

The numbers of unmarked graves at former 'Residential School' sites speak volumes. The numbers, ages and names need to be confirmed, but the horror is evident. Many more are yet to be revealed.

Kamloops B.C.: 215

Cowessess, Saskatchewan: 751

Cranbrook, B.C.: 182

Canada's Shame

By: Laura Savinkoff

This is not an easy article to write, nor is this a newsletter easy to publish. The June issue dealt with the heartbreaking oppression of Palestinian children. This one adds to that heartbreak of how we treat each other.

The fact that there are hundreds, if not thousands of missing Indigenous children was well known to those housed in 'Residential Schools' and their families. But somehow we the people did not know. Maybe we didn't want to know? Or maybe we agreed with the policy and the intent and did not care? Or maybe some of us are too busy with our lives to pay attention. But, there are those of us who do pay attention, do care, and did know but were not heard either.

Those living in these supposed schools, run by churches (Catholic, Anglican and United) hired to administer government policy and brought there by the RCMP employed of the Government of Canada. The children were brought to 'school' from Reservations that were already an indignity committed on the people of this land by the invading white man. When this program of assimilation began in 1886 Canada was a British Colony and it ran until 1996. The Dominion of Canada, under Confederation, was 'granted' full independence in 1931. So it is Canada that must bear that burden and that shame of the Residential School debacle along with so many other instances of discrimination, racism, bigotry and inequality.

The following is my opinion, my view on this topic not on behalf of the BPI and comes out of personal experience. Hopefully, no one will take offence but I ask you take a few minutes to think about what I'm saying. For you see, my husband was in a Residential School for Doukhobor children in New Denver, B.C. with about 200 others. This 'school' was run by the B.C. Government and sanctioned by the Government of Canada. Another shameful action perpetrated on children.

(Continued next column)

(From last column) **Canada's Shame**

These children suffered much the same fate as our Indigenous family. Although the intent and treatment was the same the fact that it was of shorter duration was only because we are white and Christian based and had white allies. But the effects are the same and the pain and the need to heal is the same.

These facilities were dubbed 'schools' so as to fool the 'population' that these children were being educated and treated with kindness and respect, much like the elite boarding schools. Well, we now know that was not the truth nor was it the intent. The intent was to convince the children that being 'Indian' was wrong and they must take on the ways of the white man, the church and the state, the invader and occupier, the oppressor. From the very beginning, when the people of the land welcomed the ships, the oppression and invasion began through oppressive and violent means. The final blow came when parents were threatened with imprisonment, leaving elders and younger children without the means to survive, if they did not allow their children to be taken.

Were they schools? Or were they prisons? Or were they Concentration camps? I guess you can say they were schools, because they taught young children something—they taught them how to disrespect their own culture, they taught them it was okay to hurt each other to get what you wanted, to rape, to steal, to lie, to disrespect and dishonour others; they taught the children to hate themselves. And they were prisons for the children were not allowed to leave the grounds. And a concentration camp—well many medical and social experiments were conducted on these children, force, abuse and violence was used to bend them to the will of the church and state.

What would you call this whole pogrom? Genocide? Terrorism? I say it's all of the above. When the intent is to eliminate a whole people through an organized approach is that not genocide and terrorism?

Oh yes, some will say this does not happen anymore and was in the distant past? Was it? The last 'school' closed in 1996. How much in the past is that? And do you realize that the number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children under 14 in foster care is 52.2 %. So why is that? Yes, of course the reason trotted out is these children are being abused.

(Continued page 6)

(From page 5) **Canada's Shame**

Yes it does exist in higher numbers than in the white man's world. Or does it? Or is it just that it is excused and overlooked in the white man's world? Or is it the result of centuries of victimization at the hands of church and state? Is it the result of such deep, deep pain that is manifests in hopelessness and helplessness on top of learned violent behaviour from generations of 'Residential School' abuse? It has been agreed that the victimized learns how to victimize and carries on the victimization to others and to themselves.

