

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.

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Bombing Iraq, Building Fences, Demolishing Homes

Amnesty International stated that the United States appears to be destroying the houses of those associated with guerilla attackers as a form of "collective punishment". The Pentagon said that "the idea that this is some type of collective punishment is just absolutely without merit." Amnesty pointed to one report of a family being forced to evacuate a house with five minutes notice before the structure was razed by tank and attack helicopter fire. In other instances, houses have been obliterated by 500 pound bombs dropped from F-16 fighters, attacks Amnesty has suggested were solely for retribution. Under the Geneva Convention, destruction of "real or personal property" is "prohibited" unless it is "rendered absolutely necessary by military operations."

Occupying forces have surrounded the Iraqi village of Auja, Saddam Hussein's birthplace, with a fence topped with concertina wire. Residents of Auja have been issued identification cards, and must pass a US security checkpoint to enter or leave the village. (*Agence France-Presse, Al-Jazeera*)

Casualties to date: 22,000 Iraqis 10,000 Americans

A recent report by medical charity Medact estimates that the total number of Iraqis killed as a direct result of the war is between 22,000 and



The remains of the former homes of the extended family of a suicide bomber. *Valerie Zink/FromOccupiedPalestine.org*

55,000 people. The report, entitled "Continuing Collateral Damage: the health and environmental costs of war on Iraq", also highlighted the long term health effects of the war, including a health crisis that is disproportionately affecting the young, women, and the poor. Ongoing crises in Iraq include a sharp increase in malnutrition, high maternal mortality, and a continued increase of water-borne diseases.

Recent figures from the Pentagon show that 9,675 US soldiers have been killed, wounded, injured, or evacuated for other reasons. "We really think there's an effort to hide the true cost in life, limb and the mental health of our soldiers," said Nancy Lessin of the anti-war group Military Families Speak Out. "There's a larger pic-

ture here of really trying to hide and obfuscate what's going on, and the wounded and injured are part of it." Other commentators have noted that George W. Bush has yet to attend a funeral of US troops killed in Iraq. (*BBC, Orlando Sentinel*)

Starvation, AIDS on the Rise: UN Reports

Over 800 million people worldwide are not getting enough to eat, according to a recent report released by the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Association (FAO). Though the number of starving people decreased by 37 million in the early 1990s, numbers have increased by 18 million in recent years. FAO director Jacques Diouf said that starvation "goes unnoticed unless the

world's compassion is momentarily captured by war or natural disaster." "The problem is not so much the lack of food but the absence of a real political will," he added.

UNAIDS, the UN agency responsible for fighting Acquired Immune Deficiency Virus (AIDS), reported that the number of people infected with AIDS worldwide grew by 5 million in 2003. The report estimates that between 34 million and 46 million people are living with the virus, 26 million of them Africans. 3 million people died from AIDS in 2003, the report said. (*AP*)

Israeli Attacks Leaving Thousands Homeless: UN

According to UN observers, a recent Israeli attack in Gaza left 200 homes demolished and over 2,000 people homeless. The demolitions, which occur with little warning, were a part of "Operation Root Canal", an Israeli effort to destroy tunnels that Palestinian fighters use to smuggle weapons into the Occupied Territories.

"It's a sad factor that the people of Rafah, the innocent civilians who live there, have to pay the heavy price for the mobsters and gangsters who operate these tunnels," said Sharon Feingold, the Israeli general in charge of the operation. Israeli forces has recently used military-grade bulldozers and rockets to demolish the homes of the extended families of suicide bombers, or those suspected of housing Palestinian fighters. (*Jordan Times, Australian Broadcasting Corp.*)•••

Ontario Liberals Proceed with Private Hospitals

Ontario health care activists are claiming that two planned "Public Private Partnership" (P3) hospitals in Ontario will be more expensive, not publically controlled, and represent a dangerous step towards privatized health care.

The plan for the Ottawa and Brampton hospitals--which will be financed, owned and operated by private companies--was designed by the Conservative government two months before the Ontario provincial elections. Under the unprecedented agreement, private firms will provide services that are not directly clinical, such as cleaning, laundry and maintenance.

Kevin Armstrong of the Ontario Health Coalition argued that such services may appear to be "ancillary", but are integral to the quality of care provided. Armstrong also called the P3 project "vastly more costly" than publically funded and controlled initiatives, due to the need for profits and higher interest rates that come with private-sector financing. The bottom line, he said, is that "hospital funds are going to be diverted to profits". A recent report on P3 hospitals released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that privately run hospital services were 10% more expensive over the long term.

A spokesperson for the Ontario Ministry of Health said that the plan was going forward to meet an "urgent need", but would not directly respond to questions about anticipated costs or public consultation. The recently elected Liberal government has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to halt "creeping privatization" in health care. Conservative MPP John Baird was quoted as saying: "on first glance it looks pretty identical to the deal that



Fredericton MP Andy Scott participating in a Knit-in For Peace on International Women's Day in Fredericton. *Andrea Markey*

Ernie Eves announced here two months ago, so from that standpoint we're thrilled".

—Dru Oja Jay

30,000 Protest Charest's Cuts

30,000 citizens and trade unionists made the long trip to Quebec City to protest cuts to social programs. Recently elected premier Jean Charest recently announced plans to overhaul Quebec labour laws.

Workers at the protest accused Charest of making things worse for workers while making few improvements. Many decried recent cuts to social programs, such as Quebec's successful \$5-a-day day care, which is now up to \$7-a-day. The Liberal government has also suggested cuts to education and health care would "bring Quebec into line" with the rest of North America.

—Dru Oja Jay

Community shows support for Fredericton MP

Despite drizzle in the air, close to 100 people joined together for a candlelight vigil

Friday evening in support of Fredericton MP Andy Scott. The vigil took place in front of the Justice building in downtown Fredericton, where, only hours earlier, Terrance Curtis entered his pleas on four charges in relation to an assault a week earlier that left Scott bruised and shaken. Curtis will undergo a 30-day psychiatric assessment. Curtis' wife said Curtis is against same-sex marriage.

After a five-minute silence to start the vigil, people took turns expressing their support for Andy Scott, their concerns, and their determination to make a united stand for equality.

Greg Daborn, of Moncton, New Brunswick, is the Atlantic (male) representative for EGALE Canada who traveled to Fredericton for the vigil. "We need more politicians like Andy Scott", he said. A former grade-school classmate of Scott's agreed. "I was so proud of Andy the day he cast the deciding vote in Parliament", Kim Hill said.

The Moderator of the United Church of Canada, Peter Short, sent his support for Scott and those at the vigil via e-mail to be shared with the crowd. "I hope for the day when all duly elected representatives in our

country will be free to exercise their judgment on behalf of the people without violence or intimidation. Our vigilance is not only for Andy and for those with whom we might agree but for the freedom and integrity of our democracy", Short wrote. "Please accept my gratitude for your public witness and be assured of my support for Andy."

While the feelings of solidarity and strength were in the air Friday evening, vigil organizers said there were people missing from the crowd due to fears of intimidation and retaliation. Those at the vigil emphasized a need "to mobilize a lot more people—a mobilization for freedom of existence."

"The circle here tonight represents a new bond we have formed—it will never be broken", Daborn told the crowd.

Andy Scott and his family have reportedly received death threats.

—Andrea Markey

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.

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Interview: Guatemala After the Elections

Dominion: *Since 1944, the US government has been heavily involved in shaping the situation in Guatemala. Rios Mott, the CIA backed and US-trained military dictator that recently ran for president, was lauded as “dedicated to democracy” by US President Ronald Reagan, even as his forces were killing tens of thousands of civilians. Is US influence still felt in Guatemala?*



A mask made by Guatemalan demonstrators proclaims the death of militarism. *Simon Helweg-Larsen*

Simon Helweg-Larsen: US influence is definitely still felt in Guatemala, but after its well-known role in the armed conflict the US government seems to make a conscious effort to be much less visible. The US is active in the promotion of human rights and post-war justice, but some Guatemalan authors have pointed out that this is often strongest in cases that bring attention away from the US role in atrocities and focus on former members of the Guatemalan military.

The most high-profile US influence today, however, is through counter-narcotics operations. They give most of their military aid through anti-narcotics institutions or programs, place loans and policies on the condition of anti-drug co-operation, and occasionally even have US troops present in Guatemala for training operations. Ironically, the ruling FRG political party, with their power base in the corrupt military command of the 1970s and 1980s, are the sector with the most influence in narcotics trafficking and other organized crime. The police and military are also heavily involved, and US anti-narcotics aid and training usually goes directly to those institutions and individuals involved in high-level drug activity.

You characterized the current government as having a “complete disinterest in social investment.” Do poor people in

Guatemala have any avenues to develop economically that don't involve organized crime?

Keeping in mind that organized crime is controlled by high-level government and military officials in Guatemala; poor Guatemalans don't even have the chance to rise far above their poverty through organized crime. As regarding people's options for economic development, however, these are very few. In the countryside, where most Guatemalans and the vast majority of poor Guatemalans live, most people are linked to commercial agriculture. While Guatemalan agriculture has never offered fair employment situations—with low salaries, exploitation of child labour, and debt cycles being the norm—current production crises, particularly that of coffee, have created a devastating situation in the rural areas. Unemployment is soaring, and no alternatives have been provided. Industry other than agriculture barely exists in rural areas, and many Guatemalans commute daily to the capital from the highlands, leaving their homes around 3 am.

Employment in the city is scarce and exploitative, with maquila positions presenting the most frequent formal opportunities. Many people survive by selling small items on the street, and others turn to petty theft and crime. Real-

istically, employment is scarce in Guatemala, the minimum salary is seldom paid, and most people do not have the means to provide themselves or their families with survival basics, a situation reflected in the rising rates of poverty and crime.

In the past few years, workers who have tried to organize unions while working for multinationals like Del Monte have been intimidated or threatened by armed mobs. How do you think the results of the current election will change labour relations in Guatemala?

The elections will undoubtedly bring positive change, but significant reform should not be expected. Most attacks and intimidation against human rights workers and labour organizers in the past four years can be traced back to the outgoing FRG party, headed by General Rios Montt. The private sector controlled by the economic elite has also been targeted by FRG economic and physical attacks and, as such, much media attention has been focused on publicizing and condemning human rights abuses by the FRG. Whether Oscar Berger (GANA) or Alvaro Colom (UNE) wins the presidency in the second round of voting on December 28, repairing the damaged business sector and bringing light to an improved human rights situation will be

top priorities. This will mean, at least, less threats and attacks on labour activists. Beyond this, however, not much change is likely. Berger represents the traditional economic elite, and as such would not consider readjustment of the unequal labour system or consideration of badly needed land reform. Colom might personally be in favour of such changes, but faces strong historically powerful factions that would ensure defeat of significant reform.

Assuming that the intense concentration of land ownership hasn't changed during the past decade in Guatemala, what do you see as the future of this issue, given the current climate and the recent elections?

In spite of the difficult situation described above, there is a growing movement pressuring for land reform in Guatemala. Inequality of land ownership and usage has been the key factor in Guatemalan poverty and violence since the 1500s, a fact recognized even in the 1996 Peace Accords to which representatives of the economic elite were party. Even the minimal steps lined out in the accords have not been realized, but pressure within the country is increasing, backed by the constant presence of a United Nations Mission in Guatemala (Minugua).

The organized campesino sector has proposed strategies for land reform through the Plataforma Agraria, and the FRG government recently agreed to establish a commission to consider the proposal. Campesino organizations will no doubt take advantage of the improved human rights environment to pressure for the beginning of institutional land reform in Guatemala.

Simon Helweg-Larsen is a writer and human rights observer living in Guatemala.

Israelis Criticizing Israel

The occupation of Palestine from the inside, out

Public debate about Israel tends to be framed in terms of Israel as a unified country and its foreign opponents, anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic and otherwise. Widely ignored are the Israeli intellectuals and leaders who are strongly opposed to their country's actions, and the accounts that inspire their strong opposition.

Independent Canadian journalists Jon Elmer and Valerie Zink are currently reporting from the West Bank and Gaza. The following is a series of excerpts from interviews they have conducted with diverse critical voices within Israel. The full interviews and other coverage can be read on their web site, *FromOccupiedPalestine.org*.

Jessica Montell is the Executive Director of B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.

Jon Elmer: Three Jewish settlers from the West Bank settlement of Bat Ayin were convicted on September 17 of plotting to bomb a Palestinian girls school in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of At-Tur, as well as a hospital. Judges said that scores of school children would have been slaughtered if the attack had not been foiled. Back in April a group calling itself Revenge of the Infants hurled grenades into a high school in Jenin, injuring 29. Can you discuss Jewish settler terrorism?

Jessica Montell: Over the past three years we have seen an increase in violence against both Israelis and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. It seems that as part of this intifada, people on both sides are taking the law into their own hands and committing acts of violence against the other community.

From a human rights perspective, we are more concerned with the response of the Israeli authorities and the responsibility of Israel to enforce the law and to punish people who violate the law. The Israeli authorities are, on the whole, much more lenient toward Jews who break the law—including acts of violence—than they are toward

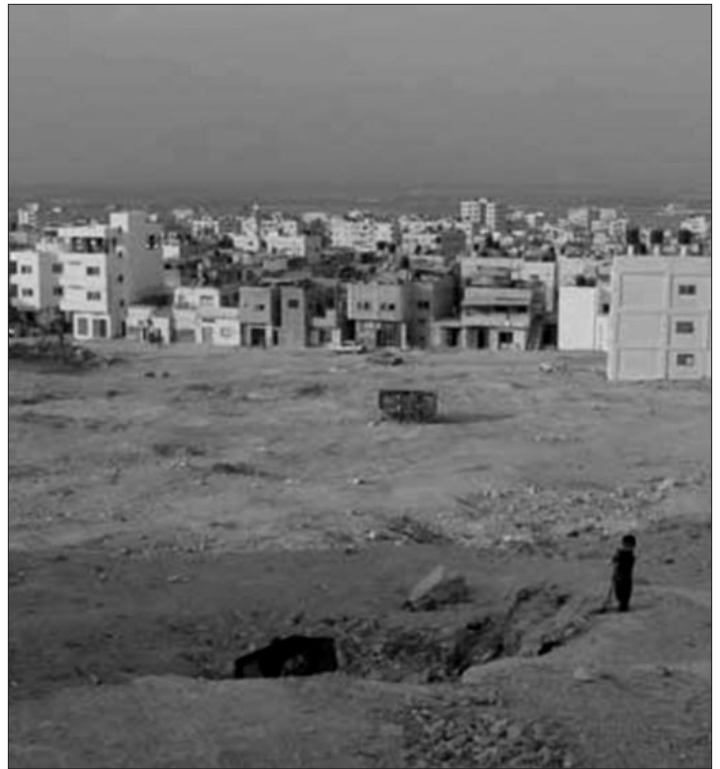
Palestinians.

The intensive investigations, arrests, interrogations, and prosecutions in the case [of the settlers from Bat Ayin] stand in stark contrast to what we see as very lax law enforcement against the routine violence by settlers toward Palestinians.

We've issued three reports in this intifada, and several before that, about the lax law enforcement [toward settlers]. The findings are that in contrast to incidents of violence by Palestinians, where law enforcement is extremely severe (to the point of collective punishment and violations of the human rights of innocent Palestinians), in the case of violence by settlers, the Israeli authorities tend to be overly forgiving. They turn a blind eye, and do not take enough measures to protect Palestinians and their property.

Jon Elmer: In B'Tselem's report *Land Grab* (2002), you conclude: "Israel has created in the Occupied Territories a regime of separation based on discrimination, applying two separate systems of law in the same area and basing the rights of individuals on their nationality. This regime is the only one of its kind in the world." Is that not a textbook definition of apartheid?

Jessica Montell: Apartheid has symbolic value because of the South African context. You



A dusty expanse is all that remains of 400 houses in Jenin razed by Israeli bulldozers. Valerie Zink/*FromOccupiedPalestine.org*

can draw plenty of similarities, and you can also see lots of differences between apartheid South Africa and Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. I think the word apartheid is useful for mobilizing people because of its emotional power. In some cases, the situation in the West Bank is worse than apartheid in South Africa. For example, the roads network in the West Bank, where Jews are allowed to travel on roads that Palestinians are not allowed to travel on, or the separation fence, which Palestinians call the Apartheid Wall.

I was recently at a conference with John Dugard, who is now the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights for the Occupations Palestinian Territories, and is originally from South Africa. He was (jokingly) offended that apartheid was being maligned [by its comparison the Israeli

occupation]. In South Africa you didn't have apartheid on the roads, you didn't have walls being constructed...

There are, however, clear similarities between apartheid South Africa and Israel's policies in the West Bank, and over the past three years they have become even clearer as the separation has intensified. Every area of life—legal rights, benefits, privileges, allocation of resources, the justice system, criminal prosecution—now has two separate tracks, one for Israelis and one for Palestinians.

Tanya Reinhart is a professor of linguistics and media studies at Tel Aviv University and Utrecht in the Netherlands. She is the author of Israel-Palestine: How to end the war of 1948 (Seven Stories Press, 2002)

Jon Elmer: Gideon Levy wrote in *Ha'aretz* recently: "Every day of quiet in Israel is another day of crass disregard for what is going on in our backyard. If there is no terrorism there are no Palestinians." What is your feeling on that statement?

Tanya Reinhart: It is true that the Israelis view the Palestinians only through their effect on Israeli society. It is really amazing how life in Tel Aviv goes on normally when there is no terror. People go about their life, their work, their studies, their coffee shops, while just a few kilometres away, a whole society is dying.

What is happening in the Territories is a process of slow and steady genocide. People die from being shot and killed, many die from their wounds—the number of wounded is enormous, it is in the tens of thousands. Often, people cannot get medical treatment,

"People go about their life, their work, their studies, their coffee shops, while just a few kilometres away, a whole society is dying."

so someone with a heart attack will die at a roadblock because they can not get to the hospital. There is a serious shortage of food, so there is malnutrition of children. The Palestinian society is dying—daily—and there is hardly any awareness of this in Israeli society.

The established Israeli peace camp actually collapsed in the Oslo years. From their perspective, they were fully willing to accept that in the Oslo Accords Israel had in fact given the Palestinians back their land. There were a few technicalities to still go over in the coming years, but essentially the occupation was over.

No facts on the ground—like the fact that the number of settlers doubled since Oslo,

that the confiscated Palestinian land increased in size, and that the one million Palestinians in Gaza were locked in a prison surrounded by massive electronic fences, with the Israeli army guarding the prison from outside—none of this was actually perceived by the Israeli peace camp.

* * *

Uri Avnery is a founding member of Gush Shalom (Israeli Peace Bloc). In his teenage years he was an independence fighter in the Irgun (1938-1942) and later a soldier in the Israeli Army. A three-time Knesset member (1965-1973, and 1979-1983), Avnery was the first Israeli to establish contact with the Palestinian Liberation Organization leadership, in 1974. During the war on Lebanon in 1982 he crossed "enemy lines" to be the first Israeli to meet with Yasser Arafat. He has been a journalist since 1947, including 40 years as editor-in-chief of the newsmagazine Ha'olam Haze, and is the author of numerous books on the conflict.

Jon Elmer: Can there be a solution to the conflict that does not properly and justly deal with the Palestinian right of return?

Uri Avnery: The Palestinian right of return has many different aspects. There is the moral aspect, the political aspect, and the practical aspect. I believe that Israel must concede to the Palestinian right of return in principle. Israel must, first of all, assume its responsibility for what happened in 1948, as far as we are to blame—and we are to blame for a great part of it, if not for all—and we must recognize in principle the right of refugees to return.

In practice, we have to find a complex solution to a very complex problem. It is manifestly idiotic to believe that Israel, with five million Jewish citizens and one million Arab citizens, will concede to the return of four million refugees. It will not happen. We can wish

it, we can think it's just, that it's moral, but it will not happen. No country commits suicide.

Now the question is: how do we solve the problem by allowing a number of refugees to return to Israel, allowing a number of refugees to return to the Palestinian state, and allowing a number of refugees to settle, with general compensation, where they want to settle? It is not an insolvable problem; there are possible solutions to this problem that concerns human beings. It is not an abstract problem, it involves four million human beings, and more than 50 years of various sorts of misery. It is possible to find a solution for them, and it can be done. It involves some good will and a readiness to give up historic myths on both sides.

Jon Elmer: It is a popular refrain—in North America at least, where I live—that there is no hope. The two sides have been fighting for thousands of years and there is just no solution. Israelis and Palestinians will always kill each other. After all your experience, from independence fighter, to frontline journalist, to member of the Knesset, to peace activist, what is the solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict?

Uri Avnery: The solution is perfectly clear. All parts of the conflict have been amply debated and discussed. Many plans have been put on the table—hundreds. And everybody knows by now exactly the parameters of a peace solution. We at Gush Shalom have published a draft text of a peace agreement, and I am fairly certain that when peace comes about, it will be more or less on these lines.

The solution is this: there will be a state of Palestine in all of the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The so-called Green-Line, the border that existed before 1967, will come into being again. There may be small adjustments, a small exchange of territories, but [the Green-Line]

will be the border between Israel and Palestine. Jerusalem will be the shared capital—East Jerusalem will be the capital of Palestine, West Jerusalem will be the capital of Israel. All settlements must be evacuated. The security must be arranged for both people, and there must be a moral solution and a practical solution.

On these lines, there will be peace. And if you ask me, they could make peace in one week. The trouble is that both people find it very difficult to come to this point. And when I say both people, I don't want to establish a symmetrical situation—there is no symmetry here: there are occupiers, and the occupied. And as the occupier, we have the responsibility to lead this process. This is what I, as an Israeli patriot, tell my own people.

* * *

Jeff Halper is an anthropologist and the Coordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHAD).

Jon Elmer: Do you see a long-term political plan within Israel? Or is it just reacting?

Jeff Halper: Well, Sharon is accused of not having a political plan and just blindly hitting out against the 'infrastructure of terror,' as they call it. But I think there is a very definite political plan: apartheid. Sharon calls this plan cantonization: a Palestinian state on about 42 per cent of the West Bank in three or four islands, all controlled and surrounded by Israel.

The plan involves making the Palestinians submit by getting a weak Palestinian leadership that will sign off on this Bantustan, this cantonization. It involves getting rid of the Palestinian middle class that would oppose it by what we call 'quiet transfer'—forcing them out of the country with bad housing, bad education and no economic life, in order to create a very malleable Palestinian mass that would then simply passively accept a Bantustan. Sharon is

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Growth at Any Cost

“NAFTA on steroids” a site for protest and paramilitary-style police action

by Yuill Herbert

On November 20th, behind five ranks of riot police, a 10 foot high reinforced fence, water cannons, and light armoured vehicles, ministers representing thirty-four countries agreed to a “lite” version of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA).

More than 10,000 protesters joined ministers in Miami and marched in circles outside the fence and outside the sight of the negotiators inside. Over 300 were arrested and many more were subjected to rubber bullets, stun grenades, and tear gas. Undercover police used tasers and electric shock guns to arrest demonstrators in the midst of the crowd.

“The police presence was totally excessive and unnecessary given the nature of the protest,” said protester Anna Kirkpatrick. “The large number of heavily equipped officers was very intimidating.”

The Palm Beach Post declared, “Miami has resembled a city under martial law.”

Environmental organizer Ben Trevelin of New York was frustrated by the slant of most media covering the protests. “It’s a shame. The violence here will overshadow the real violence of the day at the Intercontinental Hotel [the location of the meeting].”

Inside the hotel, negotiators managed to avoid a collapse of talks, like the one that occurred during the World Trade Organization Ministerial in July, by settling on a compromised agreement. The “FTAA lite” allows countries to decide on varying levels of commitment in each sector of the agreement.

“Powerful social movements in Latin America against the FTAA have made it impossible for those governments to



Police charge a crowd of protesters in Miami.

agree to a full North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) expansion. Thus, the US chose this week to make the uber concession—to move away from its ‘single undertaking’ vision of the FTAA,” said Lori Wallach of Public Citizen, an organization founded by Ralph Nader.

As a result of their limited success negotiating multilateral agreements, the US has been focusing more recently on bilateral or regional pacts, like the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). CAFTA, an agreement between the five Central American nations and the US, is expected to be based on the neo-liberal NAFTA. Activists like Wallach are concerned that the economic power of the US will overwhelm the negotiating ability of smaller countries in such deals.

According to the over 10,000 people that gathered in Miami to protest the FTAA,

the agreement is bad enough already.

“Somebody ought to be talking about the morality of free trade. They’re not talking about it at the meeting inside the hotel,” said Reverend Frank O’Laughlin, a Catholic priest who travelled from Lake Worth, Texas, to join the protests. O’Laughlin described the FTAA as “... a trade agreement that will.... make a few people rich at the expense of spreading hemispheric poverty.”

Root Cause, a coalition of grassroots organizations based in South Florida that represents immigrant workers, people of colour and other marginalized groups, used Miami as a case study to illustrate the social and environmental impacts of international trade. Their Community Impact Report found that dramatic income disparities lead to a concentration of polluting industries in poor areas.

According to the report, in Dade County, a suburb of Miami, people of colour are three times more likely to be exposed to toxic chemicals than whites. The county also has four times as many Superfund sites (major toxic waste concentrations) per square mile than the rest of Florida, with most of those in communities of colour. Latinos and African-Americans have the highest lifetime cancer risk from hazardous air pollutants, particularly if their income is under \$25,000.

“When I would go visit my Aunt Berta there was always the smell of gas fumes present,” said Keith Ivory, a resident of Overtown, Miami. “Years later, Aunt Berta would die of some type of respiratory problem, even though she never smoked. Today I still smell those fumes from People’s Gas and I wonder who will be next: a family member, friend, or me.”

The draft FTAA contains

no provisions or safeguards for environmental security to limit or mitigate these impacts.

A more fundamental ecological critique of such free trade agreements comes from a New Economics Foundation report. The report, titled *Collision Course*, outlines the conflict between trade agreements and the multilateral environmental agreement to halt climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

“International trade is set for a head-on collision with attempts to control global climate change. Trade makes up a growing share of an increasingly fossil fuel-hungry global economy. The transport it depends on is one of the fastest rising sources of greenhouse gas emissions that add to climate change,” says the report.

Despite concerns raised by citizen and environmental groups in Miami, many proponents of the FTAA are disappointed that talks aren’t moving fast enough. Canada’s Trade Minister, Pierre Pettigrew is one of them.

“We want to move [as] 34 and when you see an absolute resistance to your higher level of ambition, you register it. You may deplore it, you may think it’s not the way we should be going but we are quite satisfied that all these elements, investment, and services are remaining on the table.”

Although the FTAA negotiations have been slowed by the Miami compromise, January 2005 remains the firm deadline to end negotiations and sign the final agreement, which aims to eliminate “barriers to trade and investment” amongst countries in the Americas and the Caribbean, excluding Cuba.

With files from Palm Beach Post and the Free Trade of Americas Indymedia. •••

From Margin to Main Character

Deafening brings disability to the centre of mainstream fiction

by Laura Cardiff

I always get suspicious when I see the same book in coffee shops, on buses, trains, and coffee tables, or peering out of purses. It seems that everyone except me is part of the same book club, and they've all picked up the assigned reading for the month. Not too long ago, this novel was *The Life of Pi*, and the ubiquity of this brightly coloured, incessantly discussed novel made me want to avoid it, for the sole reason that nobody else seemed to. In a few weeks, when the paperback version is released, I have a feeling this book will be Canadian author Francis Itani's *Deafening*.

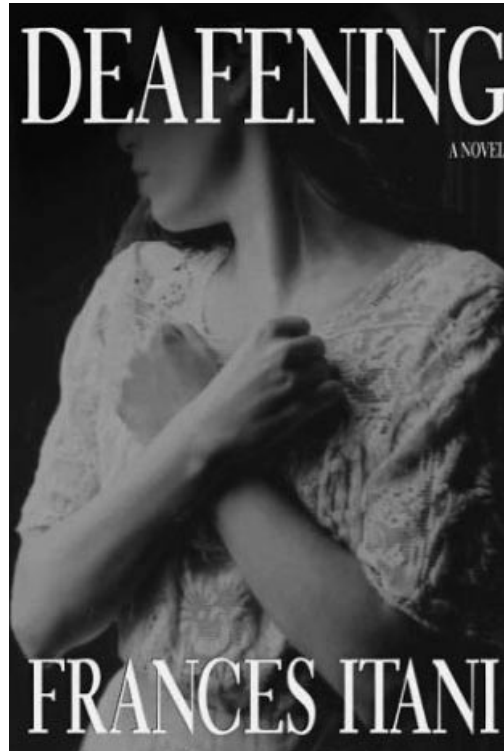
For a first novel, *Deafening* has had astounding success and has already made Itani a millionaire. Without having been shortlisted for any major literary award or chosen by Oprah's Book Club, such an achievement is certainly uncommon. Nevertheless, I approached *Deafening* with caution. Could the novel really be that out of the ordinary, or was its success more a testament to HarperCollins' marketing skill?

I can say that, stylistically at least, there was nothing astonishing about this novel. The plot was at times predictable, the form somewhat conventional, and the pace a little slow for my liking. Perhaps this very stylistic conventionality is a contributing factor to its commercial success. As a general rule, bestsellers rarely challenge established standards of form. In its content, on the other hand, *Deafening* fills a void many of us probably never noticed existed.

Itani's novel describes the life of a girl growing up in the small town of Deseronto, Ontario, and her relationship with Jim, who becomes a soldier in World War One. Fairly standard fare: war, peace, love,

loss, pain, and some Canadian history. Here conventionality is a contributing factor to the novel's success; these are universal themes with mass appeal. However, the main character, Grania, is left deaf at the age of five as a result of scarlet fever. When was the last time you read a piece of fiction about a deaf person? When, in fact, was the last time you read a novel about anybody with any sort of disability? I can name several novels in which such characters figure marginally: Dickens' novels, for example, are full of deaf old ladies, "cripples," and dwarves. But they serve only as one-dimensional villains or as comic relief. There are few novels which actually explore the experience of being marginalized due to a perceived disability. Considering that approximately one in eight Canadians lives with a disability, this is an inappropriate silence.

There is a similar silence when it comes to scholarly work on the subject. Somehow, despite the emphasis that feminist and queer studies place on the body and postcolonial studies places on how people are "othered" based on criteria such as race, class, sex, or sexuality, the topic of disability is typically overlooked. Instead, academia has focussed on the "freak." However, in the past five or six years there has been an explosion of scholarly work which seeks to redress this negligence, bringing to light the ways we think about those with disabilities. Increasingly, we are understanding that impairment



is the rule and normalcy the fantasy.

These are exactly the issues which Itani's novel brings to light. Grania's mother initially refuses to send her to the Ontario School for the Deaf in Belleville because this would force her to acknowledge her daughter's difference. Instead, she wants her daughter to lip-read and speak. Townspeople question whether Grania, being deaf, is capable of thought. They believe it is self-evident that she will not marry or have a life of her own.

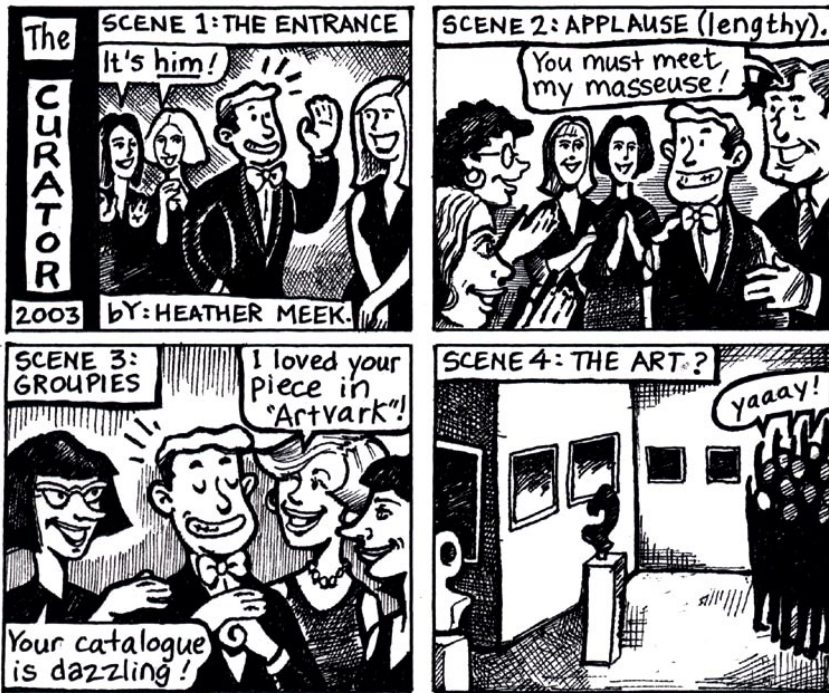
Chapters open with quotes from Alexander Graham Bell, a strong advocate of the abolishment of sign language, and *The Canadian*, the school paper of the Ontario School for the Deaf. These quotations provide an historical context through which we watch the losing

battle of the deaf community to retain its own language. Indeed, it is only in the past few decades that "oral" language such as ASL (American Sign Language), which has no written equivalent, have begun to be seen as legitimate, complete languages. As Grania says, language is the "battleground" of the deaf.

With her particular perception of the world around her, Grania realizes that there are many people in her community who feel as out of place as she does. Both the flu epidemic which sweeps through Ontario and the war leave thousands of people deaf, disfigured, and emotionally and physically scarred. She watches their struggles to blend in, a struggle she and her deaf friends have sought to master all their lives. And it is Grania who is able to help those around her to cope with their sense of isolation.

Deafening is a novel about communication that shows the way people often fail, but also sometimes miraculously manage, to understand one another. One secret to this novel's success certainly lies in the compelling character of Grania, whose unique point of view shows us our world in a light in which many of us have never considered it.

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“Israelis Criticizing Israel,” continued from page 5 »

not saying that explicitly, he is leaving things deliberately vague, but that is where he is going.

Jon Elmer: Noam Chomsky has said that Israel is essentially an offshore American base. What strategic role does Israel play in the American empire, and what does that mean for activism within the United States, in terms of ending the occupation?

Jeff Halper: I don't completely agree with Chomsky—I think he underestimates the proactiveness of Israel, and how Israel manipulates the United States. In a way, if you did a rational analysis, you would say that [America's support of Israel] is counter-productive for the United States. It is messing up the whole Muslim world, it is messing up oil, and now there is occupation of Iraq and its comparison to here. The alliance of America and Israel made sense in the Cold War—we used to have a joke within Israel that we were America's largest aircraft carrier. Maybe then it made sense, but today?

The key that everyone is missing, though Chomsky has picked up on it because this is what he studies, is that Israel

has located itself very strategically right in the centre of the global arms industry. Israel's sophisticated military hardware and military software are very important to weapons development in the United States. Israel has also become the main subcontractor of American arms. Just last year, Israel signed a contract to train and equip the Chinese army. It signed another multi-billion dollar contract to train and equip the Indian army. What is it equipping them with? It is equipping them with American weapons.

Israel is very important, because on the one hand it is a very sophisticated, high-tech arms developer and dealer. But on the other hand, there are no ethical or moral constraints: there is no Congress, there are no human rights concerns, there are no laws against taking bribes—the Israeli government can do anything it wants to. So you have very sophisticated rogue state—not a Libyan rogue state, but a high tech, military-expert rogue state. Now that is tremendously useful, both for Europe and for the United States.

For example, there are American congressional constraints on selling arms to China because of China's human

rights problems. So what Israel does is it tinkers with American arms just enough that they can be considered Israeli arms, and in that way bypasses Congress.

For the most part, Israel is the subcontractor for American arms to the 'Third World.' There is no terrible regime—Columbia, Guatemala, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile during the time of the colonels, Burma, Taiwan, Zaire, Liberia, Congo, Sierra

Leone—there is not one that does not have a major military connection to Israel. Israeli arms dealers are there [acting as] mercenaries. The guy behind Noriega was Michael Harari, an Israeli, who got out of Panama. Israeli mercenaries in Sierra Leone go around the UN boycotts of what are called blood diamonds, same in Angola. Israel was very involved in South Africa, of course, during the apartheid regime. Now Israel is developing missile systems with England, developing a new jet aircraft for Holland, and it just bought three sophisticated submarines from Germany. So Israel is playing with the big boys.

Israeli arms dealers are at home, they're like fish in water in the rough and tumble countries that eat Americans alive: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Indonesia, these countries where Americans just cannot operate, partly because of business practices and partly because they have [congressional] constraints and laws.

So this is the missing piece. If you read the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) website, the main pro-Israel lobby in the US, there's one piece called "Strategic Cooperation." The United States and Israel have a formal

treaty, a formal alliance, which gives Israel access to almost all of American military technology.

When AIPAC sells Israel to Congress, it doesn't go to congressmen and ask them to support Israel because it is Judea Christian, or because it is the 'only democracy in the Middle East,' which it also does. It sells it on this basis: "You are a member of Congress and it is your responsibility to support Israel, because this is how many industries in your state have business links to Israel, this is how many military research

“Every area of life—legal rights, benefits, privileges, allocation of resources, the justice system, criminal prosecution—now has two separate tracks, one for Israelis and one for Palestinians.”

people are sitting in universities in your district, this is how many jobs in your district are dependent on the military and the defence industry,” and they translate it down to the extent to which your district is dependent on Israel. Therefore, if you are voting against Israel, you are voting against the goose that lays the golden egg.

In most of the districts in the United States, members of Congress have a great dependence on the military. More than half of industrial employment in California is in one way or another connected to defence. Israel is right there, right in the middle of it all. And that is part of its strength.

And then we (the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, for example) come to a member of Congress, we talk about human rights, about occupation, about Palestinians, and he says: "Look I know, I read the papers, I'm not dumb, but that is not the basis on which I vote. The basis on which I vote is what is good for my constituents." ...