

A Spark In Search of a Powder Keg

International surrealist declaration

Various Authors

Rebellion is its own justification, completely independent of the chance it has to modify the state of affairs that gives rise to it. It's a spark in the wind, but a spark in search of a powder keg.

—André Breton

If only one thing has brought me joy in the last few weeks, it began when the matriarchs at Unist'ot'en burned the Canadian flag and declared reconciliation is dead. Like wildfire, it swept through the hearts of youth across the territories. Reconciliation was a distraction, a way for them to dangle a carrot in front of us and trick us into behaving. Do we not have a right to the land stolen from our ancestors? It's time to shut everything the fuck down!

—Tawinikay (aka Southern Wind Woman)

The toxic cargo carried in Canadian pipelines, whether it be tar sands oil or fracked liquid natural gas (LNG), is, according to all serious climate scientists, a major, perhaps even decisive contribution to global warming, i.e., ecological catastrophe.

Meant to fuel industrial expansion, the pipelines have themselves become fuel for revolt. Designed to move these dirty fossil fuels from one location to another, they are a crucial element in normalizing the dubious paradise of unlimited growth in awe of which all obedient consumer/ citizens are supposed to genuflect. In what the colonial map-makers have called British Columbia (BC), resource extraction has always been the name of the game.

However, the emergence in February of this year of a widespread oppositional network ranging from "land back" Indigenous warriors to elder traditionalists and from Extinction Rebellion activists to anarchist insurrectionaries was heartening. Railways, highways and ferries were blockaded, provincial legislatures, government administrative offices, banks and corporate headquarters were occupied.

The catalyst for this rebellion was a widespread Indigenous uprising that refused the illusory promises of reconciliation. Together, these rebel forces disrupted business as usual in solidarity with the Unist'ot'en Big Frog clan of the Wet'suwet'en tribal house.

As objective chance would have it, the primary Indigenous land defense camp is situated not far from the same Hazelton, B.C. area to which surrealist Kurt Seligmann and his wife Arlette journeyed in 1938. During that time, they visited Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en villages, marvelled at the imaginative power of the totem poles and ceremonial objects, made field notes, shot 16mm film, collected stories and recorded mythic histories.

Now, in 2020, growing numbers of these same Indigenous peoples have been threatening to bring the Canadian economy to a grinding halt. Unwilling to be bought off by corporate petrodollars or mollified by a legal system that has never done anything but pacify, brutalize, or betray them in the process of stealing their land, Indigenous peoples passionately fought back against the forces of colonial law and order in a radical whirlwind of willful disobedience and social disruption.

One action built upon another in creating a rolling momentum that seemed unstoppable. When one railroad blockade would be busted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), another would spring up in its place elsewhere extending the frontlines of the battle all across the continent.

Then, the debilitating Covid-19 virus arrived to compound the damage that had previously been done to the capitalist economy by the incendiary virus of revolt. The resistance of these Indigenous communities against the pipelines concerns all of us, worldwide, since they are on the front lines of the struggle to prevent cataclysmic climate change.

In the future, a key question will be whether Canadian authorities can successfully put the genie of Indigenous rebellion back in the colonial bottle of “reconciliation.” As surrealists, we hope they will not, and we stand in solidarity with the unreconciled insurgent spirit of defiant Indigenous resistance.

A new reality is to be invented and lived instead of the one that today as yesterday imposes its environmental miserabilism and its colonialist and racist hierarchies. As surrealists, we honor our historical affinity with the Kwakwaka’wakw Peace Dance headdress that for so long had occupied a place of reverence in Andre Breton’s study during his lifetime before being ceremoniously returned in 2003 to Alert Bay on Cormorant Island by his daughter, Aube Elleouet, in keeping with her father’s wishes.

With this former correspondence in mind, we presently assert that our ongoing desire to manifest the emancipation of the human community as distinctively undertaken in the surrealist domain of intervention is in perfect harmony with the fight of the Indigenous communities of the Americas against globalized Western Civilisation and its ecocidal folly.

Postscript: During the process of gathering signatures for the above declaration, we were inspired to see its uncompromising stance against white supremacy and police repression reflected in the brightly sparkling flames of the Minneapolis uprising that lit a powder keg of pent-up rage and incited an earth-shaking eruption of spontaneous rebellion in the streets of America.

It was only fitting that in solidarity with the uprising about police brutality kicked off by George Floyd’s execution/lynching at the hands of the police, anti-racism protesters in the United States would take direct action by beheading or bringing down statues of Christopher Columbus, genocidal symbol of the colonial expropriation of Native American lands.

Guy Girard, Michael Lowy, Penelope Rosemont, and Ron Sakolsky,
June 18, 2020

This international surrealist declaration was signed by 200 surrealists from around the world whose signatures can be found with the text of the article on the Fifth Estate website.

