

Short Report: Idle No More

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In November 2012 the idle no more movement was started in Saskatchewan by 4 women. They were upset by the changes to Bill C-45 and started a rally. Their beliefs spread like wildfire across Canada and now have international support, with solidarity rallies and flash mob round dances occurring as far as Egypt, New Zealand and Europe. (Groves, 2012)

The protests are aimed at raising awareness and preventing the government from using the environment's natural resources for their own financial gain. Things such as tar sands, pipelines, and pollution are damaging the environment and poisoning lakes and streams killing off plant and animal life. (Groves, 2012)

The changes of Bill C-45 and the introduction of the Navigation Protection Act (NPA) which we will discuss later on in this paper, make it easier for building pipelines and power lines across the country, by opening up what was once protected waterways. Without the federal regulation of these waterways, companies would be exempt from stating the damage or harmful effects to the bodies of water they will pass through. (Inman, Smis, & Cambou, 2013, p. 255)

Canada's wealth has grown at an increasingly fast rate by using its natural resources and land for economic growth. Fishing, mining, logging and oil companies in Canada have become some of the most powerful companies worldwide. ("Idle No More," 2013) The use of these resources without environmental protection has left many areas poisoned which in turn has started to affect the plant and animal life of these lands and waterways. All Canadians, not just the First Nations, need the land and water to survive. The Idle No More movement is not just about the use of resources affecting the first nation's communities, it's about the affect it will have on Canadians across the country. The movement is about demanding sustainability in the use of resources and

the development of land. "We believe in healthy, just, equitable and sustainable communities and have a vision and plan of how to build them." ("Idle No More," 2013)

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the idle no more movement, the changes made to Bill C-45 and the outcomes of the movement, by sharing my opinion and validating the movements concerns.

The Idle No More movement was started by 4 women, Nina Wilson from Kahkewistahaw, Sylvia McAdam from Saysewahum, Jessica Gordon from Pasqua and Sheelah McLean a non-native 3rd generation immigrant. (Lorenz, n.d.) After reading about the changes to Bill C-45 the women connected through emails and decided to organize a rally in Saskatoon Nov 10, 2012 as a way to spread the word and educate the people of Canada about what the changes would mean for our environment and resources as well as the erosion of indigenous rights. This small gathering in Saskatoon has now turned into a Canada wide movement spread through social media, with events being held across the country. (The Huffington Post, 2013)

The goal of Idle No More is to draw attention to the changes made in Bill C-45 and the Navigation Protection Act. It also highlights the environmental harm accompanying the exploitation of natural resources and the treatment of Canadian First Nations. Idle No More seeks to reinstitute the First Nation's rights and traditional laws of protecting our waters and land from corporate destruction. (<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>) The mission statement for the Idle No More movement is, "Idle No More calls on all people to join in a revolution which honors and fulfils Indigenous sovereignty which protects the land and water." (Tootoosis & Fiddler, 2013) This statement is focused on spreading the word through social media, and teaching Canadians the rights of our First Nations people, and our responsibilities to protecting our nation.

The events sparked from Idle no More and the mission statement is a response to the exploration, colonization, invasion, and inequality of the First Nations people of Canada.

(<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>) The National Day of Action was deemed one month after the initial meeting in Saskatoon and sparked teach-ins, rallies, flash mob round dances, and blockades in all provinces and territories of Canada. There has also been worldwide support with over 30 events in the USA and rallies being held across Europe, New Zealand and Egypt. The Idle No More movement has been spread globally through social media and fuelled by the treatment of First Nations by the government of Canada both historically and currently. (Groves, 2012)

One of the biggest events the National Day of Action sparked was Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike. Spence, the chief of Attawapiskat First Nations community of northern Ontario declared in 2011 a state of emergency for her community due to a housing crisis and substandard living arrangements. On the National Day of Action she announced a hunger strike where she would refuse to eat until a meeting occurred between the First Nation's leaders, the Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Governor General David Johnston. Her hunger strike finally ended 43 days later when Stephen Harper met with the First Nations leaders, drawing media attention to Idle No More and making her an icon among activists. (Tootoosis & Fiddler, 2013)

Since Theresa Spence's hunger strike many more events have taken place across Canada. In Alberta four major highway blockages occurred on the Hobbema, Driftpile, Blood Tribe and Frog Lake First Nations territory. In Saskatchewan a railway blockade and rally occurred in Peepeekisis. In Manitoba the Trans-Canada Highway was blockaded on the outskirts of Portage

