



The Brief

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What if natives stop subsidizing Canada?



Elsipogtog women lead unity march in support of Idle No More in Moncton on Jan. 9th. Photo by Stephanie Merrill.

By DRU OJA JAY

Montreal - There is a prevailing myth that Canada's more than 600 First Nations and native communities live off of money—subsidies—from the Canadian government. This myth, though it is loudly proclaimed and widely believed, is remarkable for its boldness; widely accessible, verifiable facts show that the opposite is true. Indigenous people have been subsidizing Canada for a very long time. Conservatives have leaked documents in an attempt to discredit Chief Theresa Spence, who was on a hunger

strike in Ottawa from Dec. 11th to Jan. 24th. Reporters like Jeffrey Simpson and Christie Blatchford have ridiculed the demands of native leaders and the protest movement Idle No More. Their ridicule rests on this foundational untruth: that it is hard-earned tax dollars of Canadians that pays for housing, schools and health services in First Nations. The myth carries a host of racist assumptions on its back. It enables prominent voices like Simpson and Blatchford to liken protesters' demands to "living in a dream palace" or "horse manure," respectively. It's true that Canada's federal government controls large portions of the cash flow First Nations depend on. Much of the money used by First Nations to provide services does come from the federal budget. But the accuracy of the myth ends there. On the whole, the money that First Nations receive is a small fraction of the value of the resources, and the government revenue that comes out of their territories. Let's look a few examples.

Barriere Lake

The Algonquins of Barriere Lake have a traditional territory that spans 10,000 square kilometres. For thousands of years, they have made continuous use of the land. They have never signed a treaty giving up their rights to the land. An estimated \$100 million per year in revenues are extracted every year from their territory in the form of logging, hydroelectric dams, and recreational hunting and fishing. And yet the community lives in third-world conditions. A diesel generator provides power, few jobs are available, and families

live in dilapidated bungalows. These are not the lifestyles of a community with a \$100 million economy in its backyard. In some cases, governments are willing to spend lavishly. They spared no expense, for example, sending 50 fully-equipped riot police from Montreal to break up a peaceful road blockade with tear gas and physical coercion. Barriere Lake is subsidizing the logging industry, Canada, and Quebec. The community isn't asking for the subsidies to stop, just for some jobs and a say in how their traditional territories are used. They've been fighting for these demands for decades.

Attawapiskat

Attawapiskat has been in the news because their ongoing housing crisis came to the attention of the media in 2011 (MP Charlie Angus referred to the poverty-stricken community as "Haiti at 40 below"). More recently, Chief Theresa Spence made headlines for her hunger strike. The community is near James Bay, in Ontario's far north. Right now, DeBeers is constructing a \$1 billion mine on the traditional territory of the Ahtawāpiskatowi ininiwak. Anticipated revenues will top \$6.7 billion. Currently, the Conservative government is subjecting the budget of the Cree to extensive scrutiny. But the total amount transferred to the First Nation since 2006—\$90 million—is a little more than one percent of the anticipated mine revenues. As a percentage, that's a little over half of Harper's cut to GST. Royalties from the mine do not go to the First Nation, but straight to the provincial government. The community has received some temporary jobs in the mine, and future generations will have to deal with the consequences of a giant open pit mine in their backyard. Attawapiskat is subsidizing DeBeers, Canada and Ontario.

Lubicon

The Lubicon Cree, who never signed a treaty ceding their land rights, have waged a decades-long campaign for land rights. During this time, over \$14 billion in oil and gas has been removed from their traditional territory. During the same period, the... *(continued on page 2)*