I am not excusing the violence, the abuse, the addictive behaviour. It is wrong to attack, abuse or violate others or yourself. But the churches and the state must accept responsibility for creating the problem with 'beating the Indian out of the child'. And the silence of the white people and the general population must accept that we enabled these acts of genocide, we allowed this to happen and to continue, not only for one generation but many and still turn a blind eye to the terror of foster care and institutionalization of children, teens and young adults.

So, what to do? Well, I suggest we ask the survivors and their families what they need, what we can do to help. Our help must not come from a place of placating our Indigenous family. Our help must not come from a place of assuaging our guilt, to make ourselves feel better. Our help must be because we acknowledge and share the pain of violating basic human rights; because we truly value, respect and honour the people; because we want to understand that diversity leads to living in harmony. And to do that we must right the wrong by not only verbally apologizing but by acting to ensure that all live in homes that are safe with clean water and proper sewage treatment, education and medical care to equal that which you and I get, access to all social safety nets according to need not the amount of dollars that trickle down. All systemic racist policy imposed by the ancient Indian Act must be addressed with full input by the Indigenous peoples and not only those whom the Government cherry picks and allies, but the people that live in those unsafe houses, the people who have no clean water and proper access to medical care, etc.

Canada's shame can be turned into Canada's pride if we, you and I, insist that our governments, at all levels, take steps to stop the harm, to stop the racist policies of the past and the present, to create a better world for all those who live on this land. We can if we dare step out of the darkness of denial and self-righteous superiority and into the brightness of loving kindness, equity and live in peaceful harmony with all Creation.

The material evil caused by war is big, but it is incomparably small in comparison with the perversion or the understanding of good and bad which happens during the war, and which is put into the souls of people who do not think.

Leo Tolstoy

A special message from Ecojustice

Tomorrow, June 21, is Indigenous Peoples Day.

We at Ecojustice honour and celebrate the enduring leadership, resilience, and strength of the many distinct Indigenous Peoples and Nations of the territories we call Canada.

To the Indigenous-identifying staff and board members, clients, partners, and supporters in our community: You matter.

We celebrate your existence. We hold space for your grief and sorrow. And we stand with you in your calls for truth, reconciliation, justice, and accountability.

The urgency of these calls has intensified in the weeks since the horrific confirmation that the bodies of 215 children — each of whom were forcibly removed from their homes — were found buried in an unmarked mass grave at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. Similar searches at other former school sites (at least 139 such schools operated in Canada) are likely to surface more grim findings.

The residential school system represents just one facet of a strategic, racist policy by the Canadian state to extinguish Indigenous Peoples and their cultures, knowledge, and ways of being.

This policy pre-dates confederation yet persists today, hidden in plain sight.

From healthcare ([Joyce Echaquan](#)), to law enforcement (the thousands of [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people](#)), to the justice system ([Colten Bushie](#)), systemic racism in Canada continues to kill Indigenous Peoples.

Canada cannot put this "dark chapter" behind us when its legacy is still being written today.

Indigenous Peoples have long been frontline defenders of the earth in the face of rampant industrialization. Yet they bear disproportionate environmental burdens — from the desecration of their traditional hunting grounds to unsafe drinking water on reserves to aggravated impacts from the climate crisis in the North.

In spite of these structural barriers, Indigenous Peoples continue to organize, to rise, and to thrive in a profound act of resistance and resilience. This is what we celebrate on June 21.

Ecojustice gratefully acknowledges that Indigenous leadership directly informs our mission to defend nature, combat the climate emergency, and fight for a healthy environment for all.

From stopping pipelines and fighting coal mining, to protecting caribou and salmon, we affirm that **the fight for Indigenous rights and self-determination**

(Continued page 7)

(From page 6) **A special message from Ecojustice and Ecojustice's pursuit of justice and accountability are interconnected.**

Ecojustice has integrated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action into our forthcoming strategic plan, and we will endeavor to ensure our work is consistent with and advances reconciliation wherever possible. We are committed to doing the work to decolonize ourselves and encourage members of the broader Ecojustice community to join us.

