

1492 Land Back Lane—Background

History

The land that comprises the country that we now call Canada was occupied by Indigenous people prior to colonization. Most of this land is *unceded*, which means that First Nations people never signed away this land to Canada (or *the Crown*).

In 1784, the Governor of Quebec, Sir Joseph Haldimand, gave the Haudenosaunee people 380,000 hectares of land (*the Haldimand Tract*) in exchange for their alliance with the British during the American Revolution.

This land extended 10 km on each side of the Grand River. 38 municipalities in Southern Ontario now sit on this land. Today, the Haudenosaunee people only have 5% of the original land remaining.

On the remaining land sits Six Nations of the Grand River, the largest reserve by population in Canada. The Six Nations are people of the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, and Tuscarora First Nations. In 1924, the Six Nations Elected Council (SNEC) was put in place by the Federal Government.

Today

First Nations issues fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government. After decades of disputes over land, developments are subject, by international law, to the principle of *Free, Prior and Informed Consent* when it comes to land claims.

In 2015, land was acquired by Foxgate Developments from Haldimand Country, bypassing Federal Government jurisdiction. In 2019, the Six Nations Elected Council, long-perceived by the Six Nations as not representing their collective voice, signed an “accommodation” with Foxgate Developments without consulting the broader Haudenosaunee community. Foxgate never consulted with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council, the traditional governance structure, before commencing its project.

Now, in order to stop the land from being turned into a housing subdivision, Haudenosaunee Land Defenders are occupying the site where Foxgate Developments is planning to build.

Why Occupy the Land?

After losing so much land, Land Defenders feel that this is their only option. Canada has a history of dragging out land disputes. Even if First Nations people win in court, they will only provide financial compensation. With so much Haudenosaunee land already lost, Land Defenders do not want to lose even more. As an example, Six Nations Elected Council has an ongoing court case, filed in 1995, against Ottawa and Ontario over lost lands. It is scheduled to go to trial in 2022.

Foxgate Developments has a permanent injunction, granted by a provincial court, calling for Land Defenders to leave the land and allow development. This injunction has been enforced by police, who have shot rubber bullets and used tasers on Land Defenders. Land Defenders assert that a provincial court does not have the jurisdiction to make this ruling, as First Nations land claims fall under Federal jurisdiction.

Why Should Unions Care?

As people who live in what is now Canada, we live and work on traditional Indigenous land. That's why we do land acknowledgements at meetings and events. We might think that the dispossession of land is something that happened in the past. But as evidenced by 1492 Land Back Lane, land is still being taken from Indigenous people.

As unionists, we understand the importance of solidarity to fight against the big bosses and fight for fairness. That is that Land Defenders are doing right now - they are taking on developers to fight for what is theirs.

Bosses - like Foxgate Developments and the Mayor of Caledonia - will try to tell us that what Land Defenders are doing is wrong because of the injunction. But like Indigenous people, union members know that injunctions are used against the working class to contain us. In the same way we use strikes to push for better working conditions and better lives for our members, Land Defenders are occupying land to protect it from development and to preserve it for future generations. In the same way that we set up picket lines and try to prevent scabs from entering the workplace, Land Defenders have set up barricades to prevent developers from building a subdivision on their land.

How Can We Support 1492 Land Back Lane?

- With a monetary donation to their legal fund: <https://ca.gofundme.com/f/legal-fund-1492-land-back-lane>
- By sending an e-transfer to support land defenders get the supplies they need to continue their fight: landback6nations@gmail.com
- By following their social media and amplifying what is happening:
<https://www.facebook.com/1492LandBackLane/>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/854602608643018>
- By visiting Land Defenders to bring supplies, help them build structures, or show solidarity. You can be in touch with them by emailing landback6nations@gmail.com.
- By researching the issue and talking to your friends, families, and colleagues. We need to educate others around us.