

Listuguj supports Wet'suwet'en First Nation by holding railway blockade

Gilles Gagné

LISTUGUJ: – A group of Listuguj citizens erected a blockade of the railroad on February 10 in support of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation in British Columbia, and the members of that community who defend the Unis'tot'en camp, a resistance camp built on unceded territory. Those Wet'suwet'en members want to prevent the construction of a pipeline.

As SPEC was reaching its deadline on February 14, the Listuguj demonstrators, assisted occasionally by members of Gesgapegiag, were still blocking railway traffic.

British Columbia's Unis'tot'en clan is part of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation in northern British Columbia, situated in an area targeted by several companies wanting to build energy pipelines. One project is more advanced than others, the Coastal GasLink venture, whose construction is underway.

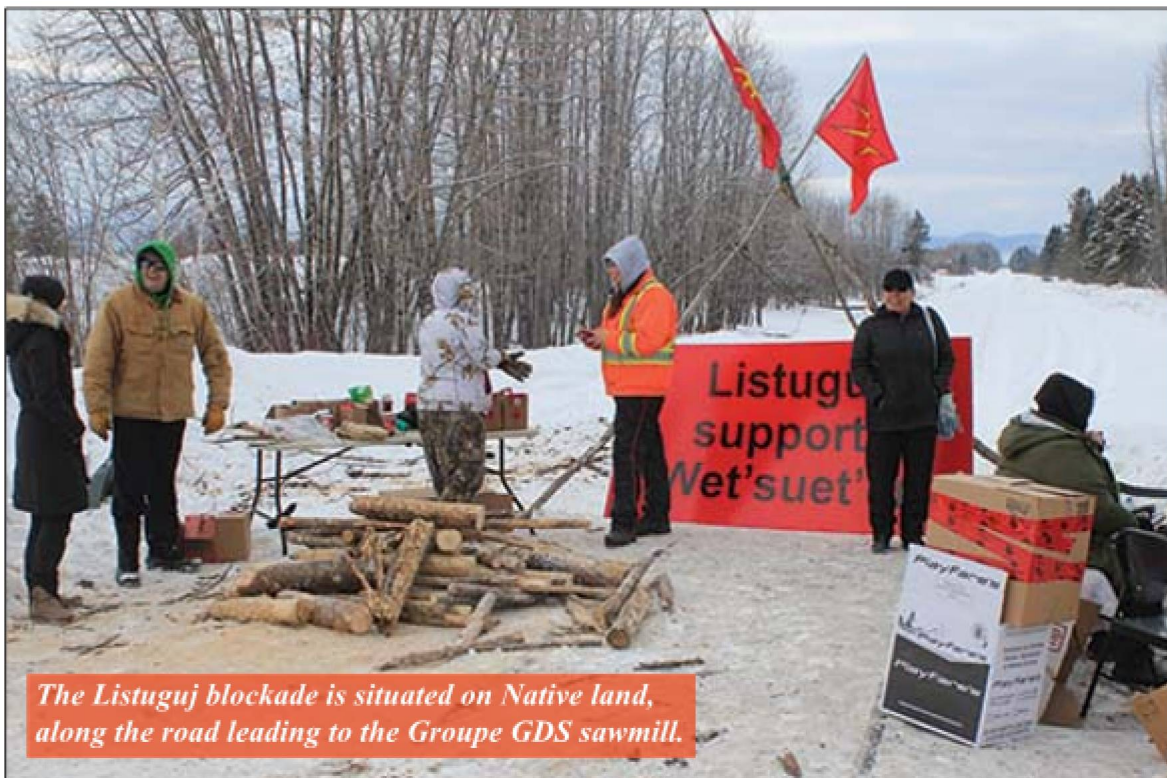
As of February 14, the Listuguj blockade had not been subjected to any police intervention. The Sûreté du Québec was clear that its police officers would not intervene on Native land. The Listuguj Police Department, routinely checked the demonstration site. Police Chief Trapper Metallic did not return phone calls from Spec but the demonstrators were not worried about an intervention. The band council also remained very discrete during the first five days of demonstration.

Here is a daily description of what took place between February 9 and 14:

Day 1:

Sunday, February 9

At the beginning of the afternoon, approximately 20 people, mainly from Listuguj but also from Gesgapegiag, gather on Interprovincial Boulevard, at the Listuguj-Pointe-à-la-Croix extremity of the J.C. Van Horne bridge, to distribute fly-



The Listuguj blockade is situated on Native land, along the road leading to the Groupe GDS sawmill.

