

# The Dominion

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## Ecuadorians Demand President's Resignation

Protests on January 26th and February 16th brought thousands of Ecuadorians to the streets of the capital Quito to express their dissatisfaction with government policies, and to call for the resignation of President Lucio Gutierrez.

Two years ago, Gutierrez came to power on a promise to transfer power and wealth from Ecuador's "corrupt oligarchy" to the country's poor masses. Many compared his populist rhetoric to that of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. Unlike Chavez, Gutierrez has pursued American-friendly policies, such as support for the Plan Colombia and the Iraq war, and has recently received praise from IMF Managing Director Rodrigo de Rato for his government's economic austerity policies.

There is now a fear that Gutierrez is taking measures that are steering the country towards dictatorial rule. A December decision by the Ecuadorian Congress to follow through with a Gutierrez request to fire 27 of Ecuador's 31 Supreme Court judges was seen as a heavy handed tactic to punish judges that attempted to impeach the President for misuse of public funds.

The Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission of Human Rights Leandro Despouy called the action a "grave interference by the executive and legislative into the judicial sphere and hence a violation of the independence of the judiciary".



Empty streets in Baghdad two days before elections. The deteriorating security situation has disproportionately affected Iraqi women, according to an Amnesty International report. *Dahr Jamail*

## Women Face Violence in "World's Newest Democracy"

During the same week that George Bush proclaimed Iraq to be the "world's newest democracy" in a speech to EU and NATO leaders in Brussels, Amnesty International released a report condemning US forces and Iraqi authorities for doing too little to protect women and girls from violence and other forms of oppression.

According to the report, entitled *Iraq: Decades of suffering, now women deserve better*, the lack of security resulting from the 2003 war "has forced many women out of public life and constitutes a major obstacle to the advancement of their rights".

While the oppressive rule of Saddam Hussein, two previous wars with Iran and the United States, and a decade of eco-

nomie sanctions are also cited as negative factors contributing to the current maltreatment of women, US-led forces and Iraqi authorities are blamed for doing little to reverse the negative trends of the past.

Deteriorating health and education services, and low female participation in the political process and workforce are serious issues that the Amnesty report claims have been met with indifference by the Iraqi authorities. In addition, few measures have been taken to protect women from increasing "violence in the family and community".

The report is also highly critical of the treatment of Iraqi women by US-led forces since the 2003 invasion. Members of the US-led forces have been accused of subjecting women to "sexual threats", and for sexually abusing, and perhaps even raping women detained in prisons.

## 300,000 displaced; Slum Demolitions on Hold in Mumbai

An estimated 300,000 people were left homeless in Mumbai, India when authorities bulldozed acres of slums that were housing the city's poor. The razing of shantytowns began in December 2004, as part of a program put in place by the municipal government of Greater Mumbai and the government of the state of Maharashtra.

The plan aims to clear squatters from government-owned land to make way for infrastructure and commercial development. Roughly half of Mumbai's population lives in slums. Due to high real estate costs, many middle class families also opt to live in huts on unused land.

"It took us a lifetime to build our houses," one former resident was quoted as saying in a Reuters report. "But the government is destroying them in a minute. We won't allow this." Hundreds of demonstrators continuously opposed the demolitions, some attacking crews that lacked police escorts, others shaving their heads in protest.

"We want to put the fear of the consequences of migration into these people. We have to restrain them from coming to Mumbai," said Vijay Kalam Patil, a Mumbai revenue officer. Hundreds of thousands have moved to the city from the countryside, looking for work in India's financial capital.

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## Canadian Officials Told to “Block Consensus” on Moratorium

According to documents leaked to the press, Canadian officials were instructed to initiate a lift on the de facto international moratorium on “terminator gene” technology and “block consensus” on any other option at a UN meeting on biological diversity earlier this month.

“Genetic Use Restriction Technologies” produce genetically modified crops that are sterile, thus making it impossible for farmers to save any seed.

Opponents call it a “recipe for starvation” and an attempt for corporations to tighten their control over the world’s food supply. Supporters say it is a way for corporations to protect their intellectual property.

