

Letter from Standing Rock

November 12, 2016

We arrived at the Standing Rock encampment late afternoon on Thursday as the sun was beginning to go down. Driving into the site was truly amazing: it is enormous! It is a village of about 500 (probably more) tents, vans, RVs, etc, some of them huge and housing dozens of people. Lots more people who are participating in the daily activities, as I am, are staying at the Sioux-run Prairie Knights Casino Hotel. The hotel and casino are enormous too. The land defining the reservation is vast and the scenery is beautiful, calm and wide. Thousands of people have participated in the protest since it started in the spring.



The encampment is a united front of all the indigenous tribes plus their allies to stop a proposed 1,200 mile pipeline that will carry fracked oil through indigenous lands, particularly under the Standing Rock Sioux reservation's section of the Missouri River and sacred burial grounds. The Sioux tribe has opposed the project despite requiring their approval according to treaties with the US government—an unfortunately old story of colonial oppression. The protesters are “water protectors” who are defending Mother Earth, their slogan: “Water is life”. They are standing up to the fossil fuel industry for themselves and for the rest of the planet and have been building this encampment for the last year.

Entering the camp, we are warmly welcomed and told “no drugs, no alcohol, no weapons; we are completely non-violent here.” We joined a ceremonial fire circle where drumming, dancing, singing, announcements and information are offered. We learn from one of the leaders that the latest strategy is to 1) advance a law suit to stop the construction of a pipeline, 2) pressure President Obama to enforce his order to halt the construction of the pipeline, 3) stop the Army Corps of Engineers from giving an easement to Energy Transfer Partners Corporation allowing them to build the pipeline, 4) build public awareness (despite the minimal attention it has gotten from the mass media) and pressure so that these other strategies work.

Right now the Army Corps of Engineers has agreed upon a 30-day “cooling off period” but Energy Transfer has announced that it is planning to complete the construction of the pipeline in the next two weeks. The Federal government has ceded policing of the area to local militarized sheriffs who have often been brutal, including over 400 arrests since August, pepper spraying and strong-arming protesters and, at one point, using attack dogs against them. Yesterday's *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* announced that, due to public pressure, they will stop sending sheriffs to the site. The tribal leadership is requesting that all children and women who do not want to be warriors leave the camp by the end of the weekend in case things become more dangerous due to the timelines put out by Energy Transfer. By good fortune, I have a flight out on Monday.

Over the course of the encampment, the tribes have been requesting allies, like me and you, to come to Standing Rock in solidarity, to listen, learn and help spread the word about what is happening. We allies are not here to lead but to follow, not here to teach but to learn. So I write to you in the hopes that I can bring you into the struggle and work with you back home to stop this pipeline and all fossil fuel pipelines, including the AIM Spectra pipeline that is scheduled to go under the Hudson River and right past Indian Point Nuclear Power Station!! The fossil fuel industry is dying, it must end in order to save our planet, but in its death throes may bring us down with it. We need to support infrastructure projects advancing sustainable energy, not build a foundation for our demise.

Once the sun set and the intense autumn prairie cold set in, we walked around the camp as best we could and stopped at one of the many food stations, had a nourishing and warming dinner of beans and cabbage soup. We had lots of conversations with interesting, dedicated people from all over the US. The cook was a student from Sonoma County, CA, studying neuro-prostheses, hoping to be part of discovering ways to regenerate nerve cells in people who suffered paralyzing injuries. A couple of massage therapists from Albuquerque were there in their van offering massages, energized people in the early 30's, dedicated to the work and willing to stay at the camp for as long as possible. A man from Soho told us that Wednesday morning after the election, lots of people were crying, holding each other and talked of keeping up the struggle. At the fire circles, in conversations, people insist that we cannot give up even trying to influence Trump. The leadership called for compassion from Trump and continued work on the movement's part to bring that compassion forward. Whew! A tall order but one to be respected.

Throughout the evening we heard the importance of kindness, of solidarity, of compassion, of a spiritual quest and unity to keep strong. Tomorrow we go to the encampment for the official newcomers orientation. I hope to visit the medical tent, participate in the Labor for Standing Rock activities and work in one of the food service tents. We bought some food, as requested, to share with the water protectors, and will deliver that Friday morning.

I feel so fortunate to be here and to share this experience with my friend, Smita Narula. It is a true privilege to have the time and resources to be here. But it is also a kind of salve for my soul, for me to support one of the most important struggles in the climate fight and indigenous rights fight, particularly after the crushing reality of a Trump presidency. For me personally, I could not have timed it better. I don't feel completely incapacitated. I see that the movement is strong; it has so many interesting and dedicated people from all walks of life. I am proud to be here and to keep learning and organizing.

If you want to begin to join in this struggle go to Food and Water Watch's petition to President Obama and go to the Nov. 15 national day of action at the various Army Corp of Engineer offices, the one in NYC is from 4-6:30 pm, at 26 Federal Plaza in Manhattan. I'll be there and happy to see you. Bring the kids so they can know that the struggle continues. We won't change our path, no matter who is the president of our nation. Don't mourn, organize.

Love and solidarity,

Nancy

Note that there will be an international day of action on November 15:

https://actionnetwork.org/event_campaigns/nov-15-nodapl-day-of-action-at-army-corps-of-engineers