ancient western red cedars over a thousand years old and Douglas firs that tower 250 feet above the ground. Because of its diverse geography, the area provides habitat for the black bear, cougar, wolves, bald eagles, the elusive marbled murrelet, orca and grey whales and some of the rarest sharks in the world.

Given its intense beauty and high "resource" value, it is not surprising that Clayoquot Sound has become the scene of a showdown of epic proportions. The protests in Clayoquot Sound began over a decade ago on Meares Island. After a two-year planning process, timber giant MacMillan Bloedel pulled out and refused all three options presented by the negotiators. When the

logging boats headed out to the island, they were met with a blockade of Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations people and local environmentalists. Eventually the Nuu-chah-nulth obtained an injunction to prevent the company from logging the island, but the issue is still before the courts and has already cost the native community over a million dollars in legal fees.

The first protests were the beginning of a growing relationship between First Nations and the environmental community, a relationship that has matured considerably over the last year. Non-native environmentalists are gradually coming to realize what had been obvious from the First Nations' perspective all along: people don't live in parks and an ancient burial ground is not a recreational site. While the environmental community has still much to learn, Clayoquot Sound has sparked a deeper understanding of the links between social and environmental issues. We are at a point of consensus between the environmental and native communities—that clearcutting irreparably damages our ecological, social and cultural landscapes.

The committees, government processes and subsequent blockades and protests continued intermittently over the years, but didn't reach a fever pitch until 1993, after the provincial government's announcement of the Clayoquot Land Use Decision. After much time and fanfare, Premier Harcourt announced that 62% of Clayoquot Sound would be open to clearcut logging; 33% of Clayoquot Sound would be "protected." What the Premier didn't say is that almost half of the protected area was previously protected and the 62% of Clayoquot Sound open to clearcut logging translates into 74% of the rainforest. Adding insult to injury, the government designated some areas of forests as "scenic corridors" and others as "special management zones." In reality, scenic corridors have proven to be thin strips of trees left along the water while the mountains above are stripped clean. For all intensive purposes "special management zones" appear to be another term for what was previously "modified landscape"—clearcuts.

Almost 70% of Vancouver Island's ancient forests have been

clearcut. Where there were once 170 intact watersheds on the island, now there are only eleven. Five are in Clayoquot Sound. Under the new decision, two intact watersheds would be protected. The decision was touted far and wide as a "responsible compromise." Before the decision, the industry was clearcutting 540,000 cubic metres of rainforest a year in Clayoquot Sound; after the decision they were allowed to log 600,000 cubic metres.

The Clayoquot Land Use Decision sparked cries of protest around the province which quickly spread around the globe. On July 1, the Clayoquot Sound Peace Camp opened and protests were held at Canadian consulates in Austria, Germany, England, Australia and the United States.

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"As the moon set over the barren, stumpridden mountains each night, hope for the future grew with our numbers."
— Amy Simpson, Peace Camp Organizer.

The Peace Camp was set up by the Friends of Clayoquot Sound to provide a meaningful forum for grassroots protests. It was a ramshackle village of tents and trailers symbolically situated in an old clearcut known as "the Black Hole." In the four months that it was operating, over 12,000 people visited the camp and joined the protests. In the Peace Camp we created a fluctuating, chaotic and warm community that functioned somewhat as a large extended family, through intense stress and upheaval. In this community, business people rolled up their sleeves beside students, musicians and doctors to wash dishes, help with twenty-four-hour security, or plan the protests to come. Functioning solely on donations, the camp managed to feed at least 200 people a day with healthy vegetarian meals.

In many respects the Peace Camp was a vehicle for and an embodiment of social change. Everyone who entered the camp agreed to abide by a basic set of principles that formed the foundations upon which the community functioned and the context within which we protested. The Peaceful Direct Action Code, as it

was called, was developed through an analysis of the philosophies of nonviolent civil disobedience. It was built upon Gandhian principles and the lessons learned from civil rights and environmental protests around the globe. It is as follows:

Peaceful Direct Action Code

1. Our attitude is one of openness, friendliness and respect toward all beings we encounter.
2. We will not use violence either verbal or physical towards any being.
3. We will not damage any property and we will discourage others from doing so.
4. We will strive for an atmosphere of calm and dignity.
5. We will carry no weapons.
6. We will not bring or use alcohol or drugs.

Each day at the Camp, workshops were held which explored the philosophy of nonviolence and civil disobedience, consensus decision-making and legal issues, as well as the history and ecology of Clayoquot Sound. The workshops and "Peaceful Direct Action Code" helped to ensure that the massive protests and the camp community remained peaceful at all times. People learned how to work together, diffuse anger, to refocus fear and anxiety constructively, and most of all, to listen to and respect one another. The philosophy of nonviolence has a great deal to do with abolishing power as we know it and redefining it as something common to all. *Power over* is to be replaced by *shared power*, by the power to do things, by the discovery of our own strength as opposed to a passive receiving of power exercised by others, often in our name. Individuals feel, and in many ways are, powerless against the state, but when we are more than individuals we can find strength, confidence and real power in working together. The success of the Peace Camp was not only in the peaceful daily blockades at the Kennedy River Bridge but the skills, knowledge and experience that thousands of individuals took back to their communities. What grew out of the "Black Hole" was a common

understanding that we have a right, indeed a responsibility, to stand up for what we believe in—and together we have the ability to do it effectively.

The government and industry have responded to the protests with fear and aggression. They have called environmentalists "hysterical," and worse. We've heard this before. They took a similar line up to the day the Atlantic cod stocks collapsed. For years Dupont called environmentalists "hysterical" for claiming that CFC's eat away at the ozone layer. Our challenge is to reverse the burden of proof. It is the corporations and governments who now must prove that their practices are ecologically and culturally responsible.

Government and industry have characterized the present debate as a choice between liking trees or liking workers. But the thousands of people who came to Clayoquot realized that we simply cannot negate our dependence on natural systems; scientists call it biodiversity. "Biodiversity is no frill. It is life and all that sustains life."[3] Biodiversity resembles a hammock: as destructive industrial practices like clearcutting dramatically alter existing ecosystems, species go extinct, the hammock unravels. Eventually the hammock can no longer hold anything. We need to begin to understand our dependence on natural systems and to develop mechanisms to have this understanding translate into socio-economic and political realities.

Ultimately, the struggle for Clayoquot Sound is not only a struggle for "wilderness" or sound forest practices but fundamentally a struggle with how we interact with the natural world; and whether we have a right to irreversibly change, and in some cases irreversibly damage the environment. It is a struggle to value the future over monetary gain and, in so doing, to recognize that short-term economic gain will not benefit human or non-human communities. It is a struggle for justice. And may be no more complicated than simply recognizing that we all need to breathe air and drink water.

The essays that follow combine experiential knowledge with academic and scientific understandings to provide a critical

analysis of the struggle for Clayoquot Sound and the legal system in which hundreds have been entangled as a result of their dissent. This is a powerful book that rings with the voices of many and exists as a testament to the power of community and our passion for survival. The message rings clear: When we stand, we stand for our lives.

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Notes

1. Canadian Council of Christians and Jews. *A Report of the International Conference of Christians and Jews*, 1969, p. 21.

2. For a more thorough discussion of law and environmental ethics, see Christopher Stone, "Should Trees Have Standing?—Toward Legal Rights For Natural Objects," *Southern California Law Review*, 45:450, p. 461; and Christopher Tribe, "Ways Not to Think About Plastic Trees: New Foundations for Environmental Law," *The Yale Law Journal*, 83:7 (1974), p. 1342.

3. Douglas Chadwick, 1991. "Conserving Biodiversity: A Unified Approach," in *Landscape Linkages and Biodiversity*, Island Press, Washington, D.C.