

# Indigenous Governance: Idle No More wages hunger strike, rail and highway blockades and other protest across Canada

Thursday 3 January 2013, by [CLARK Aaron](#), [DOBSON Cathy](#), [GALLOWAY Gloria](#), [MORDEN Paul](#) (Date first published: 27 December 2012).

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Please watch or listen to this 11-minute interview with Pamela Palmateer, Chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University, member of Eel River Bar First Nation and spokeswoman for the “Idle No More” movement. Broadcast on Democracy Now, Dec. 26, 2012:  
[http://www.democracynow.org/2012/12/26/idle\\_no\\_more\\_indigenous\\_led\\_protests](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/12/26/idle_no_more_indigenous_led_protests).

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## As protests swell, Spence stands firm on hunger strike

*They are partners of the treaties. ... But it's time to sit down with [the government and the Crown] and have a talk. I don't know why they are so afraid to come and meet.-Theresa Spence, Attiwapiskat chief on hunger strike in Ottawa.*

**By Gloria Galloway**, *The Globe and Mail*, 27 Dec 2012

The aboriginal interpretive centre on an island in the middle of the Ottawa River where Theresa Spence is living out her hunger strike is not an unhappy place. There are fires and drumming and even the occasional round of song. Native leaders have come from disparate parts of Canada to meet with the Attawapiskat chief who has said she will fast until the federal government gives in to her demand for a meeting among first nations, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and a representative of the Crown.

Ms. Spence wants to discuss the treaty that was signed in the first decade of the last century that covered a broad swath of Northern Ontario, including her own impoverished reserve. It promised money, education and health care in exchange for sharing the land.

Ms. Spence, like the descendants of the signatories of similar treaties across the country, says

Canada is no longer living up to its part of the bargain. So, two weeks ago, after listening to other chiefs at a national gathering complain about the problems affecting their people, the 49-year-old mother of five girls embarked on a hunger strike, consuming only water, fish broth and medicinal tea.

"I am fine right now," Ms. Spence said in an interview with The Globe and Mail. After taking part in an early-morning smudging ceremony, she had a cup of medicinal tea prepared for her by a young first-nations man who is one of many people helping her in her fast.

It was coincidental, she said, that her personal crusade began about the same time as first nations across Canada embarked on a widespread and prolonged series of demonstrations under the banner of "Idle No More." Those actions were also aimed at the Conservative government – specifically at a number of bills that will have a direct effect on aboriginal communities.

But Ms. Spence has emerged as a movement hero and has had plenty of support from people such as Saulteaux actor Adam Beach, who stopped by over Christmas. And, on Boxing Day, she met with Liberal leadership candidate Justin Trudeau. Her daughters and her partner, Clayton Kennedy, are also in Ottawa this week, and the atmosphere in the log-walled compound on Victoria Island is celebratory.

John Duncan, the federal minister of aboriginal affairs, wrote to Ms. Spence on Christmas Day to urge her to give up her hunger strike and to reiterate his own offer to meet with her. She rebuffed his overtures. "I didn't ask for Minister Duncan," she said. "And I have dealt with him before. When I observe him, he doesn't have a mind of his own because, before he would answer a question, he would always look at his people. He's not the Prime Minister."

Her demand, she said, is a meeting with Mr. Harper and the representative of the Crown, presumably Governor-General David Johnston. "They are partners of the treaties," Ms. Spence said. "First nations have been acting in good faith, honouring the relationships in our treaties. But it's time to sit down with [the government and the Crown] and have a talk. I don't know why they are so afraid to come and meet."

The Assembly of First Nations organized a gathering between Mr. Harper and chiefs from across Canada last January, which Ms. Spence attended. But that was not the meeting that is required, she said. "It was just the Prime Minister making a show of it. But the Crown has to come to our table, too," she said, "and this meeting has to be not just one day, it has to be at least a week or two weeks."

Mr. Harper is unlikely to give in to a hunger strike, which could be interpreted as a form of blackmail. But Ms. Spence said she is in it for the long haul and is still prepared to die if her demand is not met. "As we speak," she said, "our people are suffering with the system that we have been living in for the past 100 years."

Meanwhile, disruptions are continuing across Canada. Boxing Day round dances were organized in shopping malls, and a blockade of a CN rail track in southwestern Ontario continued into its sixth day. [See enclosed dossier.]

In downtown Vancouver, dozens of supporters disrupted Boxing Day traffic as they marched through the streets in solidarity. Police closed sections of Granville and Georgia Streets and directed traffic as the group wound through the downtown core, banging drums, waving flags, chanting and holding up signs reading, "Assimilate us no more" and "Honour the treaties, stop C-45." At the intersection of Robson and Burrard Streets, the supporters formed a large circle, stalling traffic for about 15

minutes.

The Idle No More movement has been overwhelming, Ms. Spence said. "The youth know what's going on and they feel the pain and they don't want to live like that any more. So they are standing up. And they are backing up their chiefs. And the chiefs need to go forward with their people and sit down with the government and the Crown."

Some, like Bill Erasmus, the National Chief of the Dene, have staged their own short-term hunger strikes in support of Ms. Spence. But, as far as the federal legislation goes, Mr. Erasmus says governments "don't have the right to, they don't have the power to" enact laws affecting first nations, which he says are independent from the rest of Canada. That attitude of defiance, growing in first nations across the country, suggests this could be a long year of conflict between the government and indigenous people.

Media Advisory: Aamjiwnaang First Nation continues blockade of CN Rail, Mayor of Sarnia and city police ask for meeting

When: 11 am, Sunday Dec. 23, 2012

Where: Aamjiwnaang First Nation Blockade (Williams Drive off Scott Road)

Citizens of Aamjiwnaang First Nation continue a blockade of CN rail, in support of the Idle No More movement. The Mayor of Sarnia and city police have asked for a meeting to present an offer to the end of the blockade. Aamjiwnaang Citizens are indicating they will continue the blockade until Chief Teresa Spence is granted a meeting with Prime Minister Harper, and there is recognition of the historical injustice inflicted upon the community. The meeting will take place at 11 am tomorrow, on the blockade.

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<http://www.facebook.com/notes/ron-plain/media-advisory-aamjiwnaang-first-nation-continues-blockade-of-cn-rail-mayor-of-s/10151896333252565>

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## **First Nations blockade causes railway disruption to local industry**

**By Cathy Dobson**, *Sarnia Observer* (SunMedia), Friday, December 21, 2012

A group of natives from Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Sarnia pitched a canopy across the tracks of a CN rail spur and blocked train traffic Friday in support of the Idle No More native protest in Ottawa. The blockade on the reserve began around 8:30 a.m. and was expected to last into the evening, said Chief Chris Plain. "If the prime minister will not listen to our words, perhaps he'll pay attention to our actions," he said.

He and about 15 Aamjiwnaang members parked a pickup truck across the railway line that crosses DeGurse Drive near the Aamjiwnaang First Nation industrial park. They lit a fire and pitched a canopy for the day. Meanwhile, about 60 other band members were in Ottawa to join the Idle No More rally, a movement they say is gaining international attention.

Idle No More rallies have been staged across Canada for several weeks, including one in London on

Wednesday (Dec. 1) that attracted about 1,000 natives and non-natives.

"Those of us who couldn't travel, decided spontaneously last night to do this," said Aamjiwnaang band Coun. Shawn Plain at the blockade. "This is a peaceful protest," he said. "The industries that aren't getting their shipments today will pressure the federal government.

"This is a wake up call for them. We could cause havoc on the highway but the highways are provincial. We'd rather do something that will get the federal government's attention."

The line, known as the St. Clair spur, carries CN and CSX trains to several large industries in Sarnia's Chemical Valley and St. Clair Township. The line generally accommodates four or five trains a day. One stopped before it reached DeGurse Drive at about 9:30 a.m. Friday because of the blockade, according to Shawn Plain. "The CN police came along and notified us that we were blocking the train," he said.