Canadian observers were surprised by their government’s stand. In a letter demanding that Canada support the moratorium, the National Farmers’ Union called terminator crops “the most controversial and immoral agricultural application of genetic engineering to date.”

“It was a complete surprise to see this coming from Canada,” Jim Thomas of the Toronto-based ETC Group was quoted as saying. “Canada’s proposal could easily have been mistaken for one written by Monsanto.”

Canadian Food Inspection Agency official Stephen Yarrow denied that the government was “pushing the technology,” and said they were upset at the characterization. Yarrow explained that the technology needed more testing before an all-out ban could be justified.

In the end, Canada’s efforts were unsuccessful, and the moratorium remained in place.

The leaked documents were reported in Europe by the Guardian but were not men-



Quebec students protest Liberal cuts to education. Dan Sweeney

tioned the Canadian media. The revelations did raise concerns in internet discussion groups on both sides of the political spectrum, however. One comment on the conservative Free Dominion web site said, “We’re selling starvation, aren’t we?... this is sick.” Comments on the left-leaning Rabble.ca chastised the CBC and other media for not covering the scandal.

The leaked documents are available on the ETC Group web site ([etcgroup.org](http://etcgroup.org)).

## Charest Ducks Confrontation on Education Cuts

Originally scheduled for a February 9th appearance at McGill University, Quebec Premier Jean Charest cancelled after a crowd of approximately 200 angry students attempted to confront him on his government’s cuts to education.

Upon learning that Charest was not coming, the students crossed Sherbrooke street to his riding office, where they tried to deliver their message to the Premier directly. After a stand-off between security guards and students, police arrived and removed a dozen protesters who were attempting to gain access to the building.

A statement the protest organizers had planned to read to Charest states that “While 40 per cent of Quebec students are in need of financial aid, Mr. Charest has cut \$103 million

from the loans and bursaries program, leading to a 62 per cent increase in student debt, which now on average exceeds \$20,000.”

The Premier was not available for comment.

Charest’s Liberal government has also become unpopular with Quebecers at large as recent polls have shown disapproval climb to a peak of 68 per cent. Quebec students have recently threatened a general strike over Liberal cuts.

## Tiomin Given Final Approval for Kwale Titanium Mine

NAIROBI, KENYA—After years of negotiations, the Kenyan government has given a Canadian mining company, Tiomin Resources Inc., the final approval to start a multimillion dollar titanium mining project in Kwale. On Feb. 2, the Kenyan government signed a fiscal agreement with Jean-Charles Potvin, President and CEO of Tiomin, which includes a 50 per cent reduction of the corporate tax rate for 10 years from the start of commercial production of the mine. The agreement also stipulates a 2.5 per cent gross revenue royalty to the Kenyan government.

The biggest foreign investment deal since the current government came to power, the mining project will exploit the titanium-rich sands in Kwale for at least 14 years. The Kwale

project is the first of four large mineral sand deposits along the coast of Kenya that Tiomin started exploring in 1995. The Kwale project is expected to produce large quantities of ilmenite, rutile, and zircon, which are used in the paint, ceramic and electronic industries.

The Kenyan coast is a unique tropical expanse of beaches, ancient Arabic architecture, diverse coral reefs and mangrove forests that stretches 402 kilometres. The Kenyan coastal forest is considered by Conservation International to be one of the world’s 25 hot-spots—areas of extraordinary biodiversity that are seriously threatened. Many endangered species, including the only bands of Colobus monkeys on the East African coast and also Kenya’s last remaining herds of sable antelope, depend on the coast’s fragile ecosystem, which is already under stress from the tourism industry.

The mining project will not only impact the coastal ecosystem but also the residents of the area who must be relocated. There has been opposition to the project from local communities who are concerned over the destruction of their land and compensation issues. However, construction of the project will likely begin later this year, and commercial production is expected to start by early 2007.

