



Direct Action



Definitions of direct action:

action that seeks to achieve an end directly and by the most immediately effective means (such as a boycott or strike)

the use of strikes, demonstrations, or other public forms of protest rather than negotiation to achieve one's demands.

any action seeking to achieve an immediate or direct result, especially an action against an established authority or powerful institution, as a strike or picketing.

Is there an issue in applying these definitions in relation to the actions of Indigenous peoples defending their lands and laws? Protesters or Land Defenders? Is there a difference?

"Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored."

(Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail)

Is Direct Action illegal? According to whom?

- Direct Action is often used to change the overarching laws that are viewed as unjust.
 - Ex: the Civil Rights movement, Labour Laws
- While Direct Action may be considered illegal at the time or a deviation from social norms, those engaging in the Direct Action may be adhering to different morals, beliefs, or laws that may change the status quo and the overarching laws and/or social norms in the future.
 - Ex: Four black students sitting at a white lunch counter in North Carolina in 1960 was illegal because of the colour of their skin, but sparked other sit ins, discussions, and change across the United States.
- When Indigenous peoples use Direct Action, they are often following their own legal traditions that are not recognized by the overarching state.
 - Ex: The Unist'ot'en resistance has sparked Indigenous (and ally) resistance across Canada and has forced Indigenous nations, the Canadian state, and individual Canadians into discussions around traditional Indigenous governance and laws on Indigenous lands and where this fits (or doesn't fit) in the colonial legal framework.

The rule of law

- The question of what laws govern everyone in Canada is very complex. However, it is clear that both Indigenous laws and colonial laws are included in Canada's rule of law, albeit to differing extents.
- Indigenous nations have asserted their rights and title through legal action and have entrenched their rights in Canadian common law and legislation.
- However, Indigenous peoples still find themselves needing to assert their laws on their territories when they are not being followed by the Canadian state because there are issues with paramountcy or “reconciliation” of these legal orders.
- Further, the rule of law in Canada has been used to colonize Indigenous peoples. For example, the Indian Act imposed a new governance system onto Indigenous nations. This legacy further complicates the question of who has authority over land decisions in Canada.

Direct Action by Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change

- The Direct Action on the part of Indigenous peoples plays a key role in protecting landscape, forests, and habitat.
- A recent UBC-led study analyzed land and species data from Australia, Brazil, and Canada and found that lands managed or co-managed by Indigenous peoples had the highest bio-diversity.
- Indigenous peoples possess traditional knowledge and witness first hand the effects of climate change on their lands.
- Because of their close relationship to the land and their reliance on it, climate change impacts Indigenous peoples in a very real and immediate way.
- Often the worldview of Indigenous peoples is directly tied to the land:
 - “Our people’s belief is that we are part of the land. The land is not separate from us. The land sustains us. And if we don’t take care of her, she won’t be able to sustain us, and we as a generation of people will die.” – Freda Huson, Unist’ot’en Hereditary Spokesperson
 - "It is our belief that the future of the Gwich'in and the future of the Caribou are the same. Harm to the Porcupine Caribou Herd is harm to the Gwich'in culture and millennia-old way of life."
 - — Jonathon Solomon



Indigenous youth demonstrating at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 25) in December 2019 asking Alberta and Canada to reject an application from Teck Resources for a new oil sands mine. Teck has since withdrawn its application.

Political Action





Definition of political action:

action designed to attain a purpose by the use of political power or by activity in political channels.

specifically : such action by organized labor through recognized political means (as participation in party organization, in elections, and by lobbying) —contrasted with direct action.

Gwich'in leaders testifying before a U.S. congressional subcommittee in 2019.

Political Action

- Indigenous peoples in Canada and the world have political power to yield in addressing climate change.

One example:

- In Yukon, the Vuntut Gwitchin declared a Climate Emergency in May 2019.
- Last month, Yukon First Nations signed a declaration stating that climate change requires immediate action.
- Declarations such as these can lay the foundation for those in power to make decisions and legislate in a way that addresses climate change at every level.

The Gwich'in Nation, Climate Change, and the protection of the Sacred Place Where Life Begins

A large herd of reindeer is running across a field. The reindeer are in various stages of movement, some running towards the camera and others away. The field is a mix of brown and green, suggesting a natural, open landscape. The sky is a pale, overcast blue.

Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm