

Standing Rock Evictions Interview

CrimethInc.

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Since April 2016, protesters have maintained encampments aimed at stopping the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. On February 22nd and 23rd, police evicted the Oceti Sakowin camp. We spoke with a participant in the Water Protector Anti-Repression Crew, who witnessed the camp's eviction, about the past several months of struggle, the current wave of repression against water protectors, and how participants' feelings about leadership and tactics have changed in the course of events.

CrimethInc. Ex-Worker's Collective: So, who are we speaking with and what are you doing up there at Standing Rock?

Water Protector Anti-Repression Crew: I'm a part of the Water Protector Anti-Repression Crew, which is a group of people who have been at the camps at Standing Rock for many months. We work in coordination with the Water Protector Legal Collective and the Freshet Collective helping to coordinate mass defense efforts, but also working on anti-repression education in the camps and elsewhere and then also on broader movement defense development.

CWC: How long has the protest camp been going on, and what are some of the major events that are important to understanding the timeline of the camp?

WPARC: The camp first started at Sacred Stone last April. It's been going on for almost a year. That camp started initially on Ladonna Bravebull Allard's land in April as a small prayer camp and then grew from there, especially over the course of the summer, and expanded into what then became Rosebud Camp. This all was on the reservation side of Standing Rock. Eventually, people crossed over the Cannonball River to the north side, which became the Oceti Sakowin Camp. This is the camp that some people know has been evicted as of yesterday and today, February 22nd and 23rd.

The camps have been going on for quite some time and there's been a lot of different tactics and some people might characterize it as different battles that have occurred over the course of that time, catching and capturing world-wide attention back in September with something that a lot of people refer to as Day of the Dogs where water protectors were attacked by privately hired mercenaries that were hired by the Dakota Access Pipeline to provide security for the pipeline. They used attack dogs to move water protectors off of what Dakota Access Pipeline considered its land along the pipeline route. From September 3rd—that Day of the Dogs—onward, things really escalated in intensity. Then in early October, again things really escalated in intensity where people had established a camp that was called the 1851 Treaty Camp. In camp, people

oftentimes just referred to it as Frontline Camp or North Camp. It was set up in the direct line of the pipeline and it created a shift not only in an assertion of indigenous sovereignty over whether the people of Standing Rock wanted a pipeline built on their land, but also brought into the mix the assertion of treaty rights as well, which is something that hasn't really been seen in the States in the last 30 or 40 years on that level of intensity.

That camp was raided and evicted by North Dakota and other law enforcement brought in from other states on October 27th. People refer to this as the Raid of North Camp or Raid of Frontline Camp. This was a battle that became particularly heated in a literal way. There were burning barricades, there was a very difficult direct confrontation with law enforcement, and there were multiple points of struggle happening at one time. Moving forward into November, there were again some moments that really captured worldwide attention.

On November 20th, there was the Battle of Backwater Bridge which captured, again, worldwide attention from people. Many people probably have memories of Morton County sheriffs utilizing fire hoses against hundreds of water protectors in sub-freezing temperatures. This resulted in over 300 people being medically treated for hypothermia and other injuries from different munitions that law enforcement were using; tear gas, pepper spray, and other types of less-than-lethal bullets.

Also on that night of November 20th was the night that Sophia Wilansky was injured, presumably by a concussion grenade thrown by law enforcement. She nearly lost her arm and will continue to have to have medical treatment and surgeries, probably many surgeries, to regain any use of her arm. Another woman named Suzie was shot in the eye and has lost vision in her eye as a result of the actions of law enforcement on that night. About a week or maybe two weeks later, there was a temporary moment of celebration in the camps where there was initially a denial of the easement to Dakota Access Pipeline that was put out by the Army Corps of Engineers. In that timeline, around December, at the same time that the denial of the easement happened, that was also when we found out that a federal grand jury had been convened. At least one water protector that we know of has been subpoenaed to that grand jury, Steve Martinez, and he has chosen to actively resist cooperating and continues to resist cooperation with the grand jury. There has been quite a lot that's happened since April of last year, when about 20 people started a prayer camp at Sacred Stone. Over the course of almost a year now, almost 10,000 people have come and gone through the camps. It has been a long 10 months or so.

CWC: Wait, I thought the 10,000 number was for the most people that were there at one time

WPARC: I guess that's probably accurate. Around the time of that denial of the easement in early December, there were about 9,000 people in camp at once. Probably the number of people who have come and gone through camp is higher than that, but that is the peak number of how many people were there at one time.

CWC: How has the camp changed and shifted since November? What does it look like now in late February?

WPARC: Things have changed a lot since the end of November. There were some moment of celebration amongst some when the denial of easement came from the Army Corps. And there was also, amongst many people at camp, a sense that this was temporary and unlikely to last. Trump was about to be inaugurated and take office, he had already been quite a proponent of extraction during the lead up to his administration, and he has actually been an investor in the Dakota Access Pipeline himself. On his campaign trail he had spoken about wanting to see the Keystone XL Pipeline go through after that had been shut down by Obama some time back, and

he had spoken about his insistence that Dakota Access Pipeline would be completed. So, even with that denial of the easement, there was tension within the camp that this was something that wouldn't last past January 20th.

The mood in camp has shifted quite a lot. The winter in North Dakota is harsh. At the beginning of December, there were a number of blizzards back to back. It was some of the highest snowfall the state of North Dakota has seen in many years. People in camp have been in survival mode as much as they've been in resistance.

The ways that camp has changed is definitely the numbers grew smaller over the last few months. It's not an easy place to be, and also many people had put in long months at camp and had given up a lot in their personal lives. People left jobs, people left their homes, their families, their relatives, and their communities, to come here and be not only in solidarity with the people of Standing Rock, but also for a lot of indigenous people, saw it as connecting to their own struggles in their own territories at home. People have put quite a lot on the line and it makes sense that people need to return to their own homelands and territories and communities. We say it a lot up here that the frontlines are everywhere, and I think that rings true for a lot of people during this time.

In the sense that people have been in survival mode at camp, people have also never really lost that willingness to continue to fight. There have not been, in the last few months, as intense of battles as there were in the months of September through November. There have been smaller, skirmishes with law enforcement as they started to really push the boundaries and come closer and closer to camp, especially to the big camp on the north side which is on Army Corps land, the Oceti Sakowin Camp.

During this time there were a lot of people who were facing harsh repression from the state. As of today there are almost 800 people who have open cases in the state of North Dakota. There are 6 people currently facing federal felonies and looking at long prison sentences, and there is also this active grand jury that is going on as well. As the numbers grew smaller at the camps, the intense state repression started to fully manifest in the courts.

CWC: Can you describe the current situation of repression, and how this has developed over the course of the encampment?

WPARC: Starting at the beginning of December, we found out about this grand jury that had been convened, investigating the activities of water protectors. As I mentioned before, there's one person, Steve Martinez, who we know has been subpoenaed and is actively resisting and refusing to cooperate with the grand jury. That's been going on since the beginning of December.

Going back to October 27th again, at that Raid of the North Camp, or Battle for Sacred Ground, a woman named Red Fawn Fallis was arrested and initially charged with North Dakota state charges for an attempted murder on a police officer. They said that she had a firearm and that she tried to shoot a police officer during her arrest. At first, it was just the state charges that she had. And then, shortly after that, around a month later, the Feds came in with federal charges against her. The charges against her on the federal level are felon in possession of a weapon, which carries a mandatory minimum of 2 years and up to 5 years. The state of North Dakota never dropped the state charges against her, the attempted murder charges. They're just kind of tabled and in limbo. If things don't work out on the federal level, if they aren't able to get a conviction, her legal representation feels strongly that the state of North Dakota will proceed with the state charges.

Red Fawn had been a large part of the camps and had been a huge helper and member of the community at the camps. It felt like at the time, back in October, that it was a strategic act on the state's end to have that kind of chilling effect. If you're somebody who is integral to support of a movement, then they're going to try to incapacitate you and hopefully frighten others from filling those kinds of roles. About a month ago now, we found out that one person was also being charged with federal charges. His name is Michael Markus, also known as Rattler around camp. He was charged with two federal counts. One, a civil disorder count, and the second, a use of fire in committing a crime. During a very unusual release hearing, where an ATF agent who is part of the ground team here in North Dakota and part of the investigatory body that the Feds have put together looking into the activities of water protectors, we found out during his testimony that there's a pretty massive federal investigation into the activities of water protectors. They seem fairly focused on the happenings on and around October 27th that involved burning barricades. This is what they allege that Michael Markus was a part of. About a week or two later, a previously sealed indictment became unsealed and we found out that Michael Markus has 4 co-defendants whom the state alleges were in a conspiracy of sorts together to use fire in committing a crime. Specifically, that fire was used to impede the movements and actions of law enforcement on that day in their efforts to raid the North Camp.

