

# The Dominion

dominion, *n.* 1. Control or the exercise of control. 2. A territory or sphere of influence; a realm. 3. One of the self-governing nations within the British Commonwealth.

CANADA'S GRASSROOTS NATIONAL NEWSPAPER • MARCH, 2004 • DOMINIONPAPER.CA • Vol. I, #16

## Guantanamo Prisoner Describes "Torture"

Jamal al-Harith, a British citizen who was held for over two years without charge by the American military was recently released and returned to England.

Upon his return home from "Camp X-ray" on the US military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, he described the conditions of life in the facility to the British press.

Al-Harith said that prisoners were kept in small wire cages, exposed to the weather and to snakes, insects, and scorpions on the ground. The former prisoner described brutal treatment such as frequent beatings for minor offenses, torture, and systematic humiliation. He cited specific instances where devout Muslims were forced to watch female strippers, and prisoners were told "we will kill your family and you."

US foreign secretary Jack Straw explained that there was "good reason" for detaining the suspects. When asked if any of those held were innocent, he replied, "I can't answer that question, nobody can." (*Telegraph*)

## Iraq is "One Big Guantanamo"

Over 10,000 Iraqi men and boys are being held without charge by the US military in Iraq, according to a recent *New York Times* report. The prisoners, who have been captured by the military, are in most cases not allowed contact with the outside world, including their



**Scientists hold two Giant Pacific Crabs. Introduced by the Soviets Union in the 1950s, the versatile species has multiplied rapidly, and the growing population is moving south along the Norwegian coast.**

families.

"It took the Americans five minutes to take my son," said Fadil Abdulhamid. "It has taken me more than three weeks to find him." Human rights lawyer Adil Allami commented that "Iraq has turned into one big Guantanamo," explaining that the prisoners, who are as young as 11 and as old as 75, have "essentially no rights." (*NY Times*)

## US Government Provided Funding to Opposition in Haiti, Venezuela

According to documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, the US government provided over a million dollars in funding to the Venezuelan opponents of President Hugo Chavez in 2002. The funds were channeled through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a non-profit agency with a congressional mandate to "encourage democracy."

Among the groups receiving funding are those collecting signatures for a referendum on Hugo Chavez's presidency and the people who unseated the president in a short-lived coup two years ago.

The NED also provided funds to opposition groups in Haiti opposed to the recently-deposed president Aristide. Critics have claimed that the funding, along with a major aid embargo, was part of a successful attempt to systematically destabilize the country. (*Independent*)

## Haitian Mayor: "Hundreds Killed Every Day"

The 28-year-old former mayor of Milo, a town of 50,000 in northern Haiti, told reporters that the formerly disbanded Haitian military is now killing hundreds of people. Jean Charles Moise, who is now in hiding, said that "the journalists are in Port-au-Prince, but here in the north no one is

reporting what's going on, that the former Haitian military is killing people. They are killing about 50 people a day in Cap Haitien."

Moise also said the former army has been equipped with sophisticated weaponry, including helicopters and planes, and asked reporters to find out where it was coming from. He said that the army, which killed thousands of Haitian dissidents during the US-supported Duvalier dictatorships, was traditionally used to oppress the poor of Haiti before it was disbanded by President Aristide in 1994.

Moise also drew attention to the achievements of Haiti's democratic government, and asked why the US chose to destabilize the country with an aid embargo.

"One has to ask, why is all of this happening? Is this because we used to have only 10 public high schools but now we have over 150?" (*Pacific News Service*)

## "Stalin's Last Army" Advancing on Europe

The Norwegian government is concerned that a population of giant crabs is moving south from the Arctic, fueled by explosive population growth and a lack of natural predators.

Known as "Giant Pacific Crabs", the species were introduced to the arctic region by Joseph Stalin's Soviet government in the 1950's. Scientists say the species has a remarkable ability to adapt to new conditions, and could reach as far south as the Mediterranean in the coming decades. (*Telegraph*)

## UN Recommends Reparations for Africville Residents

The fight for compensation for former residents of Africville received a boost when a United Nations report urged Canada to consider paying reparations.

Located in north Halifax, Africville was home to about 400 black Nova Scotians until it was razed by the city starting in 1964.

First a settlement for black Americans who fled the United States during the war of 1812, Africville existed as a community starting in the 1850s. Though the residents paid taxes, the city of Halifax provided no services, and residents were left to make do with what was available. This set the stage for the city's relocation program in 1964, which was initiated on the basis of the alleged poor sanitation in Africville. Most families were paid around \$500 in compensation.

Many historians cite evidence that the city used the humanitarian justification as an excuse to appropriate what was then seen as an ideal area for industrial development. Africville residents were not consulted in the formulation of the relocation program. Despite the trying conditions, many surviving Africville residents have recalled the community with some fondness, citing the strong community and independence.