Ecojustice is Canada's largest environmental law charity. Help us build the case for a better earth.

These Deaths Demand Justice

By: Migrant Rights Network: www.MigrantRights.ca

Many harrowing instances of mass deaths have been in the news recently.

In Palestine, **attacks by the Israeli military resulted in hundreds killed, including 67 children.** Last week, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc released preliminary findings of **unmarked and unidentified remains of 215 children at a residential school near Kamloops, British Columbia.** On Sunday, an anti-Muslim hatred attacker **killed a grandmother, two parents, their daughter, and leaving their 9 year old son in hospital and orphaned.**

These **deaths are connected** by on-going laws and policies that dispossess and displace people, and the racist ideas used to justify them.

130 residential schools existed in Canada, created by the Canadian government and Catholic Church. **At least 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were taken from their families** and placed here. The schools were sites of abuse and neglect. Indigenous **children were punished** for speaking their languages and practicing their culture. **Thousands never made it home.**

Canada's residential school system is part of **an ongoing campaign to tear apart Indigenous communities** that have lived here since before Canada's existence **to enable the theft of land and install what is today "Canada".**

These policies are not ancient history: **the last residential closed in 1996.** Today, while Indigenous children are **7% of the youth population, they represent 52% of children in foster care.** On-going housing and drinking water crises continue on Indigenous reserves across the country; disproportionately high rates of poverty, homelessness and incarceration among Indigenous people are the **horrific proof that these colonial policies continue to do their devastating work.**

The **Canadian government violates treaty rights and Indigenous laws** to build oil and gas pipelines and continues to fight residential school survivors in court who are demanding the compensation that is owed to them.

(Continued next column)

(From last column) **Deaths Demand Justice**
These attacks are being resisted, a powerful Indigenous movement is demanding justice. [Learn more by watching this animated video on the movement.](#)

This is the same Canada that has **exported \$57 million worth of weapons to Israel,** including \$16 million in bomb components, since 2015 and has **voted against 166 UN resolutions criticizing Israel's treatment of Palestinians since 2000.** Palestinians make up the largest group of refugees in the world - **5.6 million of the 26 million refugees supported by the United Nations,** many of whom live in Gaza, which was the site of Israel's latest attacks.

While Canada was created from theft of land, it now imposes immigration rules to deny rights to us. Primarily racialized and working class migrants are excluded from protections and benefits so that our work can be devalued for the profit of the super rich.

This week also marks **one year since the deaths of Bonifacio Eugenio Romero and Rogelio Muñoz Santos.** Virtually nothing has been done to ensure no more migrant farm workers die preventable deaths. **Already in 2021, at least 9 farm workers have died, 6 of them in federally regulated quarantine.**

The call for **full and permanent immigration status** is a call for an end to a system of deadly racialized exclusion from rights, protections and dignity. As migrants, we must **demand an end to colonial violence within Canada and throw our support behind struggles for Indigenous rights and liberation.**

We are not simply asking for rights under Canadian laws based on colonialism - **we must challenge the violent and unfair nature of this whole system.** We must join together and demand that Canadian laws and policies do not force more people out of their homes anywhere.

That is why **on June 20th - World Refugee Day and Father's Day - we will take action for full and permanent immigration status for all.** Actions are already being organized in Toronto (1pm EST, Immigration Headquarters, 74 Victoria Street) and Vancouver (10am PST, CBC Plaza).

Together, we will win!



Heartache and outrage: John Horgan's remarks on the Kamloops residential school mass grave

On Friday, May 28 the world learned what Indigenous people have been telling them for decades: that residential schools, like the Kamloops Indian Residential School, were unrecorded burial sites for the bodies of hundreds of First Nations children.

The Kamloops residential school is one of at least 22 residential schools that operated in British Columbia from the early 1860's until 1984. Indigenous survivors forced to attend these schools reported emotional, sexual and physical abuse — terrible impacts whose pain hurts today. The discovery of the bodies of 215 children on the residential school grounds — some estimated to be as young as 3 years old — has ripped open wounds that never truly closed.

