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USA :

' Back to the Roots' for Climate Justice

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This interview was conducted at the « Stop the Frack Attack National Summit, » which took place in Dallas, Texas on March 2-4, 2013 by the webzine team of Solidarity who appreciate Kandi Mossett's willingness to sit down and talk to us for a few minutes.

Kandi Mossett : My name is Kandi Mossett and I'm from North Dakota. I'm member of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nations in North Dakota and I grew up in a reservation there. I work with the Indigenous Environmental Network and I've been with them since 2007.

Solidarity Webzine : What motivates you to be an activist against fracking ?

KM : In North Dakota, we have heavy, heavy hydraulic fracturing occurring. We're actually the second largest oil producing state in the country because of hydraulic fracturing. If you look at the landmass and compare Texas and North Dakota, we're actually "and I'm not saying it's any worse" it's actually more [fracking] happening [proportionally], because we're a lot smaller. Right now, we're second in fracking, right behind Texas and in front of Alaska.

Fracking came to the reservation a long time before we even knew what was actually happening, but around 2006 was when we started to see the infrastructure, and the first thing that really motivated me was that I had a friend who was killed by one of the [semi trucks transporting the gas]. We don't have the pipeline infrastructure for the natural gas, so they're just flaring all the natural gas and transporting with trucks. That was one of the first things that happened, probably in 2008, and I got really angry as I started finding a lot more about it. It's grown exponentially since then, so we're just trying to get more community members organized against it, ever since that happened.

It's pretty environmentally destructive, especially on the reservation. You can drive around and see ditches on fire, you can see trucks driving around with their valving open, just dumping the production water right on roads, and they get away with it because there's such slack regulation. You have fracking in general "then you go to a reservation, where it's even worse.

So, it has motivated me to find out what else is going on out there and what people are doing about it.

SW : Where do you see connections between the anti-fracking movement and other movements for social justice ?

KM : Well, being with the Indigenous Environmental Network, we don't have the luxury of working on just one issue. I would like to focus all of my attention on hydraulic fracturing, but I also have to work on coal mining, uranium mining, [and other issues]. There's definitely connections because of the way people are impacted, both socially and environmentally. Whenever these types of businesses, industries, and corporations come into the community, they're pretty much destructive and predominantly it's folks that are low-income [who are affected]. They're not doing fracking in Hollywood, for example, where folks have power and resources.

There's a really big necessity for people to understand that everything is connected. It's not just the anti-fracking movement, it's the food movement, it's all the farm workers that are affected, it's people really understanding connections in all the work that we do [that is needed].

It something that's ingrained in me, so I like to tell people to think in terms of a larger "ecosystem" of how one thing interacts with other things. And if you want to use science, you know, what is it, "every action has an equal and opposite reaction"â€"who was the scientist ? [Laughs] But OK, if you want to use science, there you go !

SW : What do you think it will take to stop fracking ?

KM : I can tell you a fear that I have...I have a fear that people will stop fracking and something else will take its place, because I think that's how fracking was born and grew in the first place. Everybody was against coal, saying "carbon dioxide is in the air, it's coming from coal," so [their response was], "natural gas, let's switch to that," without realizing that it's not just natural gas, it's also oil that they're getting from hydraulic fracturing, and it's actually worse because of the methane emissions, when it comes to greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. So, we're "dealing" with carbon dioxide, but we're having methane which is 22 to 23 times worse. I think it has to be an end overall to the fossil fuel "movement," whatever you want to call it...

Since the industrial revolution, we've done all these horrible things in the past couple hundred years to the planet, and it's like "wake up, and think about it," Native people and indigenous folks were living here the past 1000 years and didn't do the things that have been done in the past couple 100 because of fossil fuels, extraction, and waste. What we need isn't just a ban here or there, or a moratorium here or there, it's gonna have to be an outright end to fossil fuels, with a just transition for workers that are in those positions. Because I have uncles and cousins who are working in the fields, I'm not against the workers by any means. The people need to see that we're out for completely changing our system and societyâ€"system change, not climate change.

SW : You're talking about broader, systemic change. What type of world would you like to see and what do you think it will take to get us there ?

KM : I think it's going to have to take a really close look at capitalism, colonization, going back to our roots and saying, "this is what it was built upon." Unless we go back to the basic building blocks of how we built it up, it's never going to get to the root cause. It's going to take a much larger force of people being informed about what's going on in our country, what's happening locally, nationally, and internationally. It's going to take political will, and what I keep hearing from people is that the way to move political will is to get the people [into motion]. I really believe in the grassroots and being able to build things from the bottom up.

But, right now, what I see a lot of is big NGOs and "big green" organizations that have this mentality thatâ€"and I don't think they are intentionally saying things "we can help"â€"but I think what happens is, they forget that the grassroots have a lot more power than [the NGOs] think they have. That's one thing we've been struggling with, that our folks really do have an answer. Give us more leeway, give us more resources to be able to help and find our place and space.

Environmental justice is all about how we speak for ourselves and, a lot of times, we're not given that opportunity to do that. I think if that changes, if it really changes to looking at your average person living on front lines, we can at least move in that direction [toward environmental justice].

It's not gonna be one thing, it's not gonna be overnight, it's not gonna be one thing that comes in and saves us. People talk about solar power, they'll talk about wind power. I'm down with that, but not with a corporate scale, not with large scale. It's going to have to be small scale, decentralized systems, and that takes power away from these big corporations. And that's just going to be how it has to be. We're going to have to go back to small scale things. Otherwise, we're putting ourselves, as human beings, in jeopardy.

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Our planet is hurting, but she'll shake us off like a batch of fleas on a dog and get on with it, spinning around and doing what she needs to do to heal herself. That's our one true mother and that's who we have a responsibility to protect. If we don't, we're doing ourselves in. As humanity, we need to come to a common understanding that we have a responsibility to save ourselves and those that can't speak for themselves, the plants and animals that are here now. I think they'll eventually bounce back, but I don't think that's the same for humans.

I think that if we do ourselves in, we're going to go the way of the dinosaur. It's not far-fetched, things have become extinct before. We've put ourselves above the system instead of part of the system. So, once we get ourselves back into the balance of things, things will turn out good. It's a little ways down the road, but it's growing, it's exciting, and I'm glad to be a part of it.

The original article appears here , together with a link to the video <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/n...>