Efforts by the Africville Genealogy Society to gain compensation for the families of Africville residents has, to date, not been fruitful.

## Five Arrested for Protesting Cuts to BC Women's Centres

Five representatives from the British Columbia Coalition of Women's Centres were arrested last weekend after refusing to leave an office in the



**Before:** Africville circa 1984; the community was denied basic sanitation and water services by the city of Halifax.



**After:** Years after the village was demolished and the land appropriated by the city of Halifax, the only remnant of Africville is a small monument.

province's legislature.

Prior to the refusal to leave, the representatives had a meeting with Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services Ida Chong concerning the Liberal government's cuts to the province's women's centres.

According to the Lower Mainland Coalition for Social Justice, 100 per cent of core funding to BC's 37 Women's Centres will be cut as of March 31, 2004, resulting in widespread closures.

The representatives had two main requests during the meeting with Chong. First, they wanted a commitment to re-open the agreement between the government and the centres, thereby continuing the funding. Secondly, they wanted

to arrange an emergency meeting with Finance Minister Gary Collins before the end of March to discuss the issue. The representatives refused to leave the Legislature until Chong came back to the table to have an "open and honest discussion about the realities for women in BC."

The funding that will be ceased has provided crisis intervention, as well as referral and emergency response services. The coalition warns that cutting the funding will continue the BC Liberal government's trend of subjecting women to "starvation, harassment, violence, homelessness, addiction, unemployment, loss of their children, and isolation, with no legal aid and nowhere to turn."

(Lower Mainland Coalition for Social Justice)

## Stronger Whistleblower Protection Needed: PSAC

The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) is worried that the Liberal government's new bill for "whistleblowers" is not extensive enough to provide the proper protection and recourse for those who choose to bring relevant issues forward. PSAC says it has been advocating for whistleblower protection for more than 20 years.

PSAC says that for whistleblower protection to be effective, it must meet several criteria. It must allow for a person to confidentially report any suspected wrongdoing to a responsible third party outside formal departmental structures and the allegations must be investigated by an independent agency, providing anonymity to the whistleblower whenever possible. If an allegation turns out to be wrong or there is not enough evidence, no penalties should be imposed on the whistleblower so that others will not be discouraged. Recourse must be provided throughout the procedure, and the entire set of rules must be applied to the entire public sector.

"We also want a cultural change in government where it is possible to question the motives and actions of the higher-ups without recrimination," says PSAC national president, Nycole Turmel. He also says that the government is refusing to agree to PSAC's suggestions and it is not offering any other solutions, even in light of the ongoing media and public scrutiny.

"When the sponsorship scandal broke I thought the government was serious, but with each passing day, their actions say otherwise," he said. (Public Service Alliance of Canada)

# Venezuela's Political Battle Back in the Spotlight

by David Fuenmayor

CARACAS — Political struggle has been the day-to-day reality for Venezuelans in the last year or so. The country is polarized and the vehemence of the two opposing factions is greater than ever. A large part of the population now stands in the middle, disillusioned with both Chavez and those who oppose him. The opposition is playing their last card to oust him.

On March 2 the National Electoral Council (CNE) declared that 1,832,493 signatures had been approved and another 876,017 needed verification. These signatures were collected by the opposition in support of a referendum on Chavez's presidency. The opposition has used different measures to attempt to overthrow Chavez in the past. In April 2002 they attempted a coup d'état; later on in December they managed to stop the oil industry, the pillar of Venezuela's economy, for several months. Economists have predicted it would take years to recover what was lost during those months. The opposition has placed all their hopes on the possibility of revoking the Chavez government using the referendum, a tool Chavez himself introduced.

The CNE declared that a corroboration process would be carried out in the following days to prove the legality of the 800,000 signatures that have not yet been recognized. The minimum number necessary to call a referendum is 2.4 million, which represents approximately 20 percent of the Venezuelan electorate. Initially reluctant to accept the CNE decision, the opposition resorted to violent protests to express their disagreement. The riots that lasted for at least five days left 9 dead and many wounded. Both sides suffered losses during the dem-



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez surveys a crowd demonstrating in support of his presidency. Many signs denounced US meddling in Venezuelan democracy. *Indymedia Bolivia*

onstrations and several members of the National Guard and policemen were wounded.

The authenticity of 876,017 signatures was called into question due to similar handwriting used to enter large numbers of signatures. This, despite numerous clarifications from the CNE stating that everyone had to fill in forms in their own handwriting, with the only exception being the illiterate or handicapped. In Venezuela, 91.1 percent of the total population over the age of 15 are literate.

This is the first referendum of this nature in the democratic history of Venezuela, and the first of its kind for the whole Latin American region. That explains some of the flaws in the process and the need for thorough revision of signatures before giving a final result.

