



Treaty tumult looms

Talk turns to civil disobedience over stalled negotiations

BY ROBERT BARRON, DAILY NEWS APRIL 15, 2009

Blockades of ferries and other acts of civil disobedience may be on the table as dozens of the province's aboriginal bands meet in Vancouver on April 24 to discuss the lack of progress in their treaty negotiations.

Robert Morales, chief negotiator for the First Nation Unity Protocol Group, which represents more than 60 B.C. bands including the Snuneymuxw First Nation, said officials from senior levels of government had indicated they would return to the table with some new strategies to break the impasse this fall, but no word has yet been received from Ottawa or Victoria.

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation didn't return calls by press time.

Morales said the signing of the Maa-nulth treaty last week, involving six First Nations on Vancouver Island's west coast, is not seen by the members of the FNUPG, now referred to as the Common Table, as an acceptable template for their treaty negotiations.

"Individual communities have to make these decisions and, while the members of the Maa-nulth are prepared to accept the policies and mandates laid down by government in their treaty, they are not acceptable to us," Morales said.

"There's a lot of questions and issues we want dealt with before we sign any treaty, and we'll be looking at all options to try and move the process forward at our meeting in Vancouver later this month."

Just a handful of First Nations in B.C. have successfully concluded treaty negotiations with the province and Ottawa.

Dozens more First Nations, including the members of the Common Table, have gone through years of intermittent negotiations with no end in sight.

Common Table members held talks with representatives from senior government last year in Vancouver with the hope that they might help break the deadlock in negotiations, which revolve around the constitutional status of treaty lands, governance, the co-management of traditional territories and other issues.

Morales said the agreement by the First Nations who have signed treaties to convert all their land to fee-simple is not acceptable to most members of his group for a number of reasons, including the fact that provincial laws and tax policies would apply to these properties for the first time.

"We want senior levels of government to come to the table and negotiate with us, not to offer us

conditions that they maintain are the bottom line and we must accept them, as they have in the past, which just leaves everyone in a stalemate," he said.

"Any suggestions on what we could decide to do to try and move the treaty process forward would be just speculation at this time, but we did block a ferry in Nanaimo a few years ago to get our point across."

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