As all of us grapple with this horror and wait for action from the federal government, Premier John Horgan rose in the BC Legislature to speak and call for a moment of silence. A transcription of his remarks are below.

"I rise today with a heavy, heavy heart.

Like all British Columbians, I was horrified to hear reports of an unmarked mass grave on the grounds of the residential school in Kamloops. Although there are no words that can describe how that feels for survivors, words, it seems, must be spoken.

Today this house has an opportunity to look back over the history, the tragic history that is not just a moment in time, but a live history of our situation here in Canada and here in British Columbia. Because for survivors of the residential school atrocities, they live it every day. Their children are living it. Their grandchildren are living it.

This is not something that happened in the past. It is something that is going on right now. And the events in Kamloops over the weekend bring that home graphically to all British Colombians, all Canadians, and, indeed, the international community.

Survivors most assuredly feel grief. They feel heartache and they feel outrage.

Children taken from their homes and sent to who knows where without any notice were told they could not speak their language; they could not practice their culture. Oftentimes beaten, oftentimes sexually abused. It feels impossible to imagine in 2021, yet, that is the history of the residential schools in our country.

The Residential School Settlement Agreements in 2007 led to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which in 2015 made 94 calls to action.

Many of them are in the letters, the mandate letters of Ministers on this side of the house as they were in the mandate letters of the previous government. They're there because these calls to action are not just a nice thing to do. This is the least, the least we can do to try and do what we can to make amends for a period in time that lives with us to this very day.

I still remember the first time I heard a residential school survivor speak in public.

(Continued next column)

(From last column) Heartache and outrage:

I was with my colleague from the 900 North Cowichan and we were in the Koksilah School, just south of Duncan here on Vancouver Island. An elder got up in the gymnasium. There were kids running around. There was lots of noise. That was a moment of celebration. But when the elder got up, you could feel the energy in the room change because every person in their young ones, other elders, everybody knew that we were going to hear a story, a story that needs to be passed down, not just for this generation, but future generations about what happened in Canada with

When I heard the story, I made a commitment at that time to do everything that I could as a student of history — I have two degrees in history and I did not know about the atrocities of residential schools from our public education system from two universities — I did not know. I learned it in a gymnasium from a survivor talking to his kids and his grandkids about what he had suffered.

I had the honor to be invited to Lower Post when I became Premier by the Takla, the Tahltan, and Taku River Tlingit to work with them, to get the federal government, to knock down the last vestiges of their residential school in Lower Post.

And I heard stories there, two elders — particularly one who could not join us in the basement because he could not walk down the stairs to relive one more time what had happened to him in that building.

At the time, the federal government thought it was a perfectly serviceable building, no need to replace it. Fortunately, fortunately, the federal government has changed their mind and on this National Indigenous People's Day, my colleague, the Minister of Indigenous Relations, and I will be going back to Lower Post at the invitation of the Takla, the Tahltan and the Taku River Tlingit to knock down that building.

And although I was very much looking forward to that moment, it is materially changed as a result of the events in Kamloops this past weekend, because it is not just a moment in history, as I often revert to, to protect the emotions that we all have. When we think about our children being torn from us by the state sent center, who knows where to be whole told, to be good white people.

Yeah. Unimaginable to us today, yet of very active part of who we are. It's on the 21st of June, when I go to Lower Post to do my part, to knock down the history of residential schools, I'll be remembering that the Kamloops and the

(Continued page 9)

(From page 8) **Heartache and outrage:**

Secwépemc have vowed to the people of British Columbia and Canada that they will determine who is there and how they passed away and will pass on those regrets back to the communities that were affected.

A courageous move by those two nations.

I thank them for the burden that they've taken on, but I want all of us to live with that burden because that's also the least that we can do.

Our children were not taken away from us. Our children were not told to not be who they were that happened to someone else.