Shortly after that, it was also made public that the joint terrorism task forces on the ground here in North Dakota as well, were looking into the activities of water activities. Some of our suspicions from the Anti-Repression Crew over the last few months were exactly this. The state of North Dakota is racking up charges, mostly misdemeanors, although there are some felonies that people are facing which carry a maximum of 5 years in prison. We assumed that there was also a larger federal schematic being put together in the background and we found out through Agent Hill from ATF's testimony that that was indeed the case.

Today and yesterday there was an eviction of Oceti Sakowin Camp that had been announced for several weeks by the Army Corps when they approved the easement, ultimately at the urging of the Trump administration. We've also noticed that ATF and FBI were on the scene of the eviction as well. Many other law enforcement agencies were also present, including Homeland Security. Today they had a Border Patrol helicopter doing surveillance over the camps. There's quite an amassing of federal forces here in North Dakota at Standing Rock that seem not only to have the purpose of shutting down this camp, but it also seems to be very intentional as this is not the only pipeline that is being built or is proposed to be built. There are many other pipelines that will be going through many people's territories across North America and across the US. This is a moment where we believe that the Trump administration and federal government want to make a strong statement of zero tolerance around indigenous sovereignty and earth defense.

CWC: What has been going on the past couple of days with the eviction of the Oceti Sakowin Camp?

WPARC: A few weeks ago, when the Army Corps ultimately approved the easement for Dakota Access Pipeline to drill underneath the Missouri River at the Lake Oahe point, they gave a deadline of February 23rd. They actually ended up coming in with a fairly large amassing of law enforcement yesterday on February 22nd. There were about 10 arrests yesterday at the camp. Primarily the people who were arrested yesterday were independent journalists, legal observers, and one water protector, someone who wasn't fulfilling a support or a media role. Yesterday they seemed to really be targeting media in a pretty overt way. Today around 9 am, they came into the big camp, Oceti Sakowin, in a much more militarized fashion. Most people had left Oceti yes-

terday, though there were a few people who had chosen to remain. There were about 20 people at the Cheyenne River Camp within Oceti who had made very clear yesterday and very publicly stated that they would passively resist the eviction. Many of the people at the Cheyenne River Camp are Oglala Lakota and come from the Pine Ridge area. Pine Ridge has a long history of struggle against the State and they also have quite a stake in seeing this pipeline stopped. They are reliant on the water from the Oglala Aquifer which is fed by the Missouri River and is actually Pine Ridge's last opportunity for clean water, as the remaining portion of their water is already contaminated by Uranium mining. Not only do people from Pine Ridge feel very strongly that their water is in danger, but they also feel very strongly about asserting their treaty rights. A big part of their choice in passively resisting the eviction yesterday, was to assert their treaty rights. The land that the Army Corps claims as theirs in that area is unceded treaty land that was never ceded to the federal government nor the state of North Dakota and still belongs to the Great Sioux Nation according to the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868.

There were around 70 other people remaining in Oceti as of the morning. Many of whom, as law enforcement moved in, chose to move south across the Cannonball River which is currently frozen. People were walking across the frozen river to the reservation side, assuming that if they went over to the reservation side it would be a safe place, as there had been no eviction notice given to the camp on the other side of the river at Rosebud where people were fleeing to. But then, in the afternoon the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or BIA, entered into Rosebud Camp and also started arresting people on the Rosebud reservation side as well. There seems to be an attempt at evicting the Rosebud encampment, and there had been an attempt to, in a very sneaky, shady way evict Sacred Stone Camp as well. But Sacred Stone is on land that is privately owned by Ladonna Bravebull Allard and her family. There seems to be a strong collusion between tribal governance at Standing Rock and federal law enforcement and the Trump administration to push out Sacred Stone Camp as well. A few weeks ago, Sacred Stone was served an eviction notice and the tribe asserted that they owned 66% of Ladonna's land, which is untrue. Ladonna, with the help of a legal team, was able to call off that eviction and resist that eviction. But we all assume here on the ground that they will continue to try and find ways to push people off of Ladonna's land at Sacred Stone as well.

CWC: Can you speak to the different elements of leadership within the camp and how that may or may not intersect with collusion with the state?

