Royal Canadian Mounted Police advocated use of live fire against indigenous pipeline protesters

Penny Smith, Roger Jordan
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The recent revelation of the British-based *Guardian* that Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) commanders advocated the use of deadly force and live ammunition against indigenous pipeline protesters must be taken as a serious warning by the entire working class. The incident underscores that Canada's ruling elite will stop at nothing to enforce its insatiable drive for profit, including through the imposition of environmentally and socially destructive pipeline projects, and that opposition will be ruthlessly suppressed.

The documents uncovered by the *Guardian* and reported by the newspaper on December 20 reveal that the RCMP was prepared to shoot to kill during a militarized police raid on Indigenous protestors who had blockaded construction of a natural gas pipeline in northern British Columbia.

According to the *Guardian* article, leaked internal notes from a strategy session that referred to a raid that took place on January 7, 2019, reveal that RCMP officials argued for "lethal overwatch," a term used for deploying officers or snipers prepared to shoot to kill. Officials at the session also urged officers to use "as much violence toward the gate as you want" in order to remove the roadblock.

Other documents disclose that the RCMP was prepared to use militarized equipment against peaceful unarmed protestors— including heavily armed police patrols with carbine rifles (which are capable of firing bullets at a speed of 895 meters per second), a jet boat, helicopter, drone technology, and heat-sensing cameras— and to carry out high tech surveillance of leaders of the protest movement, who call themselves "land defenders."

The disputed pipeline development cuts across Wet'suwet'en territory, where Indigenous protestors had been peacefully occupying an encampment known as Unist'ot'en Camp for almost a decade. In November 2018, when TransCanada filed for, and was granted, an interim injunction by the provincial Supreme Court for the forceful removal of the occupation, protesters responded by erecting a gate at the Gitimd'en checkpoint, blocking the company's access. Early in January 2019, armed police raided the camp and arrested 14 demonstrators.

One document referred to by the *Guardian* states that without exception "everyone will be arrested in the injunction area," including children and grandparents. Another makes reference to possible child apprehension by social services, and that arrests would be necessary for "sterilizing the site."

A further document reveals that the RCMP, concerned about "optics", had established a "media exclusion zone" blocking reporters from accessing the area, and were careful to hide their weapons from public view. Two private security firms were also retained to track Indigenous peoples' movements.

Additionally, the *Guardian* article discloses details of the close collaboration between the RCMP and the pipeline company prior to the raid. RCMP officers were regularly in attendance at company planning sessions and daily "tailgate" meetings.

An RCMP detachment, euphemistically labelled the Community-Industry Response Group (CIRG), have been routinely harassing and terrorizing the Wet'suwet'en for the past decade. It has maintained a presence at the Unist'ot'en Camp since the raid last January and will remain there "as long as deemed necessary." According to Indigenous protestors, the CIRG has explicitly stated that it will not assist the Wet'suwet'en if their safety is threatened. Officers told them that even in the event of a serious threat, such as an armed attack by racists against the Unist'ot'en, any action to control road access could result in arrests.

The RCMP's brutality towards indigenous protesters in British Columbia is not new. In 1995, at Gustafson Lake, where indigenous "warriors" were seeking to reclaim an ancestral burial ground, the RCMP, joined by Canadian military Special Armed Forces personnel supplied with armoured personnel carriers, set up land mines (it called

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them “early warning devices”) around the protest site and shot at demonstrators.

The pipeline at the heart of the latest protest will be owned and operated by Coastal GasLink (CGL), a subsidiary of Alberta-based energy company TC Energy (formerly TransCanada). The nearly 670-kilometre long natural gas line will stretch from the Dawson Creek area located in northeast British Columbia to a processing facility to be built near the coastal city of Kitimat, where the gas will be converted to a liquid form for export to Asian markets.

Responding to the *Guardian* exposé, Tlingit activist Anne Spice wrote that “The police are here to support the invasion of Indigenous territories...They harass us and profile us under the guise of ‘public safety’.”

Molly Wickham, a spokesperson for the protesters who was arrested at the site last January, said that "The state has always removed our people from our lands to ensure control over the resources...[The] RCMP are acting as mercenaries for industry.”

Ron Mitchell, known as Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief Hagwilnegh, who also participated in the protests, posed the question, “Who are the RCMP working for?"

The answer is that, as always, the police and political parties are working on behalf of the most powerful sections of Canada’s corporate elite.

The $6.6 billion project is part of a massive $40 billion investment by LNG Canada, a consortium of multinational energy giants, including Royal Dutch Shell, Mitsubishi Corp., Petronas., PetroChina Co. and Korean Gas Corp., that would bring Canada’s liquid natural gas to foreign markets. In October 2018, the federal Liberal and provincial NDP governments gave their approval for LNG Canada to proceed with construction “immediately” on what Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called “the single largest private sector investment in Canadian history.”

Provincially, both the Coastal TransLink pipeline and the LNG export facility in Kitimat have the backing of the minority NDP government, which is propped up by the Green Party. Following the approval of the Kitimat facility, BC Premier John Horgan enthused, “It's certainly a great day for northern British Columbia.”

The Canadian ruling class views the development and expansion of energy pipelines as an essential element in realizing its ambitions for Canada to become an “energy superpower.” The ruthless treatment meted out to anti-pipeline protesters therefore enjoys the backing of the highest levels of the capitalist state.

In 2016, then Liberal Minister of Natural Resources, Jim Carr, made statements making clear that discussions had taken place within the government about deploying the military to suppress public opposition to the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline, which will carry tar sands bitumen from Alberta to Burnaby, British Columbia, for export. Trans Mountain was given the greenlight by the federal Liberal government after it purchased the pipeline from energy giant Kinder Morgan last May for $4.4 billion.

If the RCMP and federal government are willing to sanction brutal force against indigenous protesters, they will be no less willing to use the full force of the capitalist state against workers entering into struggle across the country. Just as the courts were prepared in the Wet'suwet'en case to give legal sanction to a violent police raid, they have proven more than willing to impose no less draconian restrictions and bans on strikes and protests across the country. In the latest case, a court in Saskatchewan ruled that picketing oil refinery workers locked out at the Cooperative Refinery Complex in Regina have no right to block scabs, fuel delivery trucks, and equipment shipments from entering the premises during the strike.

In Ontario, the government of Doug Ford, who is in the midst of imposing a vicious austerity drive targeting public services and workers’ rights, described a protest by a few hundred activists at which a mock guillotine was carried early last year as a “credible threat” that had been referred to the Ontario Provincial Police.

Moreover, on the spurious grounds of “fighting terrorism,” the federal government has handed vast powers to the national security apparatus. These include the ability to actively disrupt and spy on protesters deemed to be endangering Canada’s “economic security” and “territorial integrity,” and carry out preventive arrests.

The *Guardian* report comes as governments of all political stripes around the world are stepping up repression against social opposition. When France’s Yellow Vest protests erupted in late 2018, President Emmanuel Macron responded by calling out the army and authorizing them to shoot. Hundreds of protesters were seriously injured, including several who lost their eyes. In Chile, where mass mobilizations broke out last November over mounting social inequality, the government called military personnel onto the streets of Santiago for the first time since the downfall of the fascistic Pinochet dictatorship.

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