The Idle No More movement is fired by the recent passing of the omnibus budget Bill C-45, which was approved by the Senate in a 50-27 vote. Aboriginal leaders are accusing the Conservative government of pushing the bill through without consulting them. They say the bill infringes on their treaty rights, compromises ownership of their land and takes away protection for Canada's waterways.

But Sarnia-Lambton MP Pat Davidson said the Idle No More movement is spreading a lot of "misconceptions."

"There's a lot of misinformation out there," she said. "The Navigable Waters Act has been changed but it is very old and needed to be updated. "Bill C-45 has not taken away any environmental protections," she said.

Davidson said some of the environmental assessment process has been "streamlined" but is still required. She said she believes the government had "a fair amount of consultation" with Canada's aboriginals prior to the Senate vote. "And I'd love to talk to them about it any time."

Chief Plain said he sent Davidson a memo on Wednesday about his concerns related to Bill C-45 and there was no response. "I did receive something from Chris and the reply is on its way," said Davidson.

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## **Sarnia officials seek a peaceful a solution to First Nation rail blockade**

**By Paul Morden**, *Sarnia Observer*, Thursday, December 27, 2012  
(See photo gallery at link)

A blockade of a CN rail spur line continued into Boxing Day at Aamjiwnaang First Nation in support of the national Idle No More movement. Spokesperson Ron Plain said members of the group were resolved to maintain the blockade that began Friday.

"We're getting support from way outside the community," he said. "We have non-native people that none of us know, they drove up on Christmas Day and gave us Christmas presents." Others have been bringing food, coffee and sweets.

"I really do think people are starting to get the message that this is not an Indian issue," Plain said. The rights of all Canadians are impacted by the federal government's recent actions, he said.

Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley met Monday morning with Police Chief Phil Nelson and other city officials over the issue. "Phil and myself were asked to visit the protest (Sunday), which we did," Bradley said.

"We were there for about 45 minutes and had a good exchange, a respectful exchange of views."

Bradley said he has also been in contact with Sarnia-Lambton MP Pat Davidson and other federal officials. "This is one of these situations where the Sarnia Police Service and the community have been put in the middle of an incident that is between the First Nations and the federal government," Bradley said.

He added city officials have been speaking with members of the First Nation council. "We'd like to find some way to bring this to an end."

CN successfully applied for a court injunction to end the blockade but the order left it up to Sarnia Police to decide how it would be enforced. "It was very broad in its direction to them," Bradley said. "As long as people are talking and we're trying to find a solution, they don't intend to proceed," he said Monday (Dec 24).

Plain said the railway was expected to be back in court Thursday seeking another court order. "We're trying to round up a lawyer in Toronto that will attend to it for us," he said. "We're going to ask CN to prove where they have permission of Aamjiwnaang to be on our territory."

On Christmas Eve, an estimated 200 people attended a rally at Sarnia City Hall and then marched down a short stretch of Highway 402. "I'm very proud of every single person who showed up today," said organizer Vanessa Gray. "They're speaking very loudly just by standing here with us."

Several speakers were supporting Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence who began fasting Dec. 11 in a bid to get the government's attention about issues facing the First Nations. More than 2,000 aboriginal protesters took a "dire" call for change to the nation's capital on Friday (Dec. 21) in a bid to pressure the government to meet and discuss treaty rights and "crises" plaguing First Nations communities.

The protests have targeted the Harper government's Bill C-45, which they say runs roughshod over their treaty rights and sovereignty, and threatens the environment. The Assembly of First Nations has adopted an official stance opposing the legislation. It's part of a nationwide movement dubbed Idle No More that's also made waves internationally.

Aamjiwnaang Chief Chris Plain told the crowd at city hall Monday "it's very heart-warming to see so many people here today to take up this very important cause." The crowd included residents Aamjiwnaang, Walpole Island, Kettle and Stony Point, Chippewas of the Thames, Six Nations and several other First Nations communities across Ontario.

"We're being heard right across this country," Plain said. He said he has been receiving many calls from officials seeking a solution to the rail blockade. "The message I'm giving loud and clear is it's not my help you need," Plain said. "The man who can help you is Prime Minister (Stephen) Harper. He's the one who can end this very quick."

