



Omnibus Bill C-45

Background Information:

On Tuesday, December 11th, 2012, Chief Theresa Spence of Attawapiskat First Nation, launched a hunger strike in protest of the persistent systematic disrespect shown for First Nation peoples by the Conservative government. The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) voiced support for her cause, strongly urging for an immediate and meaningful response by the Federal government. Spence's hunger claim culminated in the drafting of a 13 point Declaration of Commitment on behalf of the federal government, which identified a number of priority issues that continue to impact Aboriginal people in Canada. To date, there has been no 'indication of any specific actions planned by the federal government regarding the demands on the list'(National Post, 2013).

Inspired, in part by Spence's hunger strike, First Nations activists across Canada held rallies to protest Bill C-45 as part of a grassroots movement known as Idle No More. The Idle No More movement was spawned in opposition to the passage of the federal Omnibus Bill C-45 in December of 2012. Fuelled by the federal government's failure to engage in consultation with First Nation leaders across Canada, the Idle No More movement, reflected a commitment on behalf of all First Nations, Metis and Inuit people to honour their Traditional roles and responsibilities as the caretakers of Mother Earth. Idle No More, engaged the youth, incorporating social media as a means of rallying public support around the cause and creating awareness of the issues at stake.

What is Bill C-45?

At the centre of the Idle No More movement, is Omnibus Bill C-45 (and the Omnibus Bill 38—the Bill that preceded it) as well as a number of Bills, which when passed, will have the cumulative effect of weakening existing inherent Treaty rights. Bill C-45, the Jobs and Growth Act, proposed changes which drastically impacted the Indian Act, Fisheries Act, Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and the Navigable Water Protection Act. Designed to give the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs access over First Nations' lands, Bill C-428-the Amendment to the Indian Act, grants the Minister the authority to exercise undue influence over vulnerable communities.

The key amendment to the Indian Act grants the federal government the authority to “determine the surrender of any portion of any First Nation territory, at any given time” (PSAC, 2012). This clause directly contravenes the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous which asserts the rights Indigenous People to not be subjected to forcible removal from their lands or territories (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples-Art. 10)

The Idle No More movement is, at the core, a campaign to support and protect the inherent treaty rights First Nations people across Canada. Since its inception in December of 2012, the Idle No More movement continues to function as a means of highlighting issues of importance to First Nations people in Canada. Sovereignty Summer, a movement inspired by Idle No More, encourages people to lend support to the movement by engaging in “peaceful revolution to honour Indigenous sovereignty and protect the land and water” (Rabble, 2013).

What Can I Do to Advocate for the Rights of Indigenous People in Canada?

- Keep informed about the status of the bills (See: Legislative Information Page: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/LEGISINFO>)
- Become Involved Attend Rallies/events calling for the withdrawal of Bill C-45 and other Bills that will impact First Nations people.

References

Public Service Alliance of Canada. (2012). *PSAC wants Bill C-45 opened up to Public Debate*. Retrieved from: <http://www.psacafpc.com/news/2012/issues/20121030-e.shtml>

Rabble. (2013). *Sovereignty Summer: Idle No More launches new website to amplify impact of movement*. Retrieved from: <http://rabble.ca/news/2013/06/sovereignty-summer-idle-no-more-launches-new-website-to-amplify-impact-movement>

United Nations. (2008) *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.