Importance of Idle No More

Idle no more is the biggest indigenous movement in Canada. The movement started by four activists; Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon began as a protest of bill C-45 on November 12th, 2012. While Idle no more is a movement to “honour indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water” it expands that and raises the issues of settler colonialism, treaties, and the practices of cultural assimilation. Idle No More grows awareness of why there is a need for Sovereignty. Idle no more is more than a protest but a tool to teach Canada’s history and the history of those from before it was Canada.

Idle No More was introduced in protest of bill C-45 which was introduced by the Harper Government. Bill C-45 would remove protection of forest and waterways. The argument against the bill was that these lands were protected under treaty agreement and that the indigenous people on the land were not given a voice on the implementation. Idle no more brings up the issues of indigenous sovereignty being neglected. Tagen Detchon writes on sovereignty “Sovereignty is the right of political authorities to handle their own decision-making process. Canada’s Indigenous peoples saw themselves as sovereign nations prior to and during contact with European nations, which is particularly notable in terms of Canada’s treaties with the First Nation’s Peoples of Canada. Indigenous peoples view treaties as diplomatic negotiations between sovereign nations”. The key point is that a treaty is between two sovereign nations however though years of settler colonialism and cultural assimilation the voice of the Indigenous has been reduced and neglected. Idle no more works to rebuild the sovereignty of the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Idle No More is a resistance to the cultural assimilation that has taken place. In order to understand the movement’s need for Indigenous sovereignty, it is important to understand the cultural assimilation that took place within Canada. Cultural assimilation as explained by The Canadian Encyclopedia, “As the non-Aboriginal population increased, Aboriginal peoples — mostly First Nations — ceased to be treated as independent nations and were settled on reserves. There, Aboriginal bands were organized under the supervision of Indian Department superintendents or agents. No longer military diplomats, but local managers of reserve land and band affairs, they encouraged Aboriginal people to farm, become self-supporting by non-traditional means and generally live like the surrounding population”. There were many practices of cultural assimilation the greatest and most negatively impactful to Indigenous culture was the implementation of Residential schools. Residential schools took indigenous youth from their families, denied their language, and forced them into a European Christian schooling system. Loss of culture is evident from a forced change to the indigenous way of life and the education being provided and allowed. Idle No More brings awareness to the injustices that the Government of Canada has committed against the Indigenous.

Idle No More is more than a movement to protest a singular Bill. The issues being raised by Idle No More create a need for further understanding. A call to protect Indigenous sovereignty exists because of the treaties confirming that the government once recognized the Indigenous as its own state and therefore needs to continue to do so. The same treaties that protected the land are being ignored to fit the wishes of the government. Idle no more brings awareness to the importance of honouring the treaties and why they exist. The call for sovereignty from Idle No More teaches the history of Canada, the practices of assimilation that took place. As well as the effects of settler colonialism on the Indigenous culture.

Work Cited