If all of the signatures collected by the opposition are validated, they will add up to 2.6 million, a fraction of the 11 million Venezuelan voters. It is said that abstention at the polls is on the rise. However, even assuming that 50 percent of the voters refrain from voting, the opposition could still be far away from winning against Chavez. The Constitution states that in order to revoke Chavez's presidency his rivals would

need to get at least as many votes as the president received in the 2000 election, i.e. 3.76 million votes.

Further more, the opposition is a conglomerate of different parties that before Chavez came to power were always disputing supremacy. The unity among these parties is only a fragile one, a unity that will be broken if they manage to vote Chavez out. A separation of the opposition will make it even harder for them to win against Chavez, who is still quite popular, especially among the poor.

Some hold the theory that the opposition had already done this math and seeing the improbability of defeating Chavez in a referendum tried to resemble Haiti's situation hoping for an international intervention. US administration has kept a hostile stand toward the Chavez government, partly motivated by Chavez's defiance of US plans in the Americas. During the Summit of the Americas held in Monterey, Chavez along with Argentina's Kirchner and Brazil's Lula rejected the American-proposed free trade agreement. Recently, Chavez has been increasingly adamant in his accusations of US intervention in Venezuela. Meanwhile, spokesmen from

the opposition have appealed for a foreign intervention.

After Colin Powell invited the opposition to submit to the reparation of the signatures, there was a sudden decline in anti-Chavez demonstrations.

Venezuela's commercial newspapers and TV companies openly support actions against the president and have called for violence in pursuit of their interests. The international media coverage has been rather poor. It appears that the international media base

*Continues on page 8 »*

In memory of  
Tooker Gomberg, 1956-2004

~ ISSN 1710-0283 ~

[www.dominionpaper.ca](http://www.dominionpaper.ca)

2466 Robie St. #1, Halifax NS  
B3K 4N1 ¶ (902) 425-9888

*The Dominion* is a not for profit free newspaper covering topics of interest to Canadians. We aim to provide a counterpoint to the mainstream papers, direct attention to independent journalism, and establish a venue where alternative forms of journalism can be practiced.

*The Dominion* is published every three weeks and in print and on the web.

## Coordinating Editor

Dru Oja Jay

## Arts Editors

Max Liboiron

Jane Henderson

## Canadian News Editor

Mark Parker

## Environment Editor

Hillary Lindsay

## Copy Editors

Amanda Janes

Mark Parker

Sean Patrick Sullivan

**Accounts highlights the work of independent journalists from around the world.**

*Send feedback or suggestions to [dru@dominionpaper.ca](mailto:dru@dominionpaper.ca)*

# Is “Fighting to Win” a Criminal Act?

OCAP’s John Clarke on the “Queen’s Park Riot” and the changing rules of class warfare

*John Clarke is an organizer with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) in Toronto. The following is an edited transcript of a talk John gave at a public discussion on the criminalization of dissent in Halifax, NS on December 16, 2003. A full transcript and audio recording are available at DominionPaper.ca.*

I’d like to bring a message of solidarity from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty to this meeting, but more importantly to everyone here in this city who is facing harassment and intimidation because they stand up for what is just, and what is fair.

On June 15th, 2000, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty organized a march for homeless people and allies on the Ontario Legislature, and we faced criminal charges as a result. In Halifax, it was a protest against the G7.

If we’re talking about the criminalization of dissent, the first thing that must occur to us when we look at those kinds of examples is that we live in an insane world, where people who go out and challenge injustice are the ones who must defend themselves from the charge of being criminals.

When we marched on the Legislature, back in Toronto, we were aware that so far that year, 22 homeless people had died on the streets of Toronto. When it comes to the crimes of the G7, even the known ones would fill volumes. Those that we don’t know about would probably fill volumes more.

To say that anyone who stands up against such acts of theft and murder and violence—and fights back against them—must defend themselves from the charge of being criminal is astounding, and insane.

We should keep that in mind.

It’s important to look at some of the backdrops to the state and legal attacks that are coming down on people today.

The first and most important one—and it plays out everywhere—is what is sometimes called the neoliberal agenda. A decision has been made in the corporate boardrooms (and correspondingly, in the legislatures and parliaments) to completely change the rules of the game. To take back all barriers that stand in the way of the enrichment of the few at the expense of the many, and to remove all previous social entitlement—all regulations that limited the banditry of multinational corporations.

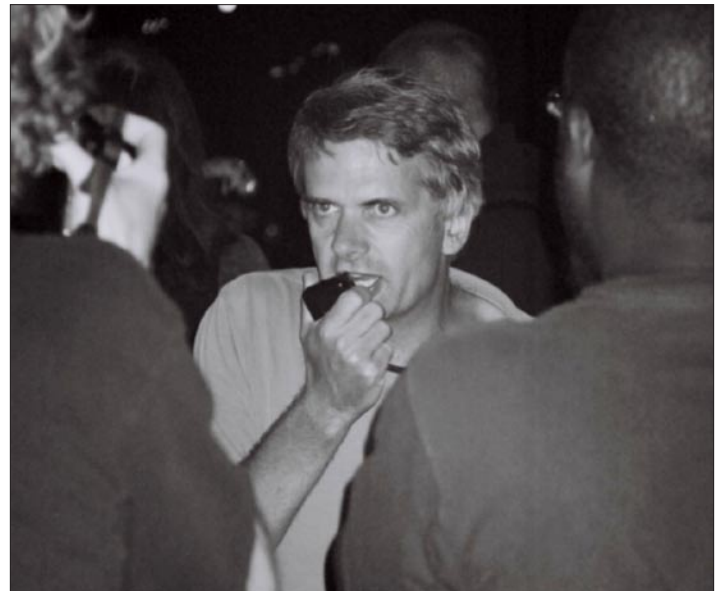
That is the agenda that is unfolding. As it unfolds, and as populations start to feel a sense of grievance, and start to resist those changes—whether it be fishers in PEI or people in any Canadian city—when people stand up against that agenda, increasingly the response of the state is to say that “we are not going to make concessions; we are not going to provide social provision; we are not going to provide health care and social programs. Our solution to your grievance is going to literally be the policeman’s billy club.” And the jail cells, and the courts.

That is the backdrop to this whole situation.

We went through a long period in history after the second world war—especially in the privileged parts of the world—when concessions were being made. When living standards were improving, when social programs were being introduced, when the succeeding generation had a realistic expectation that they were going to do better than their parents had done in their living standards and their future.

And that has come to an end.

That period of tactical con-



**John Clarke at an OCAP demonstration. Clarke is one of OCAP’s two paid organizers. OCAP**

cessions, sometimes referred to as the post-war settlement, has been replaced by its complete opposite. During that period of relative social compromise, the reality was that social resistance became more constrained, more limited... less explosive, and more ready to settle for compromise, because concessions were being provided.

The difficulty we have today is that the other side has unilaterally revoked the deal, but many on our side are still playing by the rules of that dead deal, of that exhausted compromise.

And so we have to grapple with the question of how we can, as we say in OCAP, fight to win. That question of how we deal with resisting—of how we take up an effective resistance—is an absolutely decisive one.

At an earlier period in history, people didn’t believe that the notion of resistance was raising a futile moral protest in the hope that the governments were listening. Because the governments of those days certainly weren’t listening.

They weren’t interested in moral protest. In order to win

things, you actually had to build a movement, a social movement that would be strong enough and powerful enough to actually achieve things. That’s how the trade unions were built. That’s how people in the 1930s were able to organize for their survival in the face of the great depression.

In 1929, when a delegation of the unemployed was allowed to meet with the Prime Minister of the day, R.B. Bennett, they suggested to him that the government should introduce unemployment insurance for unemployed people, which at that time made up a huge chunk of the population.

Bennett’s response was: “Never will I, or any government I’m part of, put a premium on idleness.” And yet, in 1935, Bennett tabled a bill for the introduction of unemployment insurance... just before he was voted out of office.

And today, I think what is happening is that people are beginning to realize that we cannot go on playing by the rules of a dead deal. We cannot go on resisting on the basis of hope that those in the parlia-

ment buildings are listening to us because we make a compelling moral argument.

During the days of the protest movement against Mike Harris, I was always enormously irritated when I heard people make the comment: "Mike Harris, I hope you're listening." Believe me, Mike Harris was not listening.

But he could have been

## "2,000 people per month are being evicted in Toronto"

made to listen.

But to do that, you had to speak his language. It's no good speaking to him in the language of reason and moderation and compassion; you have to speak in a language that he's going to understand.

And so, throughout the world today, you're starting to see people organizing to fight back in a way that really makes a difference. It's in what is sometimes called the South, in the historically oppressed countries, where you see the most compelling examples.

A couple of weeks ago in Toronto, we were enormously pleased that Joao Pedro Stedile, one of the leading figures of the landless peasant movement in Brazil, came to Toronto and gave a talk on the struggles of his organization. In countries like that, you're seeing people organize resistance that isn't based on the possibility of a good sound bite on the six o'clock news, or putting forward an argument that will be compelling and interesting to the people in power.

People are actually organizing to take what they need, and to make a difference in their lives. I think we need to start looking at those kinds of examples ourselves.

At OCAP, a small poor people's organization based largely in the city of Toronto, we've tried to put into effect the same kind of notion: that it is today absolutely imperative, if we are going to organize an effective

resistance, to proceed on the basis of fighting to win.

We live in a very large city where there is an enormous amount of homelessness, and an enormous amount of poverty, and where each and every day, there are rampant injustices going on. People are denied welfare, people face deportation from the country, people are being evicted from their housing—some 2,000 people per month are being evicted in Toronto at the moment.

We try to organize on a case by case basis to fight back against those things. So we've organized something that we call "direct action casework". It doesn't usually mean going to tribunals and speaking to adjudicators, it means bringing fifty people to a welfare office to ensure that a family gets the cheque that they're entitled to. It may involve going to Pearson Airport to try to prevent a deportation from happening. We've done that successfully on a couple of occasions.

On one occasion, it involved going to a Shell gas station that was refusing to pay wages owed to an employee who had been laid off, and putting up a picket line to prevent them from pumping any gas for a couple of hours. This had an enormous impact in creating social conscience on the part of the employer.

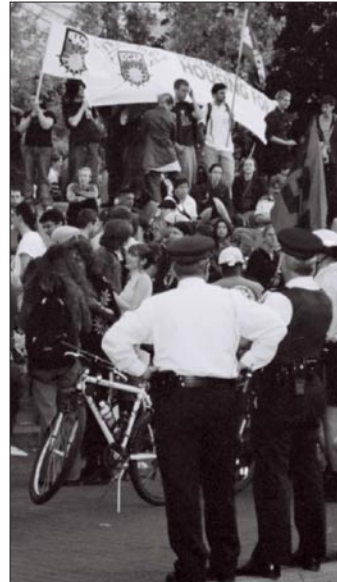
We organize these kinds of actions all the time; we intervene in hundreds and hundreds of situations.

The one action that seems to have offended the powers that be, perhaps more than any other, was the event on June 15th.

On that day, we brought around 1,500 people to the Ontario Legislature. A great percentage of the crowd was made up of homeless people. We didn't want to do what most people do when they go to Queen's Park, which is make 78 speeches and then leave. We wanted to do something that would be more challenging to the government. Something that could actually have the

potential to force them to show a mark of respect to people who really were what you might describe as "despised collateral damage", homeless people. We therefore went to the legislature with a simple demand: that a delegation of people affected by homelessness be allowed to address the legislature.

We're not, I confess, experienced Parliamentarians, and



**Police watch a feast for homeless people organized by OCAP in Yorkville, a posh Toronto shopping district. OCAP**

we were told, in the words of the speaker's executive assistant, that "it would be outside the Westminster Model of parliament" for such a thing to occur. We knew that Hillary Westin, the lieutenant-governor, gets to yammer on in front of the legislature all the time, and we knew that visiting dignitaries get to do it, so it seemed to us entirely reasonable that homeless people should be allowed to speak to people who were in many ways the direct architects of their misery.

We also anticipated that it was likely that they would take a different view. We were aware that we would be blocked, and we were ready to press the demand and hope that we might broker a deal—that we might be given the opportunity to meet with the Premier, to meet with senior cabinet min-

isters, whatever.

But they chose a course that we were astounded by. They moved to clear the grounds of the legislature. They rode horses into the crowd, and they began what the riot police refer to in their technical terminology as "punch outs"—that is, full speed baton charges into the crowd. And when the head of the riot squad was asked in

"It seemed to us entirely reasonable that homeless people should be allowed to speak to people who were in many ways the direct architects of their misery."

court, "I take it, sir, that your officers are trained to hit with these large clubs as hard as is necessary," he said: "No, they are trained to hit *as hard as they possibly can.*"

So when this happened, I imagine they anticipated there would be a rout—people would flee the grounds. What actually happened is that there was a battle. People stood their ground and people fought back. It wasn't organized, it wasn't planned that there would be a confrontation, but once they began the confrontation, there is no question that the people we brought to Queen's Park did not turn their backs.

Now, at the end of this, they began a process of demonization *and* criminalization. The event was portrayed in the mainstream media as the most evil thing that had ever occurred in the history of the planet... I'm only slightly exaggerating.

As well, they went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to win the right to all the media tapes and photographs of the day. They ended up arresting 45 people, and charging some of them with quite serious things. Between

*continued on page 8 »*

# A New Era in Conservation

## The Canadian Boreal Forest Initiative

by Yuill Herbert

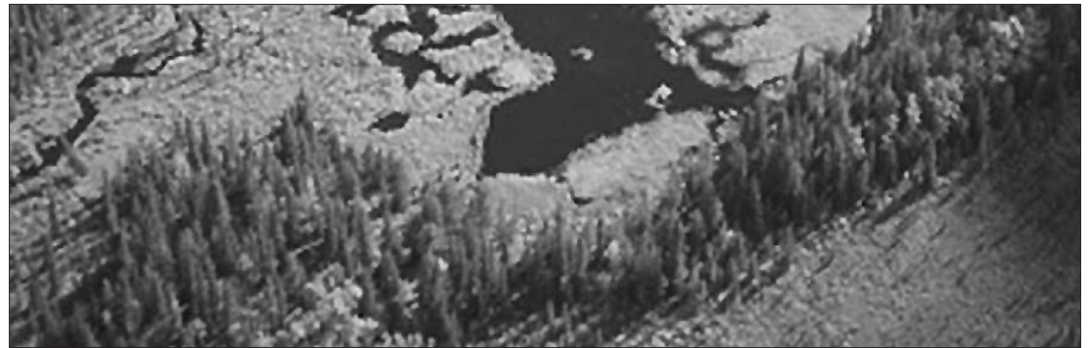
The Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI), launched at the end of last year, is a common vision for the largest conservation agreement in the world. It proposes a plan to protect approximately 265 million hectares of forest and to manage a further area of equal size according to stringent ecological standards of development.

"We have a unique opportunity to pursue a balanced vision to conserve the entire Canadian boreal region, while providing for extensive economic benefits," explained CBI's Director, Cathy Wilkinson.

Stretching across most of northern Canada, the boreal forest is the largest intact forest ecosystem in the world.

The vision is powerful due to its unusual mix of proponents, representing cooperation on an unprecedented scale. The Boreal Leadership Council, the spearheading committee of the initiative, is a mix of industry, environmental and First Nations organizations, including representatives of some of the most significant political and economic interests in the boreal region. The World Wildlife Fund, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Forest Ethics and Ducks Unlimited Canada are the environmental groups involved. The Deh Cho First Nations, the Innu Nation and Poplar River First Nation are also at the table. Most intriguing are the industry representatives, including forestry companies Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries, Tembec Inc, Domtar Inc and Suncor Inc.

"We know that it is crucial for the Canadian boreal region to be managed in a responsible way if we want future generations to benefit from its economic, environmental, and social value," said Raymond Royer, president and chief executive officer of forestry company



Canada's Boreal Forest is the largest intact forest ecosystem in the world.

Domtar Inc. Royer believes that Domtar's involvement in CBI does not only demonstrate good corporate citizenship, but also good business.

"It will allow us to better understand stakeholder concerns," he explained, "which will in turn improve our planning for future fiber supply."

The economic value of the boreal is rivaled only by its ecological significance. Globally, the boreal forest is of vital importance. A 2001 report by the United Nations Environment Program called on Canada and a handful of other countries to take immediate steps to protect the remaining large swaths of untouched forest. It found that just 21 per cent of the planet's land area was still covered with healthy forests, including large chunks in Canada, Russia, the United States, the Congo and parts of South America. Globally, the largest conservation commitments to date have been made by the Sakha Republic in northern Russia with 70 million hectares, and by the Amazon Region Protected Areas Agreement, which protects 40 million hectares. "By acting now, Canada can safeguard one of the world's remaining large ecosystems—while it is still for the most part ecologically intact," urges Wilkinson.

Although the over 500 million hectares involved in the CBI far outdoes earlier

conservation commitments, the unusual nature of the partnership, the magnitude of its vision and the process itself have generated controversy amongst environmentalists. Charles Caccia, a Toronto MP and chairman of the House of Commons Environment Committee, believes that protection of only 50 per cent of the Boreal is not enough, suggesting instead that the target should be set at 80 per cent.

But according to Monte Hummel, one of the agreement's chief architects and president of the World Wildlife Fund, the CBI goes far beyond the 80 per cent proposed by Caccia.

"The Boreal Forest Conservation Framework targets 100 per cent of Canada's boreal region for 'conservation,' where conservation is defined as striking a balance between strict protection and sustainable use that meets the highest international environmental standards," said Hummel.

The standard that the agreement proposes is the Boreal Forest Stewardship Standard, which was recently approved by Forest Stewardship Council, a certification process that is based on the principles of ecological protection and respect of the First Nations.

Caccia is also concerned by who is leading the initiative.

"It is the task of elected governments—not of private sector businesses and organiza-

tions—to produce a framework for a very sensitive and fragile resource that has more than monetary value."

According to Hummel, however, the initiative is not taking over the government's job, but helping the government to do its job better.

"Our initiative should be understood for what it is—an attempt by leading non-government parties and Aboriginal peoples to collaborate and generate solutions for governments to consider. In the past, governments have claimed their options were severely limited by adversarial relationships between First Nations, industry, and conservation groups. This constant warfare has forced governments to referee among competing interests—a dynamic which... has not historically benefited Canada's forests".

The government shares Hummel's view, but makes no commitments. Brian Emmett, who heads Canadian Forest Service, said, "We see CBI's contribution as a potentially positive input in the on-going global and informed debate on how best to practice sustainable forest management".

In the meantime, the logging continues, and one wonders for how long the boreal forest can simultaneously be both the world's largest remaining wilderness and the world's largest source of facial tissues and advertising fliers. •••

# On to the End: An interview with Geoff Berner

by Henry Svec

Geoff Berner has played in a punk band. Geoff Berner has written for Sesame Street. Geoff Berner plays the accordion and prefers to drink scotch out of a wine glass.

