

Meribeth Deen on fair trade farming ¶ Max Liboiron on quizzing gender ¶ Hillary Lindsay on GM wheat ¶ Jon Elmer's photographs of daily life in occupied Palestine >>

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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European Constitution Moves Forward

The European Union is continuing its inexorable move towards the signing of a European Constitution despite conflict over what form of government the super-state will assume. France and Germany, the two economic powerhouses seen to hold the most sway within the Union, are pushing for a Federal-style constitution, where decisions are taken by a simple majority vote within Parliament. Other more reluctant members, such as Great Britain, are unwilling to hand over sovereign power to the European Parliament and favour a constitution that gives individual member states veto rights over legislation.

Federalists argue that with membership in the European Union now at 25 countries, granting veto powers to any one state would render the Parliament powerless to take action. They also point out that giving equal power over legislation to Latvia and Italy would grant unfair power to small populations, while those favouring the veto-style government explain that theirs is the only way of protecting small states from Western European dominance.

Results of the recent European Parliament elections suggest, on the surface, that the general population of Europe is as leery of the Union as the vetoists. The 786-seat Parliament, whose seats are apportioned to countries by population, was largely filled by members representing anti-EU parties in the June 13th elections. EU proponents point out that, given the low poll turnout—as low as 30% in countries



Taiwanese Farmers March in Protest of WTO-Mandated Agriculture Regulations.

where electoral participation is not mandatory—it is likely that only electors opposed to the EU bothered to vote on election day.

Military Dictator Welcomed Back To Commonwealth

Pakistan—controlled by the military dictatorship of Pervez Musharraf, who seized control of in a 1999 coup d'état—was readmitted to the Commonwealth on May 22nd under condition that Musharraf comply with Pakistan's 17th Constitution Amendment, forcing him to step down as army chief by December 31st of this year. Commonwealth Secretary-General Donald McK-

innon stated that the Musharraf regime must accede to the constitutional separation of the offices of president and army chief, even though Pakistan's elected parliament has voted to officially recognize Musharraf as president.

Although the response of Pakistan's foreign ministry is one of gratified relief, Musharraf himself churlishly responded that Commonwealth countries should "look at their own records before criticizing others"; and that if "[Pakistan is] happy to join the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth should be happy to have a country like Pakistan in it." He contends that Pakistan's readmission should be unconditional and that the Commonwealth should not interfere in what he

sees as the internal affairs of the nation.

Opposition parties, for their part, protested that Pakistan should not be allowed back in the Commonwealth at least until Musharraf's party stops repressing critics. Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto is in exile and her husband in prison, while much of her party has been bribed or strong-armed into joining the government's coalition.

The move to readmit Pakistan was prompted by Britain's appreciation for Pakistan's support in the Afghanistan war and India's new government's eagerness to normalize relations with the old foe.

US Flexes Muscles In West Africa

The US has stated that it is planning a large naval exercise in the Gulf of Guinea, south of Nigeria and the Ivory Coast, as part of a series of military deployments designed to show that US forces are not overburdened by their commitments in Iraq. Described by spokesmen as an "unusual exercise", the deployment will involve an aircraft carrier and a number of smaller ships conducting operations in and around the developing offshore oil field in the region.

The US military has traditionally exercised with no more than three or four of its aircraft carriers deployed at a single time. This exercise will involve the simultaneous deployment of seven of its twelve "supercarriers" around the world in what the US hopes will end speculation about its ability to respond

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International News

For full stories and additional reading, visit www.dominionpaper.ca
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Conservatives to Run Deficit: CCPA

A recent evaluation of party platforms revealed that the Conservatives would run a deficit of \$11.4 billion over four years. The study, conducted by economists at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, predicted that over the same four years, the Liberals and NDP would run surpluses of \$24.2 billion and \$14.6 billion, respectively. The authors of the study claim to have used the budget projections that are most widely accepted among the parties.

