

Grass roots opposition to latest federal budget bill growing

By Stephanie Dearing
OTTAWA

Despite the fact that Bill C-45, the Jobs and Growth Act passed its third reading in the House of Commons and is now before the Senate on its second-last stop before it is enacted as a law, an Indigenous grassroots movement opposing the bill is gaining in momentum.

It is clear that Canada's First Peoples want to be heard. And their Chiefs are responding, refusing to go along with imposed legislation.

"Chiefs across the country, in particularly here in Manitoba, have grown tired of the Conservative government that acts and pretends that we don't exist," said Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) Grand Chief Derek Nepinak during a December 7 press conference.

"We are and we will remain the Indigenous people of these lands. We've been here for 30,000 years and no legislation, no act of parliament, no regulation or policy created by a settler society government like the Conservative government is going to replace or terminate the existence of our people. That's the bottom line, that's not going to happen," said Nepinak, explaining why over 100 Chiefs tried to gain entry to the House of Commons.

"We're living in an environment right now where we have over 600 murdered or missing Indigenous women," Nepinak continued. "We have 10,000 kids in care. We have zero percent of the revenues from the natural resources that are developed in our ancestral lands. We have ongoing issues with residential school legacy. We have ongoing issues with access

to records about unmarked graves for our lost children during the residential school era."

"We have a tremendous, tremendous amount of issues that are ongoing and we're no longer going to stand as an oppressed people. To that end, we walked on Parliament Hill on Tuesday," said Nepinak. He spoke about watching others being allowed to enter the building, but the Chiefs were refused entrance, even though they had been invited as guests of Charlie Angus, NDP representative for a northern Ontario riding.

Nepinak said the Chiefs went into the parliamentary building "to peacefully engage with the Prime Minister and key ministers of his government to let him know, to put him on notice that the buck stops here."

Quoting Gandhi, Nepinak

said, "There go my people, I'd better follow them," explaining, "what we're witnessing right now across the land is the resurgence of the grass roots people from our Indigenous communities."

Nepinak was referring to Idle No More, and said Chiefs are standing up to back their people.

During the recent Special Assembly of Chiefs in Gatineau, Quebec, the chiefs unanimously adopted a Statement of Unity, which puts "... the Government of Canada on notice that any further imposition of legislation and/or policies will be met with appropriate measures. We formally call upon our citizens – our men, youth, women, elders, warriors and all other

allies – to unify and support one another during this time of attacks on our governments and nations..."

Four Saskatchewan women are behind Idle No More, and they say legislation like the Jobs and Growth Act threaten treaties and sovereign rights.

The AMC points to a number of pieces of legislation which are being considered. Bill C-45 will make changes to the Fisheries Act, the Navigable Waters Act, and will also change part of the Indian Act.

In addition to the budget bill C-45, there are the following bills: S-212, An Act Providing for the Recognition of Self-Governing First Nations; C-27, First Nations Financial Transparency Act;

S-2, Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests of Rights Act; S-6, First Nations Election Act; S-8, First Nations Drinking Water Act; and C-428, Indian Act Amendment and Replacement Act.

Finally, there is M-386, a motion tabled by Liberal Acting Leader Bob Rae for consultation to take place with First Nations towards the goal of replacing the Indian Act.

Actions for December 10 took place in Toronto; Regina; Calgary; Edmonton; Merritt, B.C.; Piikani, Alberta; Saddle Lake Cree Nation; Saskatoon; Vancouver; Whitehorse; Winnipeg.

There is an action planned for Ottawa on December 21.