

Activists voice opposition to Bill C-51



By Nate Smelle

Approximately 40 demonstrators gathered in Millennium Park in Bancroft on Saturday, March 14 to stand in solidarity with communities across Canada for an emergency day of action to stop the Harper government's Bill C-51. The legislation has faced much criticism, being compared to former US President George W. Bush's Patriot Act.

Those opposed to Bill C-51 claim the federal government are using the legislation to do more than just fight terrorism. Many say the government is utilizing the Bill to help multinational corporations eliminate any threats to their bottom line by labelling individuals and organizations that speak out against terrorism. Organizer of the protest in the park Zen Trozzi believes Bill C-51 will do more to inspire fear than it will to prevent terrorists.

Indigenous communities, the Muslim community, activist communities are going to be very easily targeted through this new legislation, said Trozzi.

Many First Nations communities across the country have said no to pipeline projects and have formed coalitions to make sure their positions are maintained.

If you take part in trying to stop the pipeline because it is going through an indigenous territory, well suddenly now you are not a protester you are a terrorist, added community activist Rory McRandall.

The federal New Democrats and the Green Party have both come out against the omnibus bill, while the federal Liberals have supported the Conservatives. In a statement regarding the proposed anti-terrorism legislation, Daryl Kramp, MP said he believes the proposed legislation would provide Canada's security and law enforcement agencies with the required tools and flexibility they need to effectively detect and disrupt national security threats before they happen. This increase in power given to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) is also one of the main concerns of those against Bill C-51.

It takes away our right to political protest and it also violates our charter rights because they can now ask us for a warrant that is open-ended, said McRandall.

Once they do that there is no protection, no oversight at all after they get their warrant. Under this new legislation they get their warrant and then they are just gone. They don't have to report back to anybody and they can do as much as they want. It gives them the right to go and violate your charter rights.

Bill C-51 will also enable government agencies like Health Canada and the Canadian Revenue Agency to share information without a warrant if they consider that the information to be a threat to national security. Opponents of Bill C-51 see the legislation's ambiguity around what actually defines a threat to national security as posing a serious threat to our civil liberties.

?There are so many things hidden in this bill,? said Trozzi.

?It's actually expanding the definition of terrorism to basically include anything that activists do. With Bill C-51, us right now, we could be considered terrorists because they could say we are interfering with the country's economic stability. It's a major step towards fascism.?