But our responsibility as legislators is to make sure that the calls to action hard-fought are the least that we can do. And on National Indigenous People's Day, if you have the good fortune of being in a community with indigenous people, if you have the good fortune of having a relationship with elders in those communities, sit down, hear a story and be reminded, be reminded of the living history of Canada.

We're a proud people. We've done extraordinary things together, but we've also done atrocious things together. And collectively we have a responsibility to face that head on. And after the discovery of a mass grave in Kamloops, it's more real now than ever before."

{Editor's Note: Now let's all work to hold our Provincial and Federal Government accountable and demand they follow through with their words so well spoken over the last few weeks.}

(From last column) **6 years later...**

This has not happened. In 2009, \$1.5 million was requested from the federal government to identify burial site locations. [2] It was denied.

Federal government actions continue to harm Indigenous peoples disproportionately. **Every day we see the impacts of ongoing genocide.** In the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system. In the continued disappearance and murder of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA people. In police violence and mass incarceration. In the Federal government fighting residential school Survivors in court. [3] In decades-long boil water advisories. And in the many ongoing attempts to deny Indigenous peoples' sovereignty over their lands in order to extract resources and wealth. **It is beyond unacceptable.**

The discovery of 215 children by Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation must be a tipping point for accountability and justice for Indigenous peoples.

Honouring the lives of these 215 children must drive us to act and to demand change. **Today, I ask you to listen to the Indigenous voices speaking to these issues, amplify their stories and demand the implementation of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action.**

The 215 children buried in Kamloops were loved. They are still loved. Do not look away. Do not sit idle.

With love and sorrow,
Christy Ferguson,
Executive Director, Greenpeace Canada

From Kamloops to London, Canada Is a Deeply Racist Country

From: Passage Newsletter

(<https://readpassage.com/newsletters/>)

The ties that bind this country are ones of racism. Violence and subjugation against non-white people has been at the core of this colonial project since Europeans first set foot upon these shores.

It's the link between hundreds of unmarked graves in British Columbia, and the mass murder of a family in London, Ont. by an anti-Muslim attacker.

The last weeks have been a speed run through this country's ongoing history of brutality. This is Canada; this is what the country is.

A parade of politicians made **appearances** at a vigil Tuesday night in London to denounce hatred and embrace the moment. It wasn't quite sickening, but there was something awful and false about it.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau kicked off yet another of his empathy tours, showing up to the aftermath of a tragedy to put his hand on his heart and express how much he feels the pain of the victims. How much it hurts him to see such hatred and violence in the country he leads. (Continued page 10)

6 years later...

By: Greenpeace

"Unthinkable, undocumented, and yet known." This is what Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond wrote in the Globe and Mail this week, following the discovery of an unmarked mass grave containing the remains of 215 Indigenous children, in Kamloops BC.

This horrific finding has re-traumatized Survivors and their families. For some, it has triggered shock and rage. But for many Indigenous people and families, **it was not a surprise.** And it shouldn't be a surprise for non-Indigenous people either.

Between 2007 and 2015, Survivors of the residential school system shared testimonies before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Stories about children being stolen from their families, about forced assimilation and abuse, about missing children, and about mass graves. **These atrocities were lived and experienced. These stories were told.** This painful exercise was followed by the release of 94 Calls to Action, **including six recommendations directly related to missing children and burial information.**

Yet six years later, **only a handful have been implemented** — and none of the six on missing children and burial information. Action 71 requests death records of children. They have not been received. Action 75 requests the identification and maintenance of residential school cemeteries. (Continued next column)

(From page 9) **From Kamloops to London**

In his speech, Trudeau repeated one of Canada's great modern myths: that it is a caring and nice country.

Trudeau **said**, "As Canadians we make a pact with one another that we will look out for each other, take care of each other, respect each other."

But earlier that day, Trudeau revealed the lie within that myth, when he was **asked** whether he thought Quebec's Bill 21, which bans public servants from wearing religious symbols such as the hijab, fostered hatred and division.