—Gemma Richardson

# Growing Pains, Gains for Global Solidarity

## 2005 World Social Forum was largest ever

by Jennifer Besner

It was a cool, cloudless day in Porto Alegre, and Avenida Borges de Medeiros - where thousands were gathered for the Peace March that kicked off the fifth World Social Forum - was bristling with energy and expectation. A swarm of brightly coloured flags, shirts, banners and placards competed for the eye's attention while a mishmash of languages filled the air. In the distance, from the window of a tall building, a thousand small scraps of white receipt paper fell over the crowded street, twirling brilliantly in the afternoon sunshine. On the corner of Rua Dr. Jose Montauray, the pounding drum beat and megaphone of the Partido Comunista do Brasil demanded attention, all but drowning out the rest of hubbub.

Though many of the Forum's one hundred fifty-five thousand participants may not have understood Portuguese, the PC do B's anti-Bush slogans needed no translation. Their sentiments were echoed in many of the signs carried by other groups and individuals, including some which read "Bush is the #1 terrorist," something which prompted one American participant to comment, "you can't see that in my country."

Indeed, conceived as a meeting place for "groups and movements of civil society opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism," the Forum has opened a space for the expression of ideas that challenge existing power structures. Mounted as a protest against the World Economic Forum in Davos and as a response to a world order dictated by the demands of capital, the radically reasonable mandate of the WSF is to build "a planetary society centred on the human person."



Forum-goers discuss free radio and free software in Porto Alegre.

John Perry Barlow [creativecommons 2.0]

Over six days, the Forum offered an incredible diversity of over 2500 workshops, panels and other events presented by some 4000 organizations from 112 countries. Hugging the shore of the Guaiba river, the grounds were divided into eleven thematic pavilions with such designations as "Communication: counter-hegemonic practices, rights and alternatives" and "Peace, demilitarization and struggle against war, free trade and debt."

Though loosely unified under the broad banner of anti-capitalism/anti-neo-liberalism/anti-imperialism, the Forum is also a space for people to "debate ideas democratically" and there was plenty of room for controversy. One of the major flashpoints for disagreement was Brazil's president Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva, better known as Lula, and his relationship to the Forum and the values for which it stands.

Welcomed by jubilant crowds at the 2003 Forum, which followed the Brazilian elections and the victory of Lula's Partido dos Trabalhadores by only a few months, Lula has since disappointed many of his former supporters

with what they perceive as an acquiescence to pressure from the United States, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund, and his adoption of conservative fiscal policy. While many at the Peace March sported bright red T-shirts reading "100% Lula," the walls along Av. Borges de Medeiros displayed graffiti in three-foot high letters reading: "Abaixo as reformas anti-povo do Lula" (Down with Lula's anti-people reforms).

In his address on January 27th of this year, Lula stressed the importance of the struggle against poverty and his commitment to bringing this issue to the table at Davos. The crowd greeted him with a mixture of applause and jeers. (The local press made much of this booping and of the opposition to Lula from within his own party; the Porto Alegre paper Zero Hora even went so far as to speculate that Lula may be subject to threats and that he may have been wearing bullet-protective clothing under his suit, which they deemed exaggerated for the hot weather.)

Even Lula's decision to attend both the WSF and the World Economic Forum had

public opinion divided. While some saw him as an emissary set to carry some of the Forum's social messages to the power brokers in the Swiss mountains, others simply viewed the move as a cynical political manoeuvre. Either way, noted Terra Viva, the independent newspaper

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[www.dominionpaper.ca](http://www.dominionpaper.ca)  
[dru@dominionpaper.ca](mailto:dru@dominionpaper.ca)

PO Box 741 Station H  
 Montréal, QC H3G 2M7  
 (514) 273-9936

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### Coordinating Editor

Dru Oja Jay

### Arts Editors

Max Liboiron

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# The Architecture of “Basic Human Pleasure”

## Godzilla vs. Skateboarders showcases the art and politics of skateboarding

by Dru Oja Jay

Skateboarders are at once lazy and industrious. Lacking in any apparent productive contribution to society, they nonetheless dedicate hundreds of hours improving their complex and intricate craft. Skateboarders (there are an estimated 30 million worldwide) can be seen languishing for hours in parks and on streetcorners—stretches of time punctuated by brief manoeuvres packed with concentration, risk and skill.