Rivers and lakes be damned: why Bill C-45 concerns us all

By STEPHANIE MERRILL

Fredericton - The Harper government has fundamentally changed the way the federal government involves itself in environmental oversight; essentially downloading responsibility to provinces and the courts. Bill C-45, passed last December, and Bill C-38, passed last June, radically undermines the protection of Canada's rivers, lakes and streams, removes protections for fish habitat and repeals thousands of environmental assessments. Krysten Tully of the Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, a member of the international Waterkeeper Alliance, sums it up: "The Navigable Waters Protection Act no longer protects water. The Fisheries Act no longer protects fish. The Environmental Assessment Act no longer requires environmental assessments be done before important decisions are made." Critics say the two omnibus bills tear down legislation that took decades, if not more than a century to build up. The Fisheries Act and the Navigable Waters Protection Act are the oldest and strongest pieces of environmental legislation in Canada with the latter dating back to the Canadian Constitution in 1882. "These changes are an obvious trade-off between water and land protection to appease dirty oil and gas companies who are pressuring the federal government for relaxed regulations," said Garry Guild, a Fredericton-based retired professional who says he never protested anything until fracking for shale gas came on his radar. Indeed, the amended or repealed legislations were actually requested by the oil and gas industry. In a letter recently obtained by Greenpeace Canada through an access to information request, the industry named six federal pieces of legislation that they felt should be reformed, cited as being "outdated" for focusing on "preventing bad things from happening rather than enabling responsible outcomes." Speculation among the conservation community is that what was left out this round, namely overhauls to the Migratory Birds Convention Act and Species at Risk Act, are coming soon. The Harper government contends that the changes to the

environmental laws are to reduce red tape on the legislative processes. Industry insists red tape is too costly. Costs of extreme resource extraction are much greater now that the easy to reach conventional oil, gas, and minerals are gone. Industries like tar sands pipelines, shale gas fracking and open-pit mining are beginning to infringe on places where people live. Environmental reviews take time: time during which the public may become aware of proposed projects and oppose them, thereby potentially delaying approvals. For proponents of these projects, environmental laws, which in recent years have only become hoops to jump through, only add increasing costs to projects that are presumed to be approved in the end. William Amos, an environmental lawyer and Director of the Ecojustice Clinic at the University of Ottawa says that what is being proposed goes far beyond streamlining federal regulation. "Canada's paddlers, anglers, cottagers and outdoor recreation enthusiasts may be surprised to learn that their right to navigate favourite waterways will now need to be fought in the courts, at their own expense," says Amos. "Under the new Navigation Protection Act, development in or across 99.5% of rivers and lakes across Canada require no permit from Transport Canada. This has effectively gotten Transport Canada out of the business of enforcing Canadians' centuries' old right to navigate," he added. In New Brunswick, every single river, lake and stream, except for the lower portion of the Saint John River downstream of Mactaquac Dam, has been left off of the list under the new Navigation Protection Act. New Brunswick's iconic Mighty Miramichi and Wild Restigouche now receive no federal oversight, nor do Grand Lake and the important smaller waterways like the Nashwaak, the Kedgwick and the Pollett that support salmon spawning, canoe tripping and amazing vistas – and millions of dollars annually in revenues to the province. While residents in many economically depressed regions in New Brunswick feel inclined to support extraction projects in the hope that they will create jobs and spin-off benefits, many also see diminishing returns to themselves and their communities, not to mention environmental destruction that the new technologies and the need for bigger and bigger projects pose.



About 200 people marched across Fredericton's Westmorland Bridge to Old Government house, residence of Graydon Nicholas, New Brunswick's Lieutenant Governor. Nicholas promised to deliver letters from the group to the Queen. The march was part of a national day of action against federal Bill C-45. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

In New Brunswick, we have witnessed both the promises and the backlash to shale gas exploration, uranium mining, the dousing of public lands with herbicides to convert our diverse forest into sterile plantations and other proposals that promised economic prosperity. It's all become too much. Bill C-45 has brought Canadians from all walks of life together; Idle No More has united Canadians over a common love and concern for the future of our shared waters. "Harper has gone too far. We are uniting across this province, natives and non-natives, in a battle to save our precious water," said Guild, who can be found raising his voice and a sign at the Idle No More actions in Fredericton.