Sacred fire lit for Chantel Moore in Madawaska First Nation as activists call for dismantling and defunding the police

By TRACY GLYN

Upon hearing news of the Edmundston police killing of Chantel Moore, a Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation woman from British Columbia on June 4, members of the Madawaska First Nation near Miramichi, New Brunswick, lit a sacred fire in their community. A police officer shot Moore five times during a wellness check. She had recently moved to the city to be closer to her five-year-old daughter and mother.

Since April, police in Canada have killed at least six Indigenous people: 26-year-old Chantel Moore, 16-year-old Elsie Hudson, 36-year-old Jason Collins, 22-year-old Stewart Kevin Andrews, 42-year-old Everett Patrick and 48-year-old Rodney Levi.

Russ Letica from Madawaska First Nation invited members of the public to visit, provide an offering or say a prayer at the sacred fire that burned for one week after her death.

The Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, representing 14 First Nations on Vancouver Island, have issued a statement demanding answers as to why the woman was shot and killed: “Justice must not wait and every power must be exerted to ensure that justice is served in an appropriate, immediate, and respectful way.”

In a letter to Edmundston Mayor Cyrille Simard and Edmundston Chief of Police Alain Lang, Wabanaki Grand Council Chief Ron Tremblay said: “I am writing this letter to express my innermost hurt and disgust in relation to the wrongful killing of Chantel Moore of Tofino, BC. She was a mother and young Indigenous woman who is now another statistic to the long list of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women in Canada.”

Tremblay is calling for an out-of-province inquiry on Moore’s murder. He wants the investigation team to be led by Indigenous, Black and People of Colour. “We have witnessed both in America and Canada the violent attacks on People of Colour,” said Tremblay.

Pamela Palmer is a Mi’kmaw lawyer from Eel River Bar First Nation in northern New Brunswick and Professor and the Chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University. Writing in Canadian Dimension, Palmer says that Canadians can no longer say they are unaware that their governments and police forces are racist against Indigenous and Black peoples.

“We learned through testimony, fact, research, and statistics, that yes, Canadian police forces are racist. The media also exposed countless examples of police officers who targeted Indigenous and Black peoples with racist and sexist acts of brutality, sexualized violence and death. When politicians, journalists and commentators persist in denying that racism exists in Canada, it became apparent that white privilege and supremacy are well rooted in Canadian society,” writes Palmer.

Moore’s death comes as Black and Indigenous activists call for the dismantling and defunding of the police, and as Black Lives Matter actions have been held across New Brunswick and beyond following the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black father of a six-year-old.

“If we truly want to effect change that could stop police killings of Black people, we must have a conversation about defunding the police,” argues Sandy Hudson, a co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto.

“When victims are not the right kinds of victims, police have utterly failed. When the queer community in Toronto told police there was a serial killer targeting racialized queer men in the Church Street village, the police openly denied there was a serial killer and did not take the threat seriously. This allowed serial killer Bruce McArthur to get away with murdering at least 7 people, most of them Black and queer,” writes Hudson.

Hudson lists other examples of how the police failed to protect Indigenous women from a serial killer in British Columbia and Black trans woman Sumaya Dalmat in 2015.

Hudson is a proponent for defunding the police: “Instead of relying on police, we could rely on well-trained social workers, psychologists, forensic scientists, doctors, researchers and other well-trained individuals to fulfil our needs when violent crimes take place. In the event that intervention is required within a violent crime is ongoing, a service that provides experts specialized rapid response does not need to be connected to an institution of policing that fails in every other respect. Such a specific tactical service does not require the billions of dollars we waste in ineffective policing from year to year.”

Instead of funding police forces, Hudson calls for funding social services that provide effective public safety and for a public-health approach to drug use instead of one that criminalizes drug users.

According to Hudson, “Across Canada, policing accounts for some of the largest municipal budget expenditures. Let’s defund the police and create budgets that truly reflect our priorities. Perhaps then we could fund guaranteed access to housing, increased adult support for children in schools, and other services that create true safety and security.”