The best he could offer were some flat platitudes.

"I have long expressed my disagreement with Bill 21," Trudeau **told** reporters, "But I have also indicated that it is for Quebecers to challenge and defend their rights in court, which they have been doing."

So the prime minister says Canadians have a pact where they look out for each other, unless they are Muslims in Quebec, in which case they're on their own to fight for themselves in court.

A couple weeks earlier, 215 unmarked graves were found at the site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School in B.C. The findings were **announced** by the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Nation, which brought widespread outrage, expressions of empathy and promises to do better.

There too, the prime minister **expressed** his sorrow, this time from the House of Commons: "Today, some of the children found in Kamloops, and who have yet to be found in other places across the country, would have been grandparents or great-grandparents. They would have been elders, knowledge keepers and community leaders. They are not. And this is the fault of Canada."

Here again, we have an acknowledgement of some kind of state or societal problem, which might imply that Trudeau could be turning around to actually do something.

Well, no. His government is fighting against compensating residential school survivors in a class-action lawsuit seeking reparations for the cultural damage caused by residential schools, including the Kamloops one.

While the government **admits** in its court filings that the loss of language and other cultural practices were an "unavoidable implication" of teaching Indigenous children English, and that the schools were meant to assimilate them into Christian Canadian society, it maintains it wasn't trying to "destroy the ability ... to speak their Indigenous language or to lose the customs or traditions of their culture."

The government's lawyers added: "While the federal government may have contributed to those losses [of Indigenous culture] in various ways, such losses were not as a result of any unlawful acts or omissions of Canada or its employees or agents with respect to the operation of residential schools."

That's a hard argument to square after the discovery at Kamloops, with no records of who the dead are or how they met their end. It's even harder to square with Trudeau's rhetoric that those deaths are "the fault of Canada." (Continued next column)

(From last column) **From Kamloops to London**

Racism **remains** present today in foster systems across the country, where 52 per cent of the children are Indigenous, despite making up just 7 per cent of the youth population as of the 2016 census. Where a 16-year-old Indigenous youth can be kept for two whole days in windowless basement isolation under the **pretext** of COVID-19 precautions, with nothing but a bed and a chair. Not even allowed books, and with their cell phone confiscated.

You can pick up other threads of this official discrimination throughout the country's history. The treatment of East Asians, in particular Chinese and Japanese people, is one of outright bigotry.

Forbidding Chinese and Japanese immigrants from voting in provincial B.C. elections in the late 19th Century, instituting a federal Chinese Head Tax on newcomers, and forbidding Chinese and Japanese people from working in the mining industry is just scratching the surface of official anti-Asian racism. And in the present, hate crimes against Asians are up at least 800 per cent from the previous year **according** to some estimates, a grim watermark for the unofficial Canadian racism.

Mumilaaq Qaqqaq, the NDP MP for Nunavut, said last Friday that "colonization is not over. It has a new name. Children are still being separated from their communities. Foster care is the new residential school system."

To understand how a man driving a truck could deliberately wipe out the majority of a Muslim family, or how the graves of hundreds of children could be unmarked for a century, you need only grasp that the fabric of this country is woven with countless threads like this.

When a Quebec judge threw out a narrow part of Bill 21 last month, he cited expert testimony that described how the bill itself laid the groundwork for bigotry. Bill 21, the psychology professor **testified**, is "likely to be perceived as conveying a norm about people who wear religious symbols ... especially women who wear a hijab" and so, "It would be expected ... therefore to result in increased prejudice toward these social groups and more negative outcomes for individuals belonging to these groups."

The "pact" Trudeau referred to at the London vigil doesn't exist. The true pact in this country is that discrimination is built into the system. The government may even acknowledge that discrimination, but they will do nothing to fix it.

Water does not stay on a mountaintop, but flows into the valley. In the same manner, real virtue does not remain with those people who want to be higher than the others; but virtue stays only with people who are humble. *After the Talmud*