Liberals “Parachute” Former NDP Politicians into BC Ridings

In an election campaign ad airing on BC television, Shirley Chan (former top aide to Mike Harcourt), Ujjal Dosanjh (former NDP premier), and Dave Haggard (union leader)—all formerly of the New democratic Party—walk through Stanley Park in support of their new Liberal party political home. This switch, or “parachuting” as some call it, has managed to raise eyebrows. Some Liberals say it shows disrespect for the democratic process, while some non-partisan observers believe the party-jumping will result in harm to the Liberal party.

Dr. Norman Ruff, associate professor of political science at the University of Victoria, thinks the ad won't have the effect the Liberals are intending—to possibly sway NDP voters to the Liberals, to follow the “star” candidates. Ruff says, “I think, for NDP voters, it has a kind of reaction. They all see it, and they see that these are the three sell-outs. So, I don't think it's likely to shift the core NDP support.”

During the campaign, the federal Liberals have tried



Rob Maguire

to distance themselves from the provincial Liberals—in particular, from BC, Ontario, and Quebec—due to these governments' unpopular moves such as social program cuts and tax increases. NDP leader Jack Layton offers that there is no such separation, recently commenting, “If you like what Gordon Campbell's doing, vote for Paul Martin. If you love what Gordon Campbell's doing, vote for Stephen Harper.” (*Seven Oaks*)

Canadians Leaning Left, Despite “Blue Storm” Hype

Constant reports of momentum for Stephen Harper's Conservative Party are at odds with reality, according to the most recent national survey conducted by Ekos. According to the Ekos data, the Conservative party would receive half a million fewer votes than the Tories and Canadian Alliance won in the last election if the election were held in mid-June.

The Liberals have seen an even larger drop in support; according to the results, fully 1.4 million fewer voters plan to support the Liberals than in the 2000 election. Left-leaning parties appear to have picked up the majority of this support, with 1.3 million shifting their support to the New Democratic Party since 2000, and the Greens gaining close to a half

million voters.

Results in Quebec were similar, with a major drop in support for the Liberals. While Conservatives made minor gains, these were dwarfed by surges in support for the Green party, NDP, and the Bloc Quebecois, which gained the most from the Liberal collapse.

Privatization of Health Care Costly to Canadians: McMaster Study

A McMaster study just published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal shows that Canadians would pay an extra \$7.2 billion a year if the federal government decides to fund private health care with public money. The study lists profit, larger executive bonuses, and more administration costs as the top three reasons why the system would cost Canadians so much more money.

Gordon Guyatt, the NDP candidate running in the Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale riding, is one of the ongoing study's researchers. Since the NDP is the only mainstream party that is solidly against health care privatization, a bias could easily be associated with the study. However, the study is exhaustively based on eight others involving over 350,000 patients that were treated in both not-for-profit and for-profit US hospitals between

1980 and 1995. As well, two Harvard professors, in writing the editorial accompanying the study, praised the study as “meticulous.”

The Conservatives have said that they will not oppose provinces that decide to privatize health care. Alberta premier Ralph Klein has already stated that that on June 30—immediately after the election—he will introduce changes that will allow for more private health-care options in Alberta. The Liberals say they prefer to keep health care public, but a variety of private services are already being provided without much opposition.

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Fair's Fair

Marketing and reality in the coffee trade

by Meribeth Deen

MANAGUA, NICARAGUA—*Entering the grounds of one of Nicaragua's oldest coffee plantations, the delicate scent of coffee plants and the beauty of ancient trees lead me to believe that I have finally discovered paradise. But not far down the road I spot a few dilapidated shacks. Scruffy, barefoot children run out to greet us. These are the children of coffee workers, and the shacks are their homes. I ask my guide about the wages and working conditions for the coffee workers. He points to the shacks and asks, "What does it look like to you?" This is a paradise of sorts, but not for the workers.*

With their seemingly irresistible white cups filled with bitter-sweet froth, Starbucks, assures us that it is a socially-conscious corporation. Once a month in each of the company's 7,834 shops, a Fair Trade 'coffee of the day' is brewed. Fair Trade is an international certification program that ensures coffee farmers a better life. Starbucks openly acknowledges that only a small percentage of the coffee purchased annually is Fair Trade certified, but as Sue Mecklenburg, vice president of business practices for Starbucks proudly states, "100 per cent of the coffee we buy is under conditions that are fair to farmers."

This is the characteristic response of the global coffee chain to the increasing criticism they are facing: they claim to be paying a fair price. True, Starbucks buys coffee at an average price of \$1.20 per pound, as opposed to the current global commodity price which currently stands at about



Eugenio Laguna of the El Porvenir coffee coop in Posoltega, Nicaragua. Rob Gentry

\$0.50. But a fair price is not Fair Trade. If it were, Starbucks would simply seek Fair Trade certification for their coffee and end the debate.

Fair Trade is a market-based solution to the crisis caused by the collapse of coffee prices, which, according to the Wall Street Journal, "is contributing to social meltdowns affecting an estimated 125 million people — from Central America to Africa." Through the creation of a floor price of \$1.26 per pound of coffee and the elimination of middlemen, Fair Trade ensures that more profits go into the hands of small-scale coffee producers. But it is about more than just money.

By allowing small farmers to compete in the

global marketplace without being exploited by powerful middlemen, Fair Trade locks in agrarian reforms friendly to small farmers and peasants in the same way that free trade locks in trade policies friendly to large corporations. To be certified as Fair Trade, coffee must be bought from either a cooperative or a democratically run farmers' association. Within such structures, each producer participates in the important decisions concerning distribution. If the producer is part of a cooperative, then he or she actually *owns* part of the distribution company. Outside the confines of Fair Trade, distribution companies hold the majority of bargaining power and reap the bulk of financial benefits from the trade of commodities such as coffee. Being part of a cooperative or association can be the difference between a farmer being forced to sell his or her small plot of land or being able to keep it and continue making a living. In Nicaragua, the three large coffee cooperatives that presently export from the country were actually formed with the express purpose of maintaining the viability of land reforms introduced by the Sandinista government in the 1980s. In growing the market for cooperatively produced coffee, Fair Trade has thus been instrumental in maintaining agrarian reform in Nicaragua.

Through its emphasis on cooperation, Fair Trade helps to promote organization and development at the community level. While the cooperative or association decides how profits are divided among members, Fair Trade requires that a certain percentage is re-invested into the community. The cooperative focused on

Nicaragua's Northern region, Prodecoop, has an education committee that gives kids school supplies and assists farmers and their families in pursuing university degrees and continuing technical education. More importantly, however, a cooperative or association creates an organizational framework within a community and teaches people to work together to solve problems. Where the cooperative provides shelter from market forces, it also opens the lines of communication within a community so that individuals are no longer isolated and forced to wait on government assistance that may never come through. In a country where public investments are minimal and where government policies rarely reflect the needs of the majority, a community's ability to work together can be crucial.

Despite the benefits, life for the Fair Trade coffee farmer remains a struggle. Environmental pressures—such as limited access to water and an increasingly short rainy season—can make cultivation problematic. And while the market for Fair Trade coffee has grown steadily, advocates believe that in order for Fair Trade coffee to become mainstream, the large corporations controlling the coffee market such as Starbucks and Proctor & Gamble must get serious about Fair Trade and stop using it simply as a marketing ploy. So while Starbucks' friendly price—which is still six cents short of Fair—is better than nothing, it is certainly short of any true commitment to social justice. Whether the extra pennies fall into the hands of needy farmers is questionable, as is the ability of pennies alone to make the world a better place.

Crop Control

Genetically modified crops threaten organic growers

by Hillary Lindsay

The battle over genetically engineered (GE) foods raged on in the month of May, with uncertain victories declared on two fronts. On May 10th, biotech giant Monsanto announced that it was “deferring all further plans to introduce Roundup Ready wheat” into the marketplace. While opponents to GE foods were still celebrating, however, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of Monsanto on May 21st, in the controversial Schmeiser case. As the dust settles on fields across Canada, farmers, consumers, and activists are struggling to understand the implications of these decisions.

Monsanto is a multinational agro-chemical and foods conglomerate. The corporation is perhaps best known for their herbicide, Roundup, which is the No. 1 selling agro-chemical in the world. The herbicide, works best when used with Monsanto’s Roundup Ready seeds. Roundup Ready crops, such as canola and soybeans, have been genetically engineered to survive when sprayed with Roundup, which will kill all other weeds. Monsanto’s licensing agreement forbids farmers to save their seeds—an age-old farming tradition—meaning that farmers have to purchase new seeds from Monsanto each year.

On May 21st, the Supreme Court found Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser guilty of infringing on Monsanto’s patent rights by saving and planting Monsanto’s Roundup Ready canola seeds on his farm. However, what is more interesting, according to Dr E. Ann Clark, is what Schmeiser was not found guilty of: “He was not found guilty of obtaining the seed fraudulently. Indeed, all such allegations were dropped



Organic farmers in Saskatchewan worry that widespread use of GM mean would mean the end of organic wheat in Canada. Rob Maguire

at the actual hearing due to lack of evidence.” Furthermore, says Clark, who is a professor of Plant Agriculture at the University of Guelph, “No one—including Monsanto—argued that Schmeiser actually benefited—or even intended to benefit—from growing a crop contaminated with RR plants.”

“I didn’t want their technology on my fields”, says Schmeiser, who insists that the RR canola seeds somehow blew off a passing transport truck or from neighboring fields. According to a statement issued by Judge W. Andrew Mackay during a 1998 Federal Court judgement on the case, however, it does not matter why or how the seeds became mixed with Schmeiser’s crop: “[T]he source of the Roundup resistant canola... is really not significant for the resolution of the issue of infringement.” What mattered to the courts was that RR canola had contaminated Schmeiser’s crop and that he had failed to report this contamination to Monsanto.

The fact that the spreading of GE seeds by wind or other means cannot be controlled by the farmers of non-GE crops did not change the Supreme Court’s decision to hold them responsible for the contamination of their fields. “It is the organic farmer that will be held liable for contamination,” explains Nadege Adam, a Biotechnology Campaigner for the Council of Canadians. According to Clark, the problem of contamination is affecting many more farmers than Schmeiser: “Cross-contamination of seed crops with GM seed is now so pervasive that seed companies will no longer guarantee ‘100% GM-free’ for any field crop that has been subject to genetic modification.”

The introduction of a field crop that has been genetically modified essentially eliminates the possibility of growing that crop organically. Adam describes what has happened to the organic canola industry: “Two years ago, 200 farms in Canada grew organic canola; now there’s only one. You

cannot have an organic crop and a GE crop in the same area. The two simply cannot coexist.”

The Organic Agriculture Protection Fund (OAPF), a coalition of Saskatchewan’s certified organic farmers, has decided to do something about widespread crop contamination and the threat to their livelihoods. The group is taking Monsanto and Bayer Crop Science to court in a precedent-setting class action lawsuit to get compensation for losing canola as a crop due to genetic contamination, and to stop the approval of GE wheat as a commercial crop in Canada. The group fears that organic wheat will suffer the same fate as organic canola in Saskatchewan.

Meanwhile, on May 10th, Monsanto had announced that it was shelving its plans for GE wheat in order to, “[R]ealign research and development investments to accelerate the development of new and improved traits in corn, cotton and oilseeds.” Though this announcement is heartening for OAPF and other opponents of GE wheat, who believe the real reason for Monsanto’s change of heart is due to consumer backlash, Adam warns that the fight to stop GE wheat has not yet been won: “Monsanto was very careful in the wording of their press release. They said that they wouldn’t commercialize GE wheat right away. However, their applications for the approval of GE wheat are still being processed by Ottawa.” According to Adam, Monsanto’s strategic announcement eased much of the opposition to GE wheat, despite the fact that its introduction remains an imminent threat in Canada. “Now, if GE wheat is approved [by Ottawa] it will be up to Monsanto to decide if they release it into the marketplace. Not if, actually, but when.”

Zen and the Art of Gender Maintenance

Are you really in love? Does your best friend really hate you? Are you an annoying person? There is now a new quiz on the market to help with an even more important question: What gender are you, really? Kate Bornstein's *My Gender Workbook* uses the artistically neglected literary form of the women's magazine quiz to address the realities of gender politics. Since the demographic that magazine quizzes usually address is overwhelmingly female, and a fairly specific spin on female at that, Bornstein's quiz creates a tension within women-focused "literature". She uses a gender-constructed form to deconstruct gender, showing that the gender is completely constructed to begin with. The architecture of her argument is subtle and humorous. Reversing expectations, be they of literary format or gender, is what Kate Bornstein does best.

A sample from the quiz:

Your Gender Aptitude, Section I: Assumptions

Which of the following most accurately describes you?

- A. I'm a real man.
- B. I'm a real woman.
- C. I'm not a real man or a real woman, but I'd like to be.
- D. None of the above. I'm something else entirely.

Your Gender Aptitude, Section VI: No Gender

Which of the following statements most nearly matches your idea of gender?

- A. Gender simply is. If you don't like yours, get over it.
- B. I've been working on my own gender for a long time, and I'm getting to the point where I may actually have made my own.
- C. I think there's a lot about gender that we don't know

about yet, and I wonder why that might be.

- D. Gender is what happens to me when I get dressed in the morning.

Which of the following statements most nearly matches your feelings about gender?

- A. My *what* About gender?
- B. I guess my feelings range anywhere from anger and frustration to happiness and exhilaration.
- C. Gender confuses me. I don't know why it is the way it is.
- D. I feel... I feel... I feel a song coming on!

Have you ever experienced the nature of gender itself?

- A. No, it's not polite to question Mother Nature.
- B. I question the nature of my own gender, but gender itself? No.
- C. I question gender, but I get the spooky feeling that I'm not supposed to do that.
- D. The nature of gender? Isn't that an oxymoron?

Have you ever killed off part of yourself you didn't like?

- A. There's really nothing about myself I don't like.
- B. I've *let go* of parts of myself I haven't liked, yes.
- C. Sometimes. Are you saying that applies to gender?
- D. Oh, baby, wanna see where I stashed the bodies?

Why are you reading this book?

- A. I certainly didn't *choose* to read it, that's for sure.
- B. I think it's important to try to understand what it is that other people experience.
- C. It's been dawning on me that these might sort of be, well, my issues, too.
- D. Because *nearly* everything else about gender has been positively *dreary*, darling.



At the end of the quiz, you can check your "gender aptitude" score that can range anywhere from "Gender Outlaw" to "You're Captain James T. Kirk!" Yet the quiz is just a vehicle for Kate Bornstein's message and explorations of gender. Transgendered activism is becoming increasingly visible. Sex-change operations have come under attack for staying in the constraining dichotomy of the female *or* male options, and the link between transgendered people and homosexuality has been all but severed. A call for people to acknowledge a spectrum or pyramid of genders has begun in the transgendered movement, bringing attention to babies born with ambiguous genitalia, Native American *berdaches*, and other physical hermaphrodites as proof. This spectrum is reflected in Bornstein's quiz (not to mention her own lifestyle); there are four

choices per question and an accumulative "grade" at the end. None of the "grades" mention what type of gender you might be acting out, but they do evaluate your comfort and flexibility within that role. *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely* was published in 1998, but is still contemporary as Oprah Winfrey is interviewing transgender children; as dozens of AIDS ceremonies and protests were timed with Ronald Reagan's funeral procession; and as the trial for the killing of transsexual teenager Gwen Araujo comes to a close. Yet whether reading the book for a taste of current affairs or for personal interest, you will find yourself

asking questions not only about the construction of gender, but about what *else* might be bogus and spoon-fed to our culture.

As a writer and performance artist, Kate Bornstein's most recent work is a play entitled *Strangers in Paradox*, which opened in March 2003. She is currently touring and performing various works such as "Too Tall Blondes Do Texas," and "On Men, Women and the Rest of Us," which correspond with informal discussions, lectures, workshops and other innovative educational exchanges.

The quiz mentioned here is just a small part of *My Gender Workbook*.

Max Liboiron

If you would like to take the Gender Aptitude Test, go to: http://cydathria.com/ms_donna/ga_test.html

DAY TO DAY LIFE IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE

Suicide bombings; rocket attacks; bombing raids; assassinations; official reports; posturing; political wrangling. Whatever its bias, mainstream press coverage of the middle east overwhelmingly ignores the daily life of people living under occupation. But without understanding the conditions that Palestinians deal with every day, how can a coherent account of the situation and its attendant crises be attempted? With this in mind, we asked independent journalist Jon Elmer to compile a series of photographs from his three month stay in the West Bank and Gaza. Elmer's work can be found at www.fromoccupiedpalestine.org –ed.

RAFAH—This is a view of the so-called Philadelphi Route, the *de facto* border between Egypt and the refugee camp of Rafah (pop. 120,000), in the southern Gaza Strip. The fresh bulldozer tracks betray the evidence of what the army named Operation Root Canal, a major Israeli offensive in October 2003 during which armoured bulldozers made more than 1500 people homeless in less than 48 hours in this densely populated camp. The Philadelphi Route is used as a patrol road by Israeli tanks and is lined by sniper towers that keep constant watch (and often shoot, as you can see on the next spread), and is therefore the crucial staging point for Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip; since the al Aqsa intifada began in September 2000 more than 370 people in Rafah have been killed, at least 240 of them civilians and more than 100 children. According to the United Nations agency that administers the refugee camps in Gaza, UNRWA, more than 14,666 people have been made homeless by Israeli bulldozers, more than 10% of the camp's population.

AY STINE



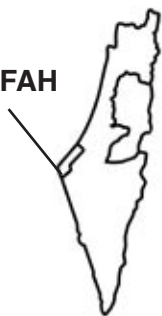


↑ In Rafah, the violence of occupation is a slow and steady grind. The Israeli army rains bullets into the camp regularly, both from the towers and the tanks—every building facing the Philadelphi Route is pockmarked by thousands of bullets and shells, and the homes facing the border have bricked over their windows to protect their families.

➔ The violence is comprehensive. It is massive : tank shells, Apache helicopter missiles, heavy machine-gun fire are regular features of the Gazan landscape. This wall stands on its own amid dozens of razed homes.



RAFAH



↘ The violence can also be subtle: a single, precisely placed bullet from a sniper's rifle made a hole in this family's rooftop water tank, draining their only water source in a camp with critical water shortages. Many of the water tanks we saw had been patched multiple times.





↑ ROADBLOCK—The Israeli occupation and military control is maintained through a massive network of roadblocks, trenches and checkpoints. In August of 2003, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs counted more than 300 roadblocks in the northern West Bank alone. Virtually every single road in the entire Occupied Palestinian Territories is obstructed in some fundamental way—be it guarded by soldiers, a trench dug across the road making it impassable, or a metal gate. Although justified by the Israelis in terms of ‘security’, it is difficult to maintain that argument in the face of photographs of unmanned gates. Palestinians I met never made estimates of how long it would take to get through roadblocks and checkpoints, but it typically could take eight hours to travel the 80 kilometres from Jenin to Ramallah. Rough estimates usually provided at least one hour for every 10 kilometres travelled.

↖ Closures have forced Palestinians to detour through fields, olive groves, streams and valleys—only some of the examples of how I travelled—to reach their destination.

← Travelling off road is a dangerous proposition, as the window of this Palestinian taxi attests.



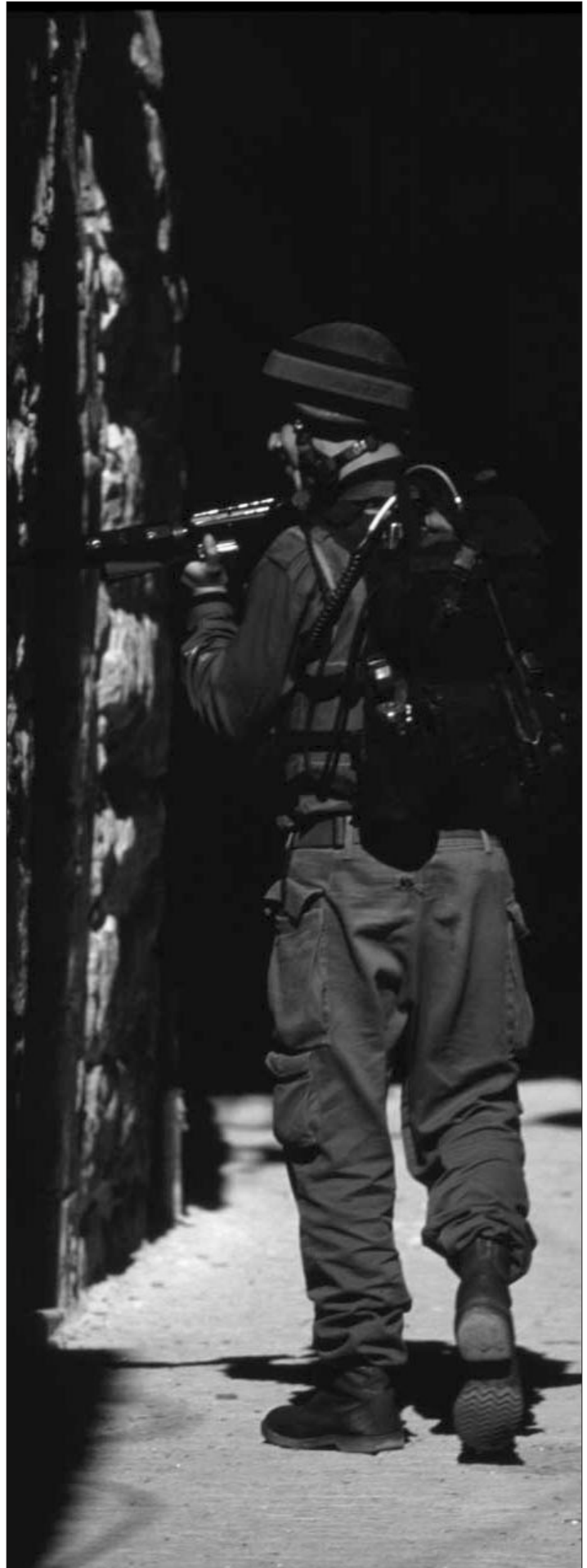
↑ JENIN—This is a ‘street-school’ in the West Bank city of Jenin, a school that is set up in the basement of a mosque or neighbourhood home to tutor children who are prohibited from going to class because the city is under curfew. This means 24 hour house arrest, with with the danger of being shot on sight by Israeli soldiers enforcing the order. In 2002, Jenin had 175 days of curfew. Street-schools are a way for children to learn, close to home. This photograph was taken on the sixth consecutive day of curfew in October 2003.

↙ ↘ QALQILIYA—Reaching eight meters into the air, the enormous Wall around Qalqiliya (pop. 50,000) is protected by a razor wire fence and sniper towers every 300 metres. It has all the trappings of a maximum security prison; a single gate regulates exit and entry into the city, manned by an Israeli guard or locked altogether. By the time the wall is complete, more than 50% of the West Bank will be annexed to Israel, and the Palestinians will live in three (depending on how you count) walled enclaves, disconnected from one another, with movement at the whim of the Israeli army.



↑ JENIN—*Top*: A tank, guns blazing, fills the downtown of Jenin with a diesel smokescreen to enforce a curfew order. The enormous trail of destruction left in the wake of the tanks is constantly renewed, and it is left to the community in Jenin to clean it up. *Above*: A merchant repairs the concrete sidewalk in front of his store during a break in the Israeli offensive.

➔ HEBRON—An Israeli soldier patrols house to house in the Old City in Hebron (pop. 90,000). 500 Jewish settlers have a colony in the centre of Hebron that is guarded by roughly 700 Israeli soldiers. The entire city is often put under strict curfew (34 schools are closed) to allow the Jewish residents free movement between their fortified settlement and the holy sites.





International News, cont'd from page 1 »

to new threats with so many resources committed to Iraq. The Iraq occupation is primarily land-based and involves relatively few naval and air force assets, which will be put on display in the coming weeks and months around the world.

Observers point out that this deployment to an oil-rich region of the world is curiously timed, given the recent increase in oil prices due to disruption of the supply in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. They suggest that the US is starting to look to other oil supplies and is positioning itself as a force in the Gulf of Guinea to exert control should the need arise. Although the offshore reserves in Africa promise to be large, they still don't exceed those in Canada, the holder of the world's second largest supply of proven oil reserves.

Corporations No Longer Persons: City Council

The city council of Arcata, California voted in favour of a

resolution to oppose the granting of the legal rights of individuals to corporations. "Only persons who are human beings should be able to participate in the democratic process," the motion read. The motion passed four votes to one.

"Corporate personhood" has been the subject of at least one other city council resolution (in Porter, Pennsylvania) and a number of high profile lawsuits dating back over 100 years. Most recently, Nike Corp. defended charges of false advertising by claiming that it had the right to freedom of speech. Today in the US, corporations have rights to free speech, privacy, the fifth amendment, and protection against discrimination.

While municipalities do not have jurisdiction over corporations, recent years have seen an increase in the engagement of City Councils in national issues in the US. Dozens of cities passed anti-war resolutions before the invasion of Iraq, and the city of San Francisco recently performed gay marriages. The Arcata council members plan to use the resolution as a basis for

ordinances addressing what they call "the legal fiction of corporate personhood".

GM Crops Spark Food Sovereignty Protests

Thousands of farmers in twenty-six countries held public demonstrations advocating food sovereignty and decrying the role of transnational corporations in agriculture. The largest agricultural protest took place in California and was accompanied by a large police presence. Among those issues being protested is the World Trade Organization's involvement in the proliferation of genetically modified (GM) crops against the will of some member states.

The European Union recently allowed the importation of some Swiss-engineered GM crops even though products containing these foods will be labeled, and growing the crops in EU countries is still prohibited. Friends of the Earth Europe delivered a petition with over

100,000 names to the WTO stating that the trade body has no place in the GM crop debate, as it is "secretive, undemocratic and unfit to serve in the interests of the general public".

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Association (FAO) released a report claiming the GM crops have no established adverse effects to health or the environment, and help poor farmers. Anti-GM advocates accused the FAO of bending to corporations like Monsanto and Syngenta, while biotech firms accused them of "scare-mongering". Facing difficulties in convincing European consumers to buy products labeled as genetically modified, Monsanto recently cancelled its "Roundup-Ready" GM wheat project.

Proponents of GM crops point to a lack of evidence of risks to health and environment, and higher yields for farmers. Those who advocate prohibition of GM crops counter that research into risks is heavily skewed by corporate funding, and that GM crops are designed with corporate profit first in mind.

Others point out that crop yields are not the problem, but that poverty, lack of price regulation and equitable distribution are. Raj Patel of the Institute for Food and Development Policy argues that it is not farmers that benefit from higher yields, but transnational food distributors that benefit from the resulting lower prices. "Corporations depend on cheap inputs, such as the agricultural products grown in the Third World, to make their food processing profitable." US taxpayer funded "food aid," says Patel, serves to drive prices down further by flooding African markets with subsidized GM corn and rice.

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) of Canada makes a similar case: farmers, it claims, are already producing far more than is needed; it is the plummeting price of food and the consolidated power of the distributors that forces them to produce greater volume at a lower cost in order to stay afloat.