Full list of signatories

Surrealists in the United States: Gale Ahrens, Will Alexander, Andy Alper, Byron Baker, J.K. Bogartte, Eric Bragg, Thom Burns, Max Cafard, Casi Cline, Steven Cline, Jennifer Cohen, Laura Corsiglia, David Coulter, Jean-Jacques Dauben, Rikki Ducornet, Terri Engels, Barrett John Erickson, Alice Farley, Natalia Fernandez, Brandon Freels, Beth Garon, Paul Garon, Robert Green, Maurice Greenia, Brigitte Nicole Grice, Janice Hathaway, Dale Houstman, Karl Howeth, Joseph Jablonski, Timothy Robert Johnson, Robin D.G. Kelly, Paul McRandle, Irene Plazewska, Theresa Plese, Michael Stone-Richards, David Roediger, Penelope Rosemont, LaDonna Smith, Steve Smith, Tamara Smith, Abigail Susik, Sasha Vlad, Richard Warra, Joel Williams, Craig S. Wilson

Surrealists in the UK: Jay Blackwood, Paul Cowdell, Jill Fenton, Rachel Fijalkowski, Krzysztof Fijalkowski, Merl Fluin, Kathy Fox, Lorna Kirin, Rob Marsden, Douglas Park, Michel Remy, Wedgwood Steventon, Frank Wright, the Leeds Surrealist Group (Gareth Brown, Stephen J. Clark, Kenneth Cox, Luke Dominey, Amalia Higham, Bill Howe, Sarah Metcalf, Peter Overton, Jonathan Tarry, Martin Trippett), the London Surrealist Group (Stuart Inman, Philip Kane, Timothy B. Layden, Jane Sparkes, Darren Thomas) and the surrealists of Wales (Jean Bonnin, Neil Combs, David Greenslade, Jeremy Over, John Richardson, John Welson)

Surrealists in Paris: Ody Saban and The Surrealist Group of Paris (Elise Aru, Michèle Bachelet, Anny Bonnin, Massimo Borghese, Claude-Lucien Cauët, Taisiia Cherkasova, Sylwia Chrostowska, Hervé Delabarre, Alfredo Fernandes, Joël Gayraud, Régis Gayraud, Guy Girard, Michael Löwy, Pierre-André Sauvageot, Bertrand Schmitt, Sylvain Tanquerel, Virginia Tentindo, Michel Zimbacca)

Surrealists in Canada: Montréal (Jacques Desbiens, Peter Dube, Sabatini Lasiesta, Bernar Sancha), Toronto (Beatriz Hausner, Sherri Higgins), Québec City (David Nadeau), Victoria (Erik Volet), the Ottawa Surrealist Group (Jason Abdelhadi, Lake, Patrick Provonost) and the Inner Island Surrealist Group (as.matta, Jesse Gentes, Sheila Nopper, Ron Sakolsky)

The Surrealist Group of Madrid: Eugenio Castro, Andrés Devesa, Jesús Garcia Rodriguez, Vicente Gutiérrez Escudero, Lurdes Martinez, Noé Ortega, Antonio Ramirez, Jose Manuel Rojo, María Santana, Angel Zapata

Surrealists in Sweden: Johannes Bergmark, Erik Bohman, Kalle Eklund, Mattias Forshage, Riyota Kasamatsu, Michael Lundberg, Emma Lundenmark, Maja Lundgren, Kristoffer Noheden, Sebastian Osorio

Surrealists in Holland: Jan Bervoets, Elizé Bleys, Josse De Haan, Rik Lina, Hans Plomp, Pieter Schermer, Wijnand Steemers, Laurens Vancrevel, Her de Vries, Bastiaan Van der Velden

Surrealists in Brazil: Alex Januario, Mário Aldo Barnabé, Diego Cardoso, Elvio Fernandes, Beau Gomez, Rodrigo Qohen, Sergio Lima, Natan Schäfer, Renato Souza

Surrealists in Chile: Jaime Alfaro, Magdalena Benavente, Jorge Herrera F., Miguel Ángel Huerta, Ximena Olguín, Enrique de Santiago, Andrés Soto, Claudia Vila

The Middle East and North Africa Surrealist Group: Algeria (Onfwan Foud), Egypt (Yasser Abdelkawy, Mohsen El-Belasy, Ghadah Kamal), Iraq (Miechel Al Raie), Syria (Tahani Jalloul), and Palestine (Fakhry Ratrout)

Surrealists in Prague: Frantisek Dryje, Joe Grim Feinberg, Katerina Pinosova, Martin Stejskal, Jan Svankmajer

The Athens Surrealist Group (Elias Melios, Sotiris Lontos, Nikos Stabakis, Theoni Tambaki, Thomas Typaldos, Marianna Xanthopoulou)

Surrealists in Costa Rica: Gaetano Andreoni, Amirah Gazel, Miguel Lohlé, Denis Magarman, Alfonso Peña

Surrealists in Buenos Aires: Silvia Guiard, Luís Conde, Alejandro Michel

Surrealists in Australia: Anthony Redmond, Michael Vandelaar, Tim White

Surrealists in Portugal: Miguel de Carvalho, Luiz Morgadinho

Surrealists in Bucharest (Dan Stanciu), **Mexico** (Susana Wald), and **the Canary Islands** (Jose Miguel Perez Corales)

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