For architects and urban planners, they are something of an affliction. Conspiring with riders, skateboards cause damage to buildings, sculptures, parks, railings and benches. The potential for skateboarders to injure themselves has invoked the insurance industry's wrath in the form of overcautious safety requirements. In urban centres throughout the western world (and perhaps beyond), public architecture and art alike are being retrofitted with obstacles that eliminate their appeal as surfaces—edges, rails, ramps, half-pipes—for skateboarding.

Godzilla vs. Skateboarders, an exhibition of skateboard-related art that has been making the rounds of Canadian art galleries since 2001, is an attempt to recast the currently tense relationship between skateboarding and architecture.

In the artwork and the narrative that accompanies it, the exhibit is unabashedly theory-driven. In the large-type wall mounted introduction, curator Anthony Kiendl proposes that skateboarding can be the basis of a “critique of architecture, social spaces, and the values constituted by those spaces.” Further comments displayed on the walls alongside the artwork by architectural historian Iain Borden (among others) speak of “movement of the body across



Olivier Théreaux

social space”, of skateboarding as “a reassessment of the values of society as expressed through the reappropriation of social space,” or as a kind of “performative language”.

The prominence of theory is fortunate, as the art in the exhibit is more compelling for its ideas than for its aesthetics. The exhibit includes skateboarding video games, architectural models, short-lived skateboarder-friendly public art later dismantled by nervous authorities, and skateboard-mounted video camera recordings. Outside of the world of skateboarding politics and aesthetics, the work doesn't speak for itself, much less provide a critique of architecture.

There is plenty of enjoyment here for those with academic or intellectual inclinations. A discussion of the skateboarder as flâneur invokes Baudelaire and Benjamin, among others. Like the young men of 19th century Paris celebrated by urban critics and poets of the time, skateboarders are not only a part of the cityscape, but a critical, aloof, self-conscious force

within it.

The embedded theoretical text also discusses the privilege granted to “the vertical” in urban architecture and posits the skateboarder as a subversive force that asserts her value in the horizontal plane. Emphasis is taken from the towering edifice and transferred to the ledges, curbs, benches and other ground-level surfaces that surround it. The authority of columns and grandiose feats of engineering are rejected in favour of the immediate human interface available on the ground. (In the language of one of the many quoted theorists, “hierarchies” are “reintegrated from vertical to horizontal arrangements”.)

The viewer leaves mulling over the interaction between architectural theory and the visceral experience of the speed, sound, and hard surfaces of skateboarding. Outside of the gallery, edges—curbs, railings, low windowsills, stairs—begin to glow with previously unnoticed potential. The viewer is ready to imagine what artist Aaron Carpenter calls “architecture

built around some principal, basic human sensual pleasures; speed, fluidity and spatial negotiation.”

Outside the show, the texture and slope of pavement is more noticeable; the opportunity to turn a corner with a flourish with the help of a railing more evident; the possibility of momentarily viewing the street from the perch of a ledge or low wall more tempting.

The show offers many potential avenues of exploration for architects and city planners. From public housing with integrated skater-friendly half-pipes to art that “subverts the clichés of a formalist organic ‘modern’ sculpture,” the overarching suggestion is that the relegation of skateboarders to skate parks and their marginalization by bylaw is a suppression of a potent critique and a source of linguistic, artistic, and architectural vitality. Quite simply, the show asserts that cities are choosing to reject skateboarders when they have the opportunity to learn from them.



