

Speech from Mary-Lou LaPratte

Oct 15, 2006

March for Freedom Speech

My name is Mary-Lou LaPratte and I live at Ipperwash Beach.

I am not here today to discredit the land claims process. I am not here to discredit Colour of Right. Colour of Right is also entrenched in the Rule of Law. That is the lawful right to demonstrate and claim ownership of land natives truly believe belongs to them.

When the native land disputes erupted at Ipperwash in 1992, 1993 and 1995, the OPP took the position the lands would be treated as reserves. This is without benefit of the land claims process, be it negotiation as through the courts. The OPP refused to enter the disputed land simply because the natives did not want them there. We have no policing at two occupied areas of Ipperwash, or authority of any kind over those on the land.

As soon as the occupations and land claim on the West Beach started we noticed a disturbing OPP policy evolving. Natives coming off the occupied lands into surrounding areas to harass, threaten, intimidate, steal from, or assault innocent homeowners and tourists, were exempt from criminal charges upon reaching the safe haven of the disputed land. In the West Beach land claim, which was going through a court process, a native anywhere on the properties, for any reason, would not be charged. Our lives became a daily nightmare of threats, intimidation, and harassment tactics which, over the years, became home invasions and physical assaults. We became a community with no policing, no province and no country. No one in the OPP, the Provincial Government or the Federal Government would give us any relief or help with the aggression. At one point after the death of native protestor Dudley George, the police totally deserted our community because they and their families became targets. Our community was in chaos. We were so terrified we asked the OPP what they would do if one of us was taken against our will onto the occupied land. The reply, "We will negotiate the return of your body." The families of two victims at Ipperwash deserve closure to bury the remains of their loved ones.

Letters to politicians, newspaper articles, and radio interviews produced the standard response. We sympathize with your frustrating predicament, but you must be patient and understanding. Repeatedly we complained no one is policing the base and the park, and the reply would be the OPP are responsible to police the base and the park.

The occupied park is still owned by the Province of Ontario. The occupied Base is still owned by the Department of National Defense. Neither government would address our concerns knowing the OPP were refusing to enter these sites. The most detrimental aspect of our lives at Ipperwash has been the selective policing based on race.

Nowhere in our OPP contract does it state we will uphold all laws on your behalf except those [crimes] perpetrated by aboriginals. Nowhere in the criminal code does it state the law will only be upheld if the criminal is not an aboriginal. Nowhere has the Provincial or Federal Government publicly stated that aboriginals are exempt from the criminal code. Therefore, we must come to the conclusion that the OPP organization has on its own decided who, when, where and how the law will be upheld according to race.

How did the OPP get this power? How did the government get the authority to tell me, my children, and my grand children that under certain circumstances we will not be protected by the law? That we

must willingly succumb to abuses of every kind and that this abuse must be endured until the land disputes in my community are resolved. That it doesn't matter if we suffer post-traumatic stress syndrome, nervous break downs, heart attacks, divorces or financial ruin. Ipperwash is a story not finished fifteen years after the land claims started.

There is no agreement in principle ratified for the return of the base to the natives.

There is no resolution or discussion on the status of the Provincial Park.

There is still a cloud to Title for those residents living on the beachfront in West Ipperwash.

There is still selective policing based on race.

There has never been compensation of any kind given to anyone fro financial losses in real estate or business, not for emotional or mental trauma, physical illness or family breakdown. None of us have been referred for victim counseling or have been included in the thousands of dollars spent for OPP and Native healing.

In the big scope of this issue we plainly do not matter. It has been stated by a former MPP that we simply aren't a large enough community to affect the vote. That is why our issues and yours in Caledonia can be put on the back burner and swept under the rug. We are not considered a threat to the political agenda. The March For Freedom meant to me a chance for ordinary citizens to look at the issue of law in native land disputes and say my God, this is not right, fair or just. We cannot have pockets of Ontario exempt from the law. We cannot have innocent residents being abused and victimized indefinitely through not fault of their own in a situation they are not allowed any input, by government or police or natives, into or to be part of the resolution.

We have anti-bullying and anti-abuse legislation. We have laws protecting the person and possessions of our citizens. Why have native land claims made all this redundant for victims of abuse in our circumstances? Our towns, cities, villages and hamlets deserve much better representation from our OPP and our elected leaders.

How dare these authorities say that I am not worthy of all the privileges, benefits and responsibilities of this Province and Country.

To deny any of us safety of property, person and possessions is a disgrace to all that democracy truly stands for.

We have met the enemy. The enemy is us because government is for the people, by the people, and we have been apathetic while our elected leaders and paid security (OPP) lead us down a path of unjustified pain.

This March represents the first civil stand for our rights since the 1900's, for citizen's rights to be recognized. I hope today is the beginning of the return of Justice for All.

I thank Gary, Mr. Barrett, Anne Marie, NY Crimewatch and you for allowing me to stand with you.