

Originally published in Pacific Free Press
October 27 2008

<http://pacificfreepress.com/content/view/3247/81/>



The Activist Eco Front on Canada's West Coast: Could it be that Victoria Citizens are a Model to the World?

By Diane Walsh

The demonstration event of October 25th 2008 in BC's Capital is something of note. So significant it's worth the world seeing.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27asncwOSQQ>

The Victoria Chapter of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC) managed to inspire more than 2,700 people to come out in support of Big Trees not Big Stumps, a rally call with a powerful message: Cutting Old Growth trees as an instituted logging practice is no longer tolerable. Wow. Quite a doozy.

In droves, ralliers flocked to the streets in Victoria. In a courageous effort to underline the moral duty—compel government to stop ravaging majestic beauties that are hundreds of years old— the people walked, the people spoke.

Despite nearly two decades of sporadic activism, the Province has shown itself unwilling to invest in infrastructure and retooling methods coupled with that—a lack of incentive to rethink relationships with its exporters—thus leaving BC forests managed insensibly. However, now, the time has come.

Marching from City Hall to the BC Legislature tree-huggers, citizens from all walks of life and occupations showed a steadfast commitment to rock the Liberals in power to act, imploring upon them to focus on sustainable second growth logging as key forest practice.

The hush-hush news of a Bermuda-incorporated [*presumed* US] company moving surreptitiously to access what-many-consider part of the world famous Cathedral Grove Park spewed the issue over the top for even the quiet supporter.

Premier Gordon Campbell and his now newly appointed Minister of Forests Pat Bell have the heat on them. Former Minister Rich Coleman was all too happy to give up the portfolio [Fall 2008] having been dogged for some years and still not getting the message—status quo in the woods leads to old growth disappearance at an alarming rate.

"At this point with 75 percent of the Island's productive old-growth already logged, including 90 percent of the valley bottoms with the largest trees warns rally organizer and WCWC campaign director Ken Wu, while posing the logical question

"Who's still arguing to log the last of the old-growth [anyway] with the exception of [shareholders and executives of] timber companies and the BC Liberal government".

Friends of Clayoquot Sound along with progressive political leaders are helping to send the message that preservation of the environment must come before quick bucks.

Any non-progressive employing the age-old tactic—to target the eco activist—no longer holds water especially in today's climate of increased across-the-spectrum community support.

Dr. Judith Sayers, Chief Councillor, Hupacasath First Nations Band (Port Alberni) told the crowd that a Liberal voice-piece (AKA the identified spokesperson) is quoted to have suggested that large numbers would not come out to the rally and that we'd be seeing the "usual suspects". The crowd roared happily and proudly, adopting the label voluntarily if but for the price of standing on the side of protecting beautiful old trees.

Ken Wu chimed in, "Old-growth forests provide habitat for many species at risk like spotted owls and marbled murrelets that need older forests. They sequester two to three times more atmospheric carbon per hectare than second growth forests do. They are important parts of many First Nations cultures, and they are fundamental pillars of BC's multi-billion dollar coastal tourism industry as millions of tourists visit old-growth forests each year in such places as Cathedral Grove, Clayoquot Sound by Tofino, the West Coast Trail, the Carmanah and Walbran Valleys, Goldstream, Cape Scott, Juan de Fuca Trail, Chilliwack Lake, and the Nootka Trail". Indeed these facts are

virtually undisputed.

Eli Enns, Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Park project leader Scott Fraser, Alberni-Qualicum MLA told Premier Campbell that his government would do well to listen to First Nations wisdom (and him for that matter) when it comes to preservation, pointing to how in various part of BC, Aboriginals have fought tooth and nail to protect Old Growth. In part the 1993 bitter rally of Clayoquot Sound (where more than 300 people were arrested) was elevated by First Nations' courage. It was then that the world first came to know about the fight in BC, when organizer Tzeporah Berman relayed the story with photographs in Europe.

Today the movement has grown substantially both in numbers and mystique. Valerie Langer, Friends of Clayoquot Sound board member, ForestEthics campaign director -- and also veteran of the 1993 protests -- spoke eloquently about cooperation: Citizens and governments must work in unison to solve the challenges, but first it must be recognized that the logging in BC must transition away from clear-cutting old growth to sustainable second growth logging and within that a commitment to ban raw log exports. A tall order. A long-term investment with a short term crunch.

Arnie Bercov from the Pulp, Paper, and Woodworkers of Canada Union and a forestry officer is one of the heroes in the movement right now, seen reaching out his hand to Ken Wu. Simply put, the loggers themselves can see that there's no future in logging old growth. Wu points out that, "Over the past year in particular, there has been great solidarity between the Wilderness Committee and the PPWC, United Steelworkers, and CEP on the issue of raw log exports, TFL deregulation, and increasingly I believe, on the need to shift the industry toward second-growth".

Carol James, Leader of the Opposition (New Democratic Party) who attended the last BC rally in March 2008, relayed to her proxy Bob Simpson, BC NDP forestry critic, that she was "extremely disappointed not have been able to attend due to a important by-election meeting in Vancouver" but expressed a deep commitment to the cause. In addition, Dr. Jane Sterk, BC Green Party leader indicated that since 1983 (the birth of the party) old growth protection has been their central pillar.

Throughout Saturday's event, big cheers of encouragement emerged from the crowd along with a willingness of the part of everyone to encircle the actual government building as a finale gesture to the Campbell government. This WCWC signature Ring-around-the-Legislature looking now more like a unity circle, obviously symbolizes a group-based shared-value citizen commitment to best logging practice solutions. This camaraderie is in a

stark contrast to the rally days of 1993 when loggers and tree-huggers were pitted against each other to the merriment of the top industry brasses and dinosaur government officials willfully blind to the destruction of both people and the Earth in that hurtful process.

To even better days ahead. A day when timber companies actual sit down at table to hammer out the sort of future economy we can all live in with some measure of dignity. If you can't come to the table then get out of woods 'cuz it ain't no playground anymore. This is real life.

Footnote: according to info listed in www.wcwc victoria.org

"Recent satellite photos show that about 75% of Vancouver Island's original, productive old growth forests have already been logged, including 90% of the valley bottoms where the largest trees grow and 99% of the old-growth coastal Douglas fir forests on eastern Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast. While 13% of Vancouver Island's land base is protected in parks, this only includes 6% of its original, productive old-growth forests. This is because much of the land in parks includes treeless alpine terrain, stunted bog forests along the west coast of the Island, and high altitude snow forests with scrubby trees (i.e. marginal or low-productivity old-growth forests with small trees that generally can't be profitably logged.