Photo: G. Gagné

ers explaining why they support the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs in their attempt to block the passage of the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

Day 2:

Monday, February 10

At 11 a.m., a group of Listuguj protesters erect a blockade on the Transports Québec rail line, which is operated by the Gaspésie Railway Society. Like other Native groups in Canada, they officially support the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and the environment protection advocates who have joined their movement to prevent the construction of TC Energy's Coastal GasLink pipeline on traditional land.

The barricade takes the Gaspésie Railway Society's staff off guard. While they were aware that it was a possibility, the railway management and employees fail to pass with a train pulling empty cement, lumber and woodchip cars before the installation of the barricade. The situation of the transporter was complicated by the effects of the February 7 snowstorm because the empty cars reached Matapédia later than expected.

Day 3:

Tuesday, February 11

During a short interview with regional media, two pro-

testers, Kayla Isaac-Gedeon and Brandon Baun, specify that they want the RCMP to leave the Wet'suwet'en location. They also support the Mohawks that are blocking the railway near Belleville, Ontario, where the RCMP contemplates an intervention to free the railway.

"We support Wet'suwet'en in its opposition to the pipeline project. If they (the promoters) can do it there, they can do it here one day," states Brandon Baun, one of the demonstrators. He and the other supporters of the cause take turns near the railway. They are between two and 15 people at a time, day and night.

"People stop to encourage us. They bring some wood for the fire, food and blankets," points out Kayla Isaac-Gedeon, another regular demonstrator. The activities of the Gaspésie Railway Society are not completely paralyzed, since a windmill blade train is loaded in New Richmond and some shunting operations are carried out for McInnis Cement in Nouvelle and New Richmond, as well as at the Temrex sawmill in Nouvelle, however, the loaded cars cannot get shipped out of the Gaspé Peninsula and the industries cannot get empty cars.

The president of the transporter, Éric Dubé, sees an ap-

parent contradiction in the choice made by the country-wide protesters because they block railways, the best land transport mode, environmentally-speaking, while they root for an ecological cause.

Day 4:

Wednesday, February 12

On their way to meetings scheduled in Quebec City, the president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, Éric Dubé, who is also prefect of the Bonaventure MRC, and the prefect of the Percé Rock MRC, Nadia Minassian, stop and talk with demonstrators.

"We didn't have to ask. We understand that the situation is not tied to regional considerations. The issue is strictly tied to what is going on out west (British Columbia) and to the presence of the (RCMP) police in Ontario (Belleville). It will probably last until the issue is resolved nationally. That is what they led us to believe," says Mr. Dubé.

He would like a more inspired intervention from the Canadian and Quebec governments to reduce tensions and find a solution. "The situation shows how vulnerable Canada is. We saw two railway blockades erected in two strategic locations, including Belleville, and it paralyzed a large portion of the country's freight traffic."

Éric Dubé discusses with CN Rail officials and he is worried. "I gather that after only one week, the impact of the demonstrations will be worse than the two weeks of CN strike in November. The strike was predictable. Those demonstrations manifested last week like sand in the gearbox."

The Gaspésie Railway Society loses \$15,000 per day in transportation revenues due to the demonstrations. "Some revenues will be lost, like those linked to the woodchips that left yesterday by truck instead of leaving by train. If it lasts one month, McInnis Cement will send its cement by truck. In the case of the windmill blades scheduled to leave over the weekend, the revenues will be delayed," explains Mr. Dubé.

Day 5:

Thursday, February 13

The Gaspésie Railway Society sends an employee to try and convince the demonstrators to let the windmill blade train scheduled for Saturday pass. It is refused. The transporter tried to use the argument that windmill blades produce renewable energy, a point that could have been perceived favourably by protesters rooting for an environmental cause.

"We tried, without success. The communication line remains open. We can't impose anything. The blockade depends on decisions made by a group. We will not pass as long as there is no resolution of the case at the national level," says Luc Lévesque, director of the transporter.

The Mi'gmaq blockade triggers different reactions outside the community. The Member of National Assembly for the riding of Bonaventure, Sylvain Roy, states that the Natives "should remember that we supported them in a \$300 million plus project in the back country of Escuminac," referring to the Mesgi'g Ugu's'n wind farm, partly owned by the Mi'gmaqs of the Gaspé Peninsula.

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BARRICADE:

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On the other hand, the blockade receives support from Environnement vert-plus, the ecological movement of the Bay of Chaleur. "There is large consensus against (shale gas) fracking, in the Gaspé Peninsula and at the international level. The municipal, provincial and federal elected officials

of the region that are called upon by the Mi'gmaq demonstrations must resist the temptation to denounce it because of its immediate consequences in the region. We invite them to show solidarity with Wet'suwet'en and intervene with the federal government in order to stop the Coastal GasLink pipeline," says Pascal Bergeron, of Environnement vert-plus.