

## *A 78-Year-Old Eco-Heroine*

### **The Sentencing of Betty Krawczyk**

By INGMAR LEE

I arrived at 800 Smithe St, Vancouver, -the Supreme Court of BC at the designated hour of 8am on Monday, March 6th/07. I was there to support the redoubtable Betty Krawczyk, British Columbia's most famous and beloved 78-year-old, non-violent, civil-disobedient ancient forest protection activist as she was sentenced to jail, once again, for standing firm against the wanton destruction of rare, ancient forest ecosystems. This was to be the fifth time that Betty was to be sent to jail for blocking logging and rare ecosystem destruction.

I didn't see any other treehuggers around at first, but in preparation for the events ahead, I took a few pictures of the entrance to the hallowed halls of British Columbia justice. Immediately I pulled out my camera, and a Sheriff came charging out of the building and told me that if I was intending on coming in, I would have to check it in at the front desk. Having crashed at a friends place the previous night, I had a small suitcase with me and a satchel containing some blankets, random bicycle tools, books etc. which would also have to be checked in.

By 8:30 am, a crowd had begun to shape up which became identifiable as supporters of Betty. Soon there were about 50 of us. At that point someone came out and said that Betty would be arriving at the other end of the courthouse, so we should walk to the other end of the block, which we did. When we arrived at the other end, we encountered a much larger crowd which had assembled there. There were a lot of cameras and a large media presence and a good deal of excitement as the crowd anticipated the arrival of Betty. She then pulled up in a taxi and strode up the stairs to give her last interview to the media. As she was speaking, someone came by who warned me that everyone who wished to be in the courtroom was being searched, so we'd better get in the queue. Things were happening pretty fast.

I got into the queue just ahead of Adriane Carr, Paul George and Joy Foy, (-the only three of BC's prominent environmentalists who bothered to attend) and as we stood in line to get searched, I saw Betty walk by, alone and totally focussed, heading into the courtroom through the same entrance as us. She passed ahead of the crowd, and then disappeared down the steps into the "Bunker" courtroom, which was specially built in the basement of the building for the Air India terrorist trials. Security was taking its time, but somehow, there was an expectation that in spite of the strict security requirement, that the trial would at least wait for Betty's supporters to get searched and then to fill the courtroom. The three security guards were labouriously searching through peoples pockets, confiscating certain items which could not be allowed in the court, ie: machine-guns, knives, cameras, food, cream pies or tape-recorders.

Luckily, the search wasn't quite as comprehensive as expected and after turning over my suitcase to the protection of the court, I was allowed to descend into the Bunker. As soon as I got in, I saw that about 40 people had preceded me, and the gallery was about 30%

full. I saw a woman speaking from the front of the room and I could see Betty sitting there all alone, below. As I took my front-row seat, I realized that this was "Madame Justice" Brown herself already at work, reading out her sentence. They had already begun, but most of the courtroom was still empty, while the queue crawled slowly through the extremely zealous security. Actually, I must have been one of the last who got in, -Adriane, Paul and Joe didn't make it.

Brown's statement was a damnable, rotten piece of work, shockingly rude and nasty, and blatantly vindictive towards Betty. I have been endeavouring to get a transcript, as this sentence-statement by the Judge so amply clarifies the depths to which the quality and integrity of our legal system has plummeted. Brown is clearly furious with, and despises Betty, who has been emphasizing the most sordid aspect of this sorry saga. whereby Judge Brown cruelly sentenced Betty's partner-in-crime, the frail 71-year-old Pacheena Elder, Harriet Nahanie to 14 days in the Surrey Pre-Trial Remand Centre, which is a notorious "Hell-hole" dungeon. Betty warned Judge Brown, in writing, that Harriet was in a very frail state of health, and suffered from asthma, and could not stand the harsh incarceration conditions at the Remand Centre. Harriet was in there for 9 days, after which she was rushed to hospital where she died a few days later. Brown's statement, and whatever she said at Harriet's sentencing epitomizes just how shameless, grovelling, evil and corrupt our legal system really is. Anyone who knows Betty Krawczyk or Harriet Nahanie, anyone who has met these women, for anyone who has ever given them the time of day knows that these brave women are not criminals. They are gentle, ferocious pacifist, feminist mentors, icons of determination, courage, honesty and human decency, -tireless and relentless activists for the protection of our planet. In short, they are heroes, whose fame and reputation is increasing by the day. I was utterly disgusted in that courtroom and I joined into the chorus of jeers that rang out as soon as the cowardly Judge read out her sentence to Betty. "I sentence you to 10 months" she said, and then repeated it. It was a petulant slap in the face from a pompous, remorseless bureaucrat who had just three weeks ago issued the death sentence to Harriet Nahanie for "disrespecting the court."