WPARC: Any time that you get a mass movement together, in my personal experience and in my knowledge of history, there are many forces at play. There is no such thing on the ground as unity. I think this rings true for the struggle at Standing Rock as well. With as many thousands of people who have come to and from this camp, there are people who come for many different reasons. There are definitely NGOs and "movement manager" types that have come to and from camp; but I think the thing that sticks out the most, as far as where some dark kind of collusion with the state or with capital exists, is in tribal governance in this situation in particular. If people know the history of tribal government and how they were set up, these are not the ways in which indigenous communities historically, traditionally governed themselves. This is a colonial model of governance that has been imposed upon indigenous people in North America in the US. As much as people want to say they are here at the camps in solidarity with Standing Rock Sioux reservation, that becomes very blurry. On the ground over the months that these camps have existed, it has become blurry over and over again, including for myself. There was a time back in early December when the Army Corps denied the easement, that Dave Archambault, the tribal

chairman of Standing Rock, came to the camp to announce this and then drove around camp in his pickup truck telling everyone it was time to go home. The tribal government has repeatedly insisted that people need to go home, that this battle is in the courtrooms now, and that the need for the camps is over. That's not how people at the camps feel, and while they wish to be in solidarity with Standing Rock Sioux reservation and the people of Standing Rock, it becomes about being in solidarity with the people and the land and the water, as opposed to being in solidarity with the tribal government.

The history of tribal governments across the US is that they often are in collusion with the federal government and their wishes, or with the wishes of capital. Over and over again on many reservations, you see tribal governments sell out their own people and act against the interests or wishes of people on the rez. This is not an unusual turn of events when it comes to struggles for indigenous sovereignty over their lands and waters, but it is heartbreaking for people to watch. There's also been moments where individual people's desires for how struggle is enacted on a frontline come to a head, where some people have one view of a tactic that might be useful and others have a different view. Many people are familiar with the assertion that this is a prayerful movement, and I think for a lot of people who don't come from indigenous spiritual practice, it can be hard to understand what people here at the camps mean when they say that this is a prayerful movement. For indigenous people, the way it has been explained for me—I'm not native—but the way that I've heard many people talk about it, who are native, is that prayer for them is not something that you do at church. A lot of Christians view prayer as something that you do, and then you brush your teeth and move on with your day. For indigenous people, prayer is something that you enact. To set up a prayer camp in resistance to a pipeline, your prayers are your resistance. And it's your words and your ceremony as much as it's your actions on the frontline. I think that's important for people to take into consideration in this situation. There are differences between indigenous practices and the practices of tribal government or individuals' choices on a frontline and the choices of an NGO that has grants to uphold and that they hope will be renewed in the future.

CWC: While you've been up there, have you seen any shifts in participants' views on tactics as a result of their time being at the camps?

WPARC: I definitely have seen how not just individuals' views about tactics have shifted and changed over their time in camp, but I've also seen how organizations' tactics have changed with their time in camp. An organization called IP3, Indigenous People's Power Project, came to the camps back in September or October. They're a non-profit indigenous organization that provides all types of training. They do a lot of direct action trainings and know your rights trainings across the US in a lot of different territories. Initially when they came to camp, there was a very strong dynamic within the camp of elder leadership and that being very central in indigenous struggles traditionally. But, the way that played out in the camp became very confusing for many people. An action would be occurring, people would be on a frontline, there would be tear gas flying and all of a sudden someone would run up and say, "the elders say that everyone needs to go home, return to the camp!" But it was very unclear who these elders were and where they were to tell us this, and why they had sent this person who is clearly not an elder. Had this person ever spoken to an elder?

It became really confusing on frontlines many times over, especially October through November. This dynamic of the frontline, things are heated, people are battling with the police, and then the elders have called everybody back. What I watched with IP3 was a shift from automatically

telling their folks to come back any time that some random person ran up and said the elders say go home, to then starting to train their people in direct action trainings which they were running every single day at camp for months. They were telling people that when you go out to an action, whether it be an action near the pipeline or an action in town in Mandan or Bismarck, the two big towns about an hour north of where the camps are, that you go out with an objective and you stick to the objective no matter what.

On Thanksgiving Day, or “Thanks-taking,” there was an action at a place called Turtle Island which is a sacred spot for the people of Standing Rock that’s just on the northeast side of the Oceti Camp. There’s a creek called the Cantapeta Creek that is a water barrier between where the camp is and where Turtle Island is. Law enforcement had taken over Turtle Island. To the people of Standing Rock and to indigenous people who were at the camp, it was very offensive to watch law enforcement desecrating this sacred place. There had been many attempts previously in the weeks prior, to retake Turtle Island [with] people building bridges or running boats across. Then on Thanks-taking Day, IP3 helped to organize an action where they successfully built a bridge and got hundreds of people across onto Turtle Island for prayer and ceremony.

The same thing played out again where suddenly people come from nowhere saying, “The elders have called everybody back, we need to go home. This shouldn’t happen, it’s not sanctioned by the elders...” I watched people from IP3 tell the people who had come for this action, “Stay here and finish what you’re here to do. We’re here for prayer and for ceremony, and we’ll complete our prayers and our ceremony before we go home. We go home when our action is done.”

Even with some of these people we may consider more liberal entities, I did see their shift and their change. One of the most dramatic shifts on that front was when Red Warrior Camp established itself at Standing Rock. Along with Red Warrior came a much more direct action approach. Back in September, October early November, a lot of direct actions came through Red Warrior. While some of the more liberal “movement manager” types worked very hard through a gossip campaign to malign Red Warrior within the camps at Standing Rock, it also helped to embolden people from other camps to really step up the kind of actions they were willing to take. Many people have a lot to say about Red Warrior: they’re wild, they are not prayerful, they have no elder leadership. None of those things are true. All of their actions were done with intention and ceremony and prayer, but they really viewed their prayers as action. In speaking with people from Red Warrior Camp, that was clear over and over again. They had their own elders and they knew who their elders were. They are very aware and in relationship with their elders, as traditionally it should be. That kind of model shifted for a lot of people coming through the camps as to what that could look like, what traditional leadership from your elders can look like. But it also really needs to be traditional. It needs to be people you are in relationship with. That started to be modeled in other encampments and groups of people within the larger camp framework.

When people talk about “the camps” at Standing Rock, there’s actually a whole lot of camps. As much as there was Red Warrior Camp, there were like 20 other crews of people that came with their tribe or their community and set up their own camp within the camp and really had their own structure within it and were making decisions within their own smaller encampment. They had their own grandmothers and their own elders they were getting leadership and wisdom from.

CWC: Finally, what are some of your most cherished memories from Standing Rock and the No Dakota Access Pipeline resistance?

WPARC: I'm really glad that you asked this. Today and yesterday have been pretty dark days for people up here, with the eviction of Oceti Sakowin. The visions in our minds from the last two days are burning structures that many of us have spent time building. Many of us spent time in those structures, or for our comrades or loved ones or relatives, those were their homes for many months. It's a good time to remember some of the really beautiful things that have occurred at camp. When I first came to camp I was spending the majority of my time at Red Warrior Camp and living there amongst friends and comrades, some old and some new. There were a lot of times where it was just a mess of children running around camp while grown-ups are scurrying around and doing the work of the day, chopping wood and cooking food.

Some of my favorite memories are that, I'd watch people who are very busy, elders and people who are planning stopping a multi-billion dollar pipeline also take time out of their day to play with little ones who are begging for their attention. There are a lot of really beautiful moments at camp and one thing that I remember someone saying on that note is from Savage Fam, who spent many months at Red Warrior. I remember her saying one night at a concert, "We're not supposed to live this way. We're supposed to be at home in our own territories building up our own people. But we're here and we're fighting." As much as we're not supposed to live this way, we're not supposed to be living in constant struggle and battle, there's something really beautiful about the camps. In some ways, maybe we are supposed to live this way. Not so much living under the sniper scopes and floodlights of Dakota Access Pipeline, but living in real community with one another, where there's plenty of work to do but no one is leaving their children at home to go to a job. Their children are alongside of them while they're doing the work of their day.

Those moments at camp are things that a lot of people will carry with them. I've also seen some incredibly powerful moments of ceremony and prayer. Back in December, there was a Women's March up to where Morton County Sheriff had barricaded off Highway 1806 on the north end of camp. That barricade still remains there, it has been there for many months. When this Women's March happened there was a group of elders, grandmothers at the front and it was hundreds of women behind them, totally silent. All you could hear from the back all the way to the front of the barricade where these grandmothers were facing down snipers and a militarized barricade, were their prayers and their ceremony. It was one of the most beautiful and impactful things I've ever seen. I come from a very different spiritual tradition and practice, but it's maybe the most impactful spiritual practice I've ever seen, in that moment, those particular grandmothers on that frontline. I hope that as much as it has been a dark time these last couple days with the eviction happening and 45 people sitting in jail tonight, I hope people will hold onto all those things they've experienced at camp and that they've returned to their homes and their territories with, and will carry some of those ways that we've kind of all discovered together. Maybe we are meant to live a little bit like this.

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