*Tree, A Life Story*  
by Suzuki and Grady  
Douglas & McIntyre, 2004

This book claims to tell the story of a single tree—specifically a Douglas-fir stands alongside a trail by the beach at David Suzuki’s cottage. But *Tree, A Life Story*, tells much more than that. After all, “If left alone, our tree would grow forever, but nothing in the forest is ever alone”. Suzuki and Grady trace the birth of this tree back to well before the appearance of

a seed. They start with the Big Bang and follow the evolutionary development of life on earth from single-celled bacteria to plants, trees, and other multicellular organisms. We watch as salmon, feeding in the ocean, accumulate nitrogen. A grizzly eats the fish when they head inland to spawn. Defecating its meal, the grizzly fertilizes the nitrogen-poor soil of the Doug-

las-fir forest. Twenty pages in, the reader may be a bit bewildered, but with perseverance, it becomes apparent that every detail, every tangent, serves its purpose. If the non-scientist can slog through the at times heavy scientific terminology, *Tree, A Life Story*, makes a rewarding, and even an inspiring read.

—Meribeth Deen



*The Drunken Lovely Bird*  
by Sue Sinclair  
Goose Lane Editions, 2004

Sue Sinclair is an astoundingly visual poet; if she were an artist, she would paint still-lives. The strength of this book lies in the poems that endow ordinary, cold objects with warm emotion and humanity: lonely refrigerators; hopeful, shy bathtubs; hung-over plates and silverware; a streetlight that will “lean out/ its throat to be smothered” with stroking affection. In this, her third collection, Sinclair has recognized and mastered her

own artistic obsessions: lilacs, tulips, winter, and an enduring fascination with the properties of light. Besides these leitmotifs, Sinclair continues to draw inspiration from the household, the garden, Newfoundland, and the urban landscape. Even in her less captivating narrative poems, she rewards the reader with a delightful and ultimately redemptive twist. A seemingly predictable poem about Eurydice and Orpheus

reunited in the underworld, for example, ends with this playful and psychologically astute image: “Sometimes when they are walking she teases him, falls behind./ He looks over his shoulder again and again: there she is. They/ never tire of this game”. This is an eminently readable collection that seldom falters, sure of where it has come from and where it wants to go.

—Matthew J. Trafford



*Leaving the Narrow Place*  
by Dorothy Field  
Oolichan, 2004

In “Not that It’s So Much Easier”, Field notes with awe: “Still, I was a Jew. Wherever I went they knew me. In Florence at fourteen a man knocked on the car window, gave us directions to the synagogue. In Merida a French tourist picked me out”. *Leaving the Narrow Place* traces the poet’s secular Jewish upbringing and her attempt to adopt Jewish customs as an adult. Some poems, like the split-down-the-side

“Music Box”, are artful reconstructions of the family dramas that dominated the speaker’s childhood. Often, however, the machinery of the poems is too exposed: “I load bushels with brown-pocked fruit,/ tumbrel them to distant burial/ and remember Aunt Libby, alone in the old house”. Here, as in many of the “haying” poems (a series in which the poets cuts and bales her farm’s hay with such companions as Ophelia, Ger-

trude Stein, Murasaki Shikibu, and her own grandmother), the segue is too obvious, and Field has a tendency to bog down her better lines with overexplained images and ideas. The speaker and her family don’t properly make the leap into full characters, and Field doesn’t manage to transcend the narrow place of her own experiences.

—Linda Besner



*The Sink House*  
by Julia Williams  
Coach House Books, 2004

The beauty in its central imagining—a house’s love affair with a riverbank across the ocean—is perhaps enough reason to pick up William’s first book *The Sink House* and bear witness to this intimate flood, even if the book is at times as choppy and erratic as the waves it describes. The playful typography, and the enigmatic structure which divides the book of

poems into six sections—“wave,” “house,” “dry,” “wet,” “wreck” and “float”—create intriguing yet frustrating layers of division. Some poems stand alone, while others demand to be read in context, as the titles launch ideas that are completed only by the next title. Williams sometimes seems to be testing her skills by writing from a basket of words selected in advance:

the word “sandbag” keeps unaccountably floating to the surface. There are, however, some lovely moments: “He dyes her bed blue and when she crawls in on cold nights she thinks she’s underwater.” And later: “don’t let these arms fool you/ there is no procedure/ for waving and drowning”. Williams knows how to swim.

