

Solidarity with the Idle No More Movement and #J11 in Canada

Saturday 26 January 2013, by [Tushkahomma](#) (Date first published: 9 January 2013).

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What is Idle No More?

The Idle No More movement started in November 2012 in response to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's introduction of Omnibus Budget Bill C-45 (which, among other things, gutted the Navigable Waters Protection Act) as well as other legislation detrimental to First Nations. Organizers held small rallies and a number of teach-ins throughout November to prepare for a National Day of Action on Amnesty International's Human Rights Day, December 10. Those protests dovetailed with protests already happening in British Columbia over the Northern Gateway and Pacific Trails pipelines.

Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence announced a hunger strike to demand that Harper and the Governor General meet to discuss treaty rights of indigenous peoples. The Assembly of First Nations then issued an open letter calling for a meeting to discuss the Chief's demands. However, by that time, Idle No More had ballooned as a grassroots movement with its own leaders, independent of the Assembly of First Nations.

On December 17, the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations (those First Nations that signed Treaty Number 6) declared they did not recognize the legality of laws which are in violation of Treaty and Aboriginal rights and reaffirmed the Crown's longstanding legal obligations.

First Nations are concerned about pending legislation that would undermine their rights and are demanding sovereignty, including the establishment of Nation-to-Nation relationships, rather than being governed by the Indian Act. In addition to sovereignty and treaty rights, they are universally concerned about environmental destruction, especially about the future of water and land protection. The energy of Idle No More has fused a number of widespread grievances into a movement.

Idle No More resonates beyond Canada

Protests have spread outside of Canada, and throughout the Christmas season, flash mobs erupted with round dances in malls and big box stores. Over 1,000 participated in the Mall of the America flash mob in Minnesota (see YouTube clip below). American Indians continue to protest at Canadian consulates and have brought the round dance to public spaces to demand the attention of the American public. Protests and solidarity events have been held in Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Arizona, Illinois, New Mexico, Washington, D.C., Texas, and continue to spread.

American Indian communities, which have long struggled against racism, chronic unemployment, poverty, and ecological devastation, and for sovereignty and cultural survival, are now facing austerity budgets as most U.S. government agencies have reduced appropriations. These issues have now converged in the consciousness of many, inspired by the example of Idle No More, and grassroots activism has increased.

American Indians have been fighting a long battle on the ecological front, including resistance to the Keystone XL pipeline in both Canada and the U.S. In some cases, activists have come head to head against their own tribal governments on the issues of dirty power plants and clean water issues. Moreover, recent struggles to renew the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) with tribal provisions saw widespread activism. Participation in Idle No More represents a continuation of the growing momentum in many tribal communities as well as off-reservation, where over 60% of American Indians now live, including cities where they are an “invisible minority.”

Growing militancy of the movement

Militant tactics are also on the rise, especially at the artificial colonial border. On December 30, about 100 people marched from Walpole Island to Algonac, Michigan. From January 4 to 6, blockades of Canadian highways and border crossings brought traffic to a halt. On January 5, Mohawk protests in New York State closed the International Bridge.

While U.S. readers might remember militant indigenous action in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, First Nations on the Canadian side of the colonial border drew on militant tactics throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. For a deeper understanding of Idle No More in a longer historical and political context, see this excellent piece on the Decolonization blog. The continuation of militant action and a victory for Idle No More in Ottawa would serve as an inspiration for all of us.

Idle No More protesters establish a blockade at the border crossing between Canada and the United States on January, 5 (Photo: Geoff Robins/Reuters)

What's next?

The Assembly of First Nations has invited Harper to a treaty meeting, and a delegation of First Nations leaders is meeting with Harper on January 11. Chief Spence has planned to join that delegation, but also stated that she is not ready to give up her hunger strike. Meanwhile, Idle No More has stated that the Leaders don't speak for the entire movement and have called for a parallel “one day national dialogue with Indigenous Chiefs, including hereditary Chiefs to discuss water, land, sovereignty, and treaty relationships.” A convergence of events is planned for Jan 9-11 in Ottawa, Ontario, and will likely see various tactics both inside the negotiating halls and in the streets.

Tushkahomma

Here's what you can do to join January 11 actions or show solidarity from a distance:

Join the Facebook events page for INM

Go to an event in your area—see listing [here](#)

Change your profile picture to an Idle No More theme for the day of January 11

Share this article and information about Idle No More with a friend

Useful links:

Idle No More official site: <http://Idlenomore.ca/>

Idle No More blog: <http://idlenomore1.blogspot.com/>

Idle No More on Facebook:

<http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/TV+Shows/The+National/ID/2323881230/>

#J11 Action page: <http://www.j11action.com/>

CBC video, "Explaining Idle No More": <https://www.facebook.com/IdleNoMoreCommunity>

Activist Communique: #J11 - Idle No More Global Day of Action, Solidarity and Resurgence:

<http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/krystalline-kraus/2013/01/activist-communique-j11---idle-no-more-global-day-action-so>

Harper Launches Major First Nations Termination Plan:

<http://fr.scribd.com/doc/113392661/Harper-s-First-Nation-Termination-Plan-2012>

What if First Nations stopped subsidizing Canada?

P.S.

* From Against the Current, January 9, 2013:

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/3794>

* Tushkahomma lives in Texas and is a member of Solidarity.

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