The canuck's latest release, *We Shall Not Flag or Fail, We Shall Go on to the End*, has quickly gotten the attention of campus radio stations across North America and Europe. The record features his trademark stew of diverse and previously incompatible styles. Berner's work combines

folk, punk, rock, pop, and traditional Jewish music into an organic whole. He is also difficult to pin down lyrically; Charles Bukowski, T.S. Eliot, and Naomi Klein all seem to have influenced these provocative songs.

While touring in Europe, the socially conscious troubadour took a breather to answer some questions for *the Dominion*:

**Have you spent much time writing since the new album? Any songs you'd like to tell us about?**

The next album is in the can. It's a live CD, recorded in Oslo, with Wayne Adams on percussion and Diona Davies on violin. It features some old songs, some odd covers, and a few songs that will be on the next studio album. The studio album will be called *Lucky Goddamn Jew* and will be a hardcore klezmer album. One of the highlights should be *The Violins*, a poem by the great Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, the laureate of the Intifada. This will be set to a klezmer melody and arrangement.



**Geoff Berner is forever touring. To learn more about him and his music visit [www.geoffberner.com](http://www.geoffberner.com). Henry Svec**

That's about as clear a statement as I can make about the current situation in Israel.

**Is corporate power and influence something that you are concerned with? *We All Gotta Be a Prostitute Sometimes* and *Porn Queen Girlfriend* seem to be very critical of consumerism and its effects.**

I think that whenever we fail to see other people as people like ourselves, we are vulnerable to the possibility of committing terrible crimes. And when we start to see ourselves as not worth much, then we are vulnerable to despair.

**In *Iron Grey* you sing about the government not being able to find your hiding place; if you could have one minute of Paul Martin's attention, what would you say to him?**

Paul Martin is an old man. He doesn't have much time to build a legacy, which is clearly his main concern, after the elections themselves. But money and power aren't all that mat-

ters to him, or he would have stayed in the private sector. He sees himself as a man of destiny, building a legacy for himself and for his dead father, who just missed becoming Prime Minister himself. I'm sure that he has dialogues with his father every hour of the day.

So if I had one minute, I'd say: If you want to make your father proud, remember that every ruler, every society in history, is remembered and judged mostly on this criteria: How effective was he at taking care of the least powerful, the very young, the very old, and the ill?

**You seem to be much more a performer than a recording artist. Is the record just a necessary marketing tool, or an artistic medium in its own right?**

A record is certainly an artistic medium in its own right, and requires a lot more hidden artifice. It's sort of like the difference between a play and a movie.

Here in Norway, where I am now, there's a place called the Vigeland Mausoleum. Vigeland the painter spent 50

years covering the inside of a church-like building with his vision of human existence. When he died, he had his ashes placed above the doorway of the building. When I die, my record company will pour my ashes into the vinyl vat at an LP factory. Each copy of this limited edition of my "Best Of" compilation will contain a little piece of me.

**Do you ever get the feeling that no matter how potent or biting your art may be, the people who are most interested are already aware of the issues or sentiments you're dealing with?**

The key is to find a new angle on it that strikes someone in a way that it never has before. No one's world-view is totally rigid. It's always full of swirling contradictory prejudices that can be plucked out of the soup and exploited.

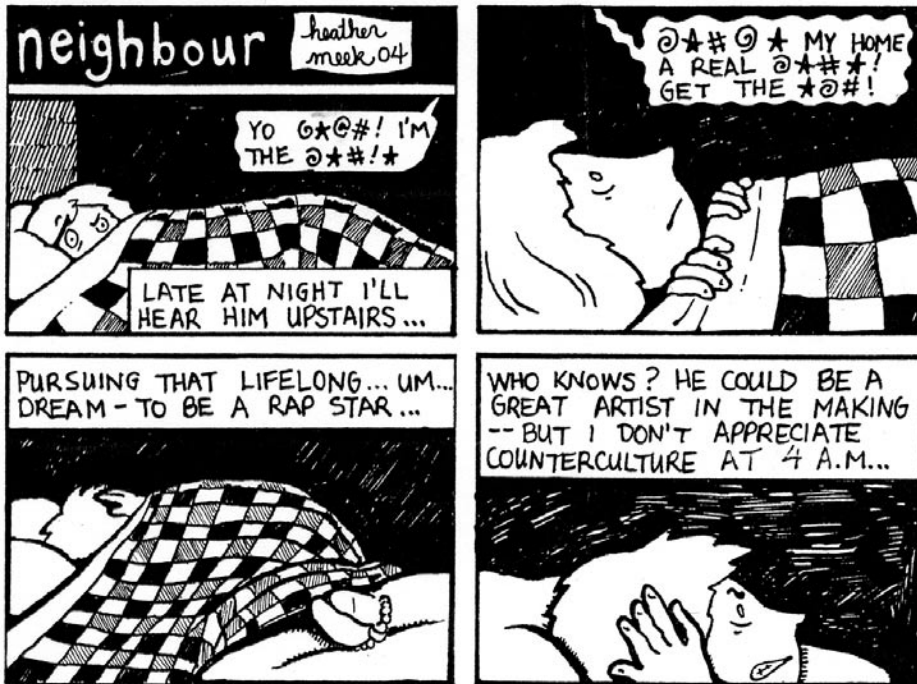
**Is the Canadian drunken accordion player the twenty-first century version of the Greek blind-soothsayer? Or maybe I've got it all wrong...**

Why not? Homer was just a guy, after all. He probably wasn't blind, either. He just kept leaving his glasses in the previous town while he was on tour.

