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Treaty No. 1

All treaties are made to last as long as the sun shines, the river flows and the grass grows, so why was Treaty No. 1 broken from the start? “Under international law, a treaty is any legally binding agreement between nations” (*What Is a Treaty?*). In Canada, treaties were agreements between the Government of Canada and Indigenous groups. The numbered treaties in Canada include the eleven treaties made between groups of indigenous peoples and the crown and the government of Canada (The Canadian Encyclopedia). The land of Treaty 1 territory includes the land of Winnipeg that we live on but there is a lot of history behind how that land became what it is today. The spirit and intent of Treaty No. 1 was not properly fulfilled by the government.

Treaty No. 1 was the first to be signed of the eleven treaties and was signed on August 3rd, 1871, at Lower Fort Garry. The treaty was signed between the Crown and the Anishinaabe and Muskegon Cree peoples. Treaty No. 1 is composed of seven First Nations, Peguis First Nation, Sagkeeng First Nation, Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation, Long Plain First Nation, Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation, and Swan Lake First Nation (Parks Canada). The government would sign treaties with indigenous people to be able to have their land (The Canadian Encyclopedia).

Treaty No. 1 guaranteed certain treaty rights, and promises were made to the indigenous groups who signed the treaty. One big promise was regarding reserve land for the exclusive use of indigenous people. Treaty No. 1 promised there would be fixed amount of reserve land for each

band of one hundred sixty acres of reserve lands per family of five. Though the land would change proportionately if the family was larger or bigger. This was an agreement between the Crown and the indigenous groups apart of the treaty that promised they would have allotted land solely for their use to continue their way of life undisturbed. Another agreement which was promised in Treaty No. 1 was treaty annuity which are fixed sum of money the government pays to indigenous people. Any indigenous man, woman and child receives treaty annuity of three dollars in Canadian currency. One major promise made in Treaty No. 1 was about schooling for indigenous children. It was promised that there would be schools maintained on each reserve. This was a notable promise that was broken shortly later on, as a key agreement apart of Treaty No. 1 was that schools would be located on reserves meaning children would be able to stay with their families and involved with their culture, language and way of life. Lastly, it was promised that inside the reserves, no intoxicating liquor would be allowed inside or sold inside. Also, that this condition would be strictly and properly carried out (Government of Canada, Treaty Texts – Treaties No. 1 and No. 2). These were the agreements and promises made to the indigenous groups apart of Treaty No. 1 in return of them yielding their traditional lands to the Crown and the government.

Treaty No. 1 also had unwritten verbal agreements and promises that were not in the official document but were promised to those indigenous peoples. These other terms apart of the treaty may be called outside promises. The official written text did not include the agreements about supplying clothing, agricultural tools and equipment such as plows, harrows and buggies, and animals such as bulls, cows and boars. Although those were all apart of the promises and negotiations associated with the treaty (Albers).

One major promise that was broken from Treaty No. 1 was the agreement for schools to be located on reserves. During the signing of the treaty and negotiations, access to schools located on

the reserves were included as apart of the agreement. During the negotiations, indigenous peoples wanted schools as they wanted their children to be educated. They were under the impression that their children would be receiving a proper education while on the reserve with their families, but this was one of the many broken promises. It's now known that from the very beginning the intention of residential schools were to assimilate indigenous children into Canadian society. Majority of the schools were not located on reserves like promised and this was intentionally done for children to lose their language, culture, religion, and way of life, and be disconnected from their family and community (Grusko).

Another major part about the agreements in Treaty No. 1 were the reserves. Treaty No. 1 included there being a fixed amount of reserve land for each band of one hundred sixty acres of reserve lands per family of five, with the land changing proportionately if the family was larger or bigger (Government of Canada, Treaty Texts – Treaties No. 1 and No. 2). The main point to understand from this promise is the intention behind treaty. Indigenous people had the thought that this would be a way to share the land and an agreement made with mutual respect for each other. But across Canada after the Indian Act came into power, Indigenous peoples slowly lost the way of life and livelihood they were promised from the treaty. Many indigenous peoples across Canada were relocated from the traditional lands they resided on and often these lands were less valuable and hard to farm on, while their traditional lands were given to settlers to farm and profit from (Grusko). Although the treaty was supposed to guarantee indigenous peoples land, what was expected didn't follow through after the Indian Act was implemented. A part of the Indian Act was “The Indian Act governs all reserves in Canada. The Act outlines that First Nations peoples cannot own title to land on reserve, and the Crown can use reserve land for any reason” (Indigenous

Awareness Canada). Indigenous peoples were moved from their traditional lands and later when the Indian Act was implemented, they weren't even allowed to leave the reserves with approval.

All the changes drastically impacted their lifestyle and their ability to provide for themselves. Their lifestyle, freedom and way of life being taken away from them was not at all apart of the negotiations of the treaty. One problem is that reserves were funded by the government for indigenous people, but there are many reserves that do not receive adequate funding and do not have adequate living conditions. Living conditions vary on reserves across Canada, although many to this day do not have adequate housing, clean water and many have high poverty rates (Joseph). All of these conditions and issues were not apart of the original negotiations and verbal promises of reserves and land during the making of the treaty. The main point to gather is, during negotiations of the treaty and land agreements, indigenous people had an expectation of what would happen to their people, but these were not all fulfilled including reserves and the land and lifestyle promised to them. Schools, reserves, and land were some of the major parts of the broken promises from the treaty. Although there were other occurrences of the government not following through with agreements of other various resources as well.

Although certain aspects of the negotiations weren't written down and documented, agreements and promises were made so indigenous people signing Treaty No. 1 had an impression of what would be happening to their communities, while the government had different intentions. The Crown and government deliberately hid their real agenda to colonize and control versus sharing and the two cultures coexisting together. This could be considered as Treaty No. 1 being broken as although indigenous people technically agreed to the treaty, the real spirit and intent was not kept (Grusko). Although indigenous peoples did yield their land to the Crown when agreeing with the treaty, they had the impression that they would be sharing their land and get to continue

their way of life while living in peace with settlers. Although this is not what happened of course, and the government sought to control and own the land instead. Indigenous people were given the least profitable lands that were useless for farming and were moved away from their traditional hunting grounds (Wilson). The takeaway to understand is “had the true promises, spirit and intent of Treaty 1 been fully implemented, First Nations peoples would have been empowered, through their right-to-livelihood, to attend well-funded schools, receive state of the art health care and work in well-paying jobs” (Treaty One). The original intention and trust in the treaty was broken.

The government did not carry out the true spirit and intent of the agreements and negotiations from Treaty No. 1. Treaty No. 1 included many agreements and promises for indigenous people although not all of them were properly fulfilled like promised. Many harmful impacts have come from these broken promises to indigenous people and have impacted many parts of their lifestyle, health, culture, living conditions and livelihood as well. Overall, the main takeaway from this is for all of us to be knowledgeable and aware of the history of the land we live on.

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