La Prairie. In Ontario members of the Aamjiwnaang set up rail line blockades near Sarnia, the 401 highway was shut down near London and blockades of highway 6 and 17 near Espanola took place. In Quebec there was a traffic slowdown at Pointe-À-La-Croix and highway 132 was shut down. Nova Scotia had two traffic slowdowns one in Cape Breton and one south of Truro. Along with the above blockades and slowdowns many rallies and flash mob round dances have occurred across the country. (Groves, 2012)

The Harper government introduced Bill C-45 on October 18, 2012 as an act implementing budget provisions. Once the bill was passed it was renamed the “Jobs and Growth Act, 2012” (Tootoosis & Fiddler, 2013) The act is more than 400 pages and changes legislation of 64 different regulations, the changes that sparked the Idle No More Movement are the ones made to the Indian Act, Navigation Protection Act and the Environmental Assessment Act. (Tootoosis & Fiddler, 2013)

Amendments to the Indian Act drastically change the ability of the First Nations to allocate reserve lands. Communities now decide on leasing the land based on votes only from those in attendance at the meeting, whereas previously all eligible voters had a say in the decision even if they were not at the meeting. (Inman et al., 2013, p. 256) Other changes made give the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs the authority to call a meeting for the consideration of band territory surrender. The Minister can refuse or accept a proposal from the band council for the land designation whereas previously the minister did not have authority to interfere with band council decisions. (Inman et al., 2013, p. 256) The Idle No More movement states that “these changes allow for easier opening of treaty lands and territory.” (Tootoosis & Fiddler, 2013)

The Navigation Protection Act, which was formerly known as the Navigable Waterways Protection Act, used to protect all bodies of water from pollution and obstruction that were deep enough to float a canoe. (Inman et al., 2013, p. 256) The changes made to the act significantly reduced the number of protected lakes and rivers excluding over 99% of them.

(Inman et al., 2013, p. 256) These changes allow power line and pipeline projects to exclude any damages or destruction of waterways that aren't on the approved list made by the transportation minister (Tootoosis & Fiddler, 2013)

Changes to the Environmental act reduce the number of projects for resource development that require assessments making the approval process faster. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) can now be done provincially in substitution for federal EIA reducing the time it takes for approval and lowering the restrictions for the approval.

(Inman et al., 2013, p. 255) The Idle No More movement opposes this faster approval process and thinks it is detrimental to our land (Tootoosis & Fiddler, 2013)

The purpose of the Idle No More movement and the outcomes they are hoping for rely on the Canadian people to come together as a nation and fight for their land and water. To start, abandoning any legislation that infringes on environmental protection, or aboriginal and treaty rights such as Bill C-45 and restricting corporate development. They want respect for the rights of First Nations people to deny development on their lands and honor the historic treaties laid out in the past. (<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>) The movement also wants answers about the many missing and murdered First Nations women. They want women to be involved in the design and implementation of action into these inquiries, while promoting stopping violence against women and initiating a national action plan. (<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>) The biggest problems the movement sheds light on is the fact most of these bills get passed without giving First Nations a

chance to voice their opinion. Canada is built on First Nations land acquired hundreds of years ago through treaties drafted between the government and the First Nations people. The basic foundation of these treaties was for Canadians to live peacefully with the First Nations people and for the First Nations people to receive benefits and perpetual annuities from the government. One hundred years later it seems the government and the thirty million or so non-natives have forgotten or have not been exposed to these agreements. (Hopper, 2013)

In My opinion I think the Canadian government has forgotten the treaties and rights given to the First Nations people in the past. They pretend to embrace multiculturalism and the inherent rights of the First Nations people however they seem to be driven solely by money and economic growth and not how it affects the environment. Unfortunately I don't believe the Idle No More movement will make a change in the way First Nations people are treated or give them the rights to their land back. However I think between this movement and the attention brought to the media for environmental concerns whether it is the tar sands, pipelines, pollution or oil spills, helps make a stronger case for the corporate companies to be more efficient and environmentally sustainable in their developments. Footage of animals covered in oil or dead fish washed up on the shores is what gets the media's attention and strikes a chord with the Canadian people. Knowing we drink the water and eat the food grown on the land brings the environmental aspect close to home giving movements such as Idle No More a strong nationwide support. The problem with protests, road blocks and hunger strikes is that although they validate concerns and show the problems we are facing they do not provide viable solutions and alternative ideas which makes the movement just a voice not an action.

I agree that Idle No More's concerns are valid and I support the initiative they have taken. Who knew that four women wanting to educate people on the changes to Bill C-45 could

spark such a mass protest across the country, the support nationally and globally has been incredible.



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