It's not as though there was no precedent by which the corporate-lackey Brown-noser Brown and the BC legal system could have used discretion in dealing with Betty, Harriet, or any of the Eagleridge Heights protesters. Justice William Grist in May, 2006 could have refused to grant the American developer Kiewit their injunction and insist that the authorities arrest Betty using the existing legal framework. The police should have arrested Betty, Harriet and the protesters immediately and charged them as was their duty, instead of waiting around for the court injunction. Judges don't have to issue injunctions. Several years ago the late Madame Justice Quigano refused to issue the Gordon Campbell government a court injunction to remove protesters from their proposed 150-slot Winnebozo parking lot which they wanted to plow out of the forest at Cathedral Grove. The Judge remarked that should the government wish to remove the protesters, it had all the means available to do so using existing laws. This is exactly what Betty is after, -she wants to be treated just like any other criminal ~ by getting arrested and then making her case before the court. She simply wants a fair trial so that she can expose the rot and corruption which is destroying our forests. There is no possible court challenge for those who defy a court injunction, -which is pretty ideal for situation all Neocon zealot governments love. After the Campbell government was not able to get its court injunction at Cathedral Grove, it preferred to suffer a belligerent and humiliating Treesitting blockade along a busy highway for two years rather than use existing laws to arrest the protesters. Ultimately they capitulated and gave up on their parking lot scheme, rather than face forest-loving citizens in court. The government was stymied because its logging policies are indefensible and cannot stand up to any kind of court challenge.

Once Betty had been sentenced and had left the courtroom, we climbed the stairs out of the Bunker, gathered up our belongings from the security and emerged to find the other 100 supporters who had been barred entry to the courtroom angrily describing their

experience to the cameras. People were very angry and upset and there were a lot of tears. There were sustained, powerful 10-minute continuous Shame! Shame, Shame!!! chanting sessions which filled the whole courthouse right up to its soaring glass ceilings. And a large contingent of First Nations women struck up their drums and sang a very beautiful dirge which went on and on, and got everyone singing. After about an hour, it seemed like things were wrapping up, but when Jeremy got up on a wall and suggested that we should stage an impromptu march around the court building, everyone joined in.

But when we got around to the opposite side, everyone turned spontaneously and instead of marching around the building, filed straight into the doors at 800 Smithe. We all marched right into the building and when the Sheriffs set up a cordon at the secondary doors into the inner sanctum, 18 of us sat down and blocked the doors. About 60 people milled around the rotunda, while others were prevented from entering and remained outside. They were only allowing lawyers through the cordon, but as it turned out later, we shut down the Supreme Court of BC for 3 hours. All the media was crowding the windows as cameras are not permitted in the building.

Eventually, a Sheriff came rushing down and announced that he was serving us with, ~yep, you guessed it, -another court injunction, and that we had 60 seconds to get out of the way. At this time a dozen RCMP officers arrived to make the arrests, so having disrupted the court for three hours most of us got up and moved, but it turns out that 2 people did get arrested. We didn't have to move far though, because it was interpreted that the injunction specified that while the protesters could not block access to the court or interfere with the process of justice, that didn't preclude them from milling around and loitering in the lobby. Treehuggers loitering around the BC Supreme Court can be pretty annoying, apparently. Gradually, over a period of another 45 minutes, the Police moved up their cordon and pushed us out of the building. Then the demonstration continued for another hour outside the door, and during this time the Police refused entry to everyone, including the lawyers. We chanted and the First Nations drummers sang and danced.

This spontaneous demonstration kept getting new life breathed into it and every time I got ready to leave, something else happened. For the final event, I was watching as a taxi pulled up and saw the media rush over. Suddenly British Columbia's Attorney General Wally Oppal himself, -the Supreme Representative of the BC Legal System and Betty's nemesis, emerged from the car and the media immediately swarmed him, eager to hear about his recently divulged prostate issue. Oppal obviously does not have a clue about the internationally-recognized case of Betty Krawczyk, and the shame and ill-repute her dreadful treatment has brought down on the BC legal system. Immediately the Oppal was recognized, sustained shouts of Shame! Shame drowned him out and finally drove him back into his taxi and he was taken away.

Here are a few words from Betty's blog regarding Oppal:

" ... Recently Mr. Wally Opal on CKNW said that anybody in BC facing prison time could have a jury trial. But when I called into the program and advised Mr. Opal that I was facing prison time on a Criminal Contempt of Court charge and wasn't allowed a jury trial he said well, in my case the judge was quite right not to allow me a jury trial; as I was arrested under civil contempt and that civil contempt did not warrant a jury trial. And yet here I am, once again convicted of Contempt of Court, not Civil, but Criminal, minus a jury trial, or the protections of the Criminal Code. My Lady, the very expediency of this method of depriving citizens of their lawful rights when they seek to protect the environment from corporate predators is quite remarkable. I protest this, My Lady, and will protest it with my dying breath ... "

I encourage people to take the opportunity to visit Betty. If you have got any faith at all that justice is possible in British Columbia, or that environmental issues can be forwarded through due process through our institutionally corrupt government and legal

mechanisms, then you need to see the reality of our deeply rotten system. You'll get that direct experience and see for yourself by visiting dear Betty in jail.

[For more on Betty click here.](#)

**Ingmar Lee** once spent three weeks in the Walbran Valley on Vancouver Island, supporting Betty and the 'Women in the Woods' in their blockade of the American logging giant Weyerhaeuser which was destroying the valley's magnificent ancient forests. For that action, Betty spent 10 months in prison. Ingmar can be reached at [www.ingmarlee.com](http://www.ingmarlee.com)