About showing up to the Black Lives Matter actions, spoken word artist and Tenants’ Rights organizer Eishia Hudson recently wrote: “I’m not calling for a new police force. The Halifax Examiner,” Today, young Black people will wake up in cells, in shelters, without jobs, without access to education. Today, Indigenous people fill up our prisons as girls like Eishia Hudson are gunned down by Winnipeg police. One day in the streets doesn’t change that.”

Jones continues:

Justice looks like tenants organizing to fight their landlords. It looks like mothers taking over abandoned buildings to raise their children in. It looks like taking resources from the police and giving it to the community for housing, for treatment, to live a full life. It looks like stopping spending money on prisons and jails and investing in our communities instead. It doesn’t look like bailouts and subsidies to corporations, bloated police budgets, money for surveillance, and putting money into punishment and never into healing.

Justice also looks like Black and Indigenous people organizing together, and white people holding the line for hours in the street to protect Black and brown and Indigenous people from police.

It is young people and elders speaking together. It is communities arguing about strategy, and those who choose to use their energy to work for community in other ways. It is the people who do the working of organizing: the banner makers, the crowd marshals, the people who keep the streets clear, the people who stand the hours with hand sanitizer, tirelessly offering it to people. It is fighting and dancing. It is kneeling and protesting. This is how we practice. This is how we learn what Justice feels like. This is how our lives matter.

Tracy Glynn is a news writer and editor with the NB Media Co-op.
Toilet paper in a time of tax havens: New Brunswick: politician calls J.D. Irving's charity “spam”, tables motion to ban financial assistance to companies that use tax havens:

By TRACY GLYNN

On May 27, Kevin Arseneau, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Kent North, tabled a motion in the New Brunswick Legislature calling on the government to ban financial assistance to any company that are known to use tax havens and implement a publicly-accessible beneficial ownership registry by the end of the year.

A month ago, Arseneau said he was not impressed by what he called “spam” from a J.D. Irving Ltd. representative about their toilet paper donation to shelters and transition houses in New Brunswick.

On April 27, Chris MacDonald, J.D. Irving’s Director of Government Relations, wrote to all New Brunswick MLAs to tell them the toilet paper company is “donating to shelters and transition houses is made 100% here in New Brunswick.”

“So the box the tissue comes in is made in New Brunswick. The process to produce tissue starts with the planting of seedlings and eventually ends with the creation of parent rolls of tissue these are very large rolls weighing 5 tonnes, measuring 7 feet in diameter and 17 feet in height at our tissue mill in Saint John. These parent rolls are then converted to end-user consumer products at our facility in Frederic,” wrote MacDonald.

About one hour later, Arseneau responded to MacDonald: “Beyond the opportunistic aspect of this public relations effort, your charity hardly masks the harm done by the shameless use of tax havens by the companies you control.”

“Very few New Brunswickers would need your charity if you had preferred to pay your taxes on your corporate profits in Canada, rather than in Bermuda and elsewhere. Be aware that toilet paper, tissue (these are very large rolls weighing 5 tonnes, measuring 7 feet in diameter and 17 feet in height) at our tissue mill in Saint John. These parent rolls are then converted to end-user consumer products at our facility in Frederic,” he continued Arseneau.

Arseneau wrote in this letter to J.D. Irving that since the 1970s, “frivolous expenditures of millions of dollars that should stay here have gone to these tax havens.”

In response to the criticisms that J.D. Irving pay their fair share of taxes, Mary Keth, J.D. Irving’s Vice-President of Communications, said: “As regards to your statement regarding tax havens, the fact is the J.D. Irving Limited group of companies are owned and controlled by its employees. This is a group of companies that have been operating in New Brunswick.”

Kevin Arseneau Green MLA for Kent North. Photo from the Office of the Green Party Caucus.

Kevin Arseneau is not the only provincial government representative who calls for action on tax havens. Alain Deneault is a scholar and writer on tax havens. In his book, called “spam” from a J.D. Irving Ltd. representative about their toilet paper donation to shelters and transition houses in New Brunswick.

Kevin Arseneau, Green MLA for Kent North. Photo from the Office of the Green Party Caucus.

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