**Is the bard a role that you want to play forever? Do you ever see yourself settling down?**

[Not] until I drop dead on stage.

**Henry Svec is currently studying English literature and history at Mount Allison University.**



“John Clarke,” continued from page 5 »

a third and a half of the people arrested were homeless, they had the hardest time of all getting out of jail. One young homeless man, James Semple, spent seven months in the Don jail before he could make bail.

I was there to pick him up when he got out, and the first thing he said was “It was worth it.”

Now, what they also did was impose absolutely rigid bail conditions. Every person who was arrested was given the condition that they could not associate with any other member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. So that was 45 people who were faced with the sort of banning order that we could associate with the Apartheid regime in South Africa. There would also be serious repercussions when anybody would get arrested on a minor charge afterwards.

I was arrested at a political protest some time afterwards, and because of the bail conditions I had, it took a month for me to get out of jail. That was an experience that several people had.

What they also did was to single out three of us—Gaetan Heroux, Stefan Pilipa and myself—and they charged us

as so-called “organizers of a planned riot”. They laid two charges; against Stefan and Gaetan they laid the charge of “participating in a riot”, which carries a two-year jail term.

To participate in a riot, it is only necessary that you are one of “three or more persons gathered together for a common purpose in an unlawful assembly that has begun to disturb the peace tumultuously”.

That could be Jerry Springer. That could be just about anything. It could be any picket line skirmish; it certainly could be a demonstration where any level of disturbance occurs.

Against me, they laid two charges: “counselling to participate in a riot”, and “counselling to assault the police”, based on a speech I had made just before we went up to the legislature.

To lay a charge of that kind against somebody who makes a speech has implications that are so obvious that I don’t even need to spell them out, but a conviction on that would have been incredibly serious. Conviction on the two charges together could have meant seven years in jail.

Now, I would like you to step back and say that the laying of those kinds of charges in the

post war period has been very, very rare. And to lay them as part of an orchestrated attempt to crush an organization is almost unprecedented. You would have to go back to the charges that were laid against the leadership of the Communist Party in 1931, where they laid section 98 criminal code charges and seditious libel charges against them, and gave seven members of the Communist Party something like forty years in jail.

And you would have to go back to the kind of charges that were laid—“conspiracy and riot”—against unemployed workers in Newfoundland in 1935.

When they sought to bring in legal precedents to put before the judge, they themselves had to keep coming back to the 1930s; that was where all the precedents lay. We couldn’t find any direct comparisons to charging someone for making a political speech. The two examples we could find in Canadian history were Annie Buller, who got six months of hard labour in 1931 for a speech that she never actually made because she wasn’t there.

And the other one would be a Nova Scotia example in

the 1920s: J.B. McLaughlin, who in protesting against a brutal police attack on striking steelworkers, wrote a letter deploring this to his own union members urging them to take solidarity action in support of the steelworkers. He was sentenced to two years in Dorchester penitentiary for “seditious libel”. And the prosecutor in that case argued that it didn’t matter whether what McLaughlin said about the police was true or untrue; the very fact that he was trying to create disaffection by saying it made him guilty, and a jury right here in Halifax convicted him.

To read the second half of John Clarke’s talk, please visit [www.dominionpaper.ca](http://www.dominionpaper.ca).

“Venezuela,” cont. from page 3 »

their reports on coverage in the fiercely partisan local media, detracting from their claim to objectivity. It is also common for international press to cite numbers out of context. For instance, the figure of 3.4 million signatures that the opposition claims to have has been widely reported, but very few have mentioned that there are 11 million voters in Venezuela.

During Chavez’s presidency, unemployment has increased, as well as inflation, poverty and malnutrition. Impunity, nepotism and corruption are also rampant. These maladies are not restricted to Chavez administration and aren’t exclusively his responsibility, as they have been present for decades. Just as Chavez failed to carry out fundamental reforms in his six years in power, the opposition who seeks his removal failed for 40 years at achieving the very same task. It is no surprise, then, that many Venezuelans distrust the opposition and feel disillusioned by Chavez. Those Venezuelans are the ones who will decide what will happen next.

Being cynical, one might predict that they’ll wait until the next election, hoping for a new messiah who promises to save the country.