With files from QMI Agency  
paul.morden sunmedia.ca

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## **CN Rail Ontario Blockade May Cause Petrochemical Plant Shutdowns**

**By Aaron Clark**, Bloomberg News, published in the *Windsor Star*, Dec. 27, 2012

SARNIA The blockade of a Canadian National Railway Co. line that helps serve the petrochemical industry in Sarnia may force plants in the area to close, the rail operator said.

The blockade of the line by a First Nations group began Dec. 21 and is ongoing, said Jim Feeny, a Montreal-based spokesman for Canadian National. The spur line, over which an average of 450 Canadian National rail cars pass each day, runs from a main line to an industrial area of Sarnia, he said. "It's beginning to affect customers on the line," Feeny said. "Some of them are facing plant shutdowns if service is not resumed."

A phone message left in the general voice mail for the Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Sarnia wasn't immediately returned.

Products carried on the line include ethylene, methanol, butane and propane, Feeny said. Canadian National doesn't move crude oil on the line, he said. CSX Corp. also uses the line to serve customers, he said.

Three refineries operated by Imperial Oil Ltd, Royal Dutch Shell Plc and Suncor Energy Inc. in the Sarnia region have a combined capacity of 277,730 barrels a day of crude processing capacity, data compiled by Bloomberg show.

Meanwhile, Aamjiwnaang Chief Chris Plain says gestures of support are flooding in. He says donations such as blankets and food and other offers of help are coming in from within the province and from as far away as California as word spreads through social media.

The protesters are denouncing the Harper government's omnibus Bill C-45, which they claim eliminates treaty and aboriginal rights set out in the Constitution and removes protection from rivers and lakes.

Organizer Vanessa Gray told a Christmas Eve rally in Sarnia that actions aimed to bring the community together "to stand up for what your rights are and what you believe in." Gray told protesters the government's legislation, which critics say weakens environmental protection, affects not only First Nations people, but "every person across the nation."

Chief Plain agreed all Canadians need to be aware of what First Nations are doing. "It's not an Indian thing," he said. "We may be about the loudest, but as far as Canadians, you all need to be advised, you know, these things are affecting all of us."

Plain says organizers have yet to decide whether to challenge a court injunction granting police the power to end the protest. Sarnia police have said they won't move to stop the blockade unless there is a safety risk.

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## **Garden River to block rail line, Highway 17A and B**

By *The Sault Star*, with files from QMI Agency, page one, Thursday Dec. 27, 2012

Sault Ste Marie, northern Ontario-Garden River First Nation plans to block the transportation of goods through its territory by rail and road for 12 hours on Thursday.

The blockade is a show of support for Attawapiskat First Nation Chief Theresa Spence, who began a hunger strike on Dec. 11 to protest what she called Canada's treatment of First Nations people. It also is part of the national Idle No More protests, says Craig Sayers, head councillor for Garden River. Protesters will block the rail line while others will close the Trans-Canada Highway at the intersection of 17A and B, at the city limits, from 8 am to 8 pm. Sayers said the highway blockade will only affect transports. Local traffic will be able to get through.

Sault Ste. Marie Police Service and Sault Ste. Marie Detachment of the OPP said Wednesday the Highway 17/ 17B intersection will be closed every 15 minutes on the hour Thursday, and Highway 17B, from the Sault Ste. Marie east city limits to the Echo Bay Bridge, will be closed to through traffic from 8 am to 8 pm.

Blockades and protests have been taking place across the country as part of a push for a meeting between the First Nations and the government. More than 2,000 Idle No More protestors marched in Ottawa last Friday in what they described as a "dire" call for change in an effort to pressure the government to meet and discuss treaty rights and "crises" plaguing First Nation communities.

A blockade of CN Rail in Sarnia, Ont. by Aamjiwnaang First Nation entered its fourth day on Monday.

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<http://www.rogerannis.com/idle-no-more-wages-hunger-strike-rail-and-highway-blockades-and-other-protest-across-canada/>