

The Movement for Legitimate Indigenous Sovereignty

Dan Kimball
Bridgewater State University
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Summary: The public issue campaign, Idle No More, is a protest movement relying on the involvement of activist public relations as a way to ensure principles of coexistence and mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples are honored.

Background

The Idle No More Movement is a Canadian based, turned worldwide protest that seeks to draw attention to the abhorrent conditions of indigenous Canadian communities that have been negatively impacted by the recently passed Bill C-45, which eludes most Canadian environmental laws. The peaceful Canadian grassroots protest was originated by four First Nations women, and quickly become one of the largest Indigenous mass movements in Canadian history (idlenomore.ca). This movement has inspired various peaceful protests throughout the Canadian state resulting in a push for political and social change.

Canada has capitalized off of its abundance of land and resources, becoming one of the wealthiest countries in the world. However, various industries including mining, logging, oil, and fishing companies have abused their authoritative role at the expense of some of the poorest First Nations communities. These communities are rich in these valuable resources, and these Canadian industries continue to deplete these communities without any share of profit, exhausting fresh water supply, resulting in poisoned water which residually affects the ecosystem. The communities are being abused by this government that initially sought out to honor the laws that had been set out to *protect* these original communities.

The cycle of abuse continues as the government seeks to pass various laws that will allow reserve lands to be purchased and sold by big business for profit. Guidelines are miniscule, and all too often ignored. Although these companies are promising profit share, they have neglected to honor initial treaties which have left the Indigenous people skeptical. The people of the First Nations fear that soon they will be left with nothing other than poisonous water, land, and air. The Idle No More Campaign is an attempt to secure Indigenous autonomy and reinstate long-

established laws. For every day that passes, the tension between the Indigenous people and mainstream society grows as their rights continue to be ignored.

The Indigenous people have recently pushed for moving towards sustainability and overall development of scarce resources as well. The ultimate goal is to build an autonomous, sustainable community with environmental protections.

RQ: Who are the people forwarding this campaign, and what steps in particular are the Indigenous people taking to ensure sovereignty, sustainability, and reinstatement of peace?

Findings

The Saskatchewan Four, Sylvia McAdam, Sheelah McLean, Jessica Gordon and Nina Wilson have been at the forefront of leading the campaign against the Harper Government's Bill C-45 (Hasselriis, 2013). Not only are these women responsible for leading the peaceful protests consisting of various marches, but also bringing the awareness of this issue to social media. The hash tag Idle No More created a media firestorm throughout Canada and beyond.

According to the "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" corporate interest must respect the interest of these aforementioned people who are saying no to development on their territory (idlenomore.ca). Another necessary step towards the reinstatement of peace is the reaffirmation of the Aboriginal Title and Rights, in section 35 of Canada's constitution, and recommended by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (idlenomore.ca).

Building awareness for the people of the First Nations has not been limited to peaceful marches in Canadian territories and social media. There has been a worldwide effort to raise awareness for racist and exploitive behavior toward Indigenous people through things such as

round dances, flash mobs, and rallies worldwide (truth-out.org). Although all of these movements and more have helped the campaign gain relative success, crisis responses depend on the public and political environment in which the crisis is occurring, the culture and inner workings of the organization facing the crisis, and human nature. These three factors directly tie into the Idle No More event.

Contrary to some of this research, a poll taken by Armina Ligaya, (2013) suggests that 49% of Canadians do not support the Idle No More movement and more than half of those people have First Nations ancestry. The poll randomly surveyed 1,626 Canadian adults on January 16 and 17, during a succession of demonstrations. The vast majority of Canadians, (61%) said police should not allow Idle No More protesters to block major highways, rail lines and border crossings as this presents an inconvenience to their everyday routine. Still, the aboriginal people involved in the Idle No More movement continue to be at the focal point of these crises. These crises are interrelated and have plagued the aboriginal people.

On October 17th Canadian police arrested at least 40 people in Eastern New Brunswick at the site of a protest over shale gas development that turned violent when authorities attempted to enforce a court-ordered injunction that the demonstrators be removed. The RCMP has claimed that this action was necessary as protestors from First Nations groups were arrested for firearms violations, threats intimidation, mischief, and violating the injunction. Protestors contest those claims, stating that law enforcement met the unarmed protesters with dogs and tear gas.

One of the most recent issues deals with the development of the Keystone XL pipeline. The pipeline would run approximately 2,000 miles from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, synthesizing heavy crude oil from tar sand (activistpr.com). The issue with tar sands led to a mechanical crisis just months ago in Greenpeace Canada, as an estimated 1.5 million barrels of

tar sands have leaked and are continuing to leak at four different sites in Alberta directly affecting the ecosystem. Lopez (2013) attests that tar sands create significant dangers to water quality, climate change, and human health.

Conclusion

This struggle is not exclusively important to the Aboriginal peoples of the First Nations of Canada. Freedom for people facing injustice is a global struggle that is becoming more prevalent through the expansion of social media. In more ways than one, this situation parallels the United States' treatment of their Native People. Understanding how people typically respond to issues, most people that are aware of the Idle No More movement have shown support. This controversy ties into violence against women, environmental degradation, and moral, political and legal choices. All of these movements and more have helped the campaign gain relative success.

This movement is also a microcosm for the current emphasis on sustainability and installment of renewable resources. Processes that are hazardous to the Earth have serious consequences to the climate and health of the people affected by these processes. The Idle No More movement has valid arguments that may spark social revolutions; however, changing laws is not an easy process.

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