—Erin Brubacher

# “...where a son cannot work for his father”

## Métis fishing rights and the federal government

by Kim Petersen

“But if there is justice, as I still hope, oh dear, it seems to me I have become insane to hope still.”—Louis Riel, 1885

The legendary Métis leader Louis Riel lamented the injustice suffered by his people, of which he is the greatest exemplar, having been found guilty by the settler court “of a crime the most pernicious and greatest that man can commit”: high treason. For this Riel was hanged in 1885.

The Métis are a people of mixed heritage, originally designated as mix of French and First Nation ethnicity. The definition has since been expanded to include all ethnicities mixed with natives. This definitional unclarity, however, formed the basis of the Ontario government case against Métis hunter Steve Powley.

Powley and his son Roddy were charged in 1993 under the Ontario Game and Fish Act after they killed a moose near Bawating (Sault Ste Marie) without a moose-hunting license.

Powley argued that section 35 (2) of the 1982 Canada Act delineated aboriginal rights as belonging to “aboriginal peoples of Canada,” which includes Métis peoples. In the landmark *R. v. Powley* decision, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously ruled that Powley and his son have the same hunting rights as a “full-status Indian.”

The ruling was specific to Powley and his Métis community but no expert seriously considers that one Métis community enjoys greater rights than another Métis community. Therefore, the ruling is considered to embrace all 300,000 Métis citizens in communities across Canada.

Despite the Powley decision, Ontario authorities continue to stymie Métis rights.

Allan Bjornaa Jr. is a



Métis fishing near Sault Ste. Marie, circa 1869. *William Armstrong/National Archives*

member of the Ontario Métis and Aboriginal Association from Batchewana Bay, Ontario. Batchewana First Nation peoples are indigenous to the Great Lakes region and at Bawating. His father, Allan Bjornaa Sr., is a Batchewana First Nation fisherman who catches whitefish and lake trout in Lake Superior.

Bjornaa Jr. released an email sent out on 24 January 2005 from David McLeish of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). McLeish stated, “In the case of Aboriginal communities engaged in commercial fishing activities, it is MNR’s preference to negotiate consensus arrangements, leading toward [a treaty], which can include provision for the inclusion of non-community members in the fishery.”

Bjornaa Jr. states, “Fishing has been the life blood of not only my family but my entire community of Batchewana Bay. Up until recently, I was allowed to work for my father, but, as it stands now, the Ministry of Natural Resources has imposed a ban on non-Batchewana Band members on their boats. I cannot find another instance anywhere in Canada where a

son cannot work for his father. The MNR has threatened me with criminal charges and has threatened my father with the seizure of his equipment. The only thing criminal here is the blatant discrimination the government is showing towards not only Batchewana Band members but proud Métis fisherman as well.”

An MNR employee confirmed the policy against non-Aboriginals on commercial fish boats. Attempts to achieve further confirmation by phone and email went unanswered before press time.

Bjornaa Jr. wonders why he cannot fish if Métis rights are indeed enshrined in the settler’s constitution. He asks, “Is it a crime for a native to marry a white woman? Should his children suffer because the woman he loves is white?”

There is a distrust of government.

“The government has went too far in trying to govern what they have no right to govern,” says Bjornaa Jr. “Native fishing should be governed by natives. My father is a good man and is concerned with preservation of the lakes. He has showed us to

respect the lake.”

“This is not only affecting my family but all native fishermen here. There are boats that are sitting at the harbor because the government is forcing boat owners to discriminate against Métis and whites alike.”

Bjornaa Jr. supports this with an anecdote: “My father tried to post a job listing at the local government job bank with the stipulation that ‘Batchewana Band members need only apply.’ He was told that he could not post that listing because it was ‘discriminating based on race.’ My father then told them that it was the government that was forcing him to be a ‘racist’ as they put it.”

On his father’s boat Bjornaa Jr. worked with other “non-status natives and whites.” Bjornaa Jr. tells that there was camaraderie among fishermen regardless of ethnicity. Governmental officials, however, are dividing the fishermen along ethnic lines.

Currently there are cases involving Métis fishing rights that are in the Ontario settler justice system. Perhaps Riel’s “insane” hope persists.

# Cancer Prevention in Canada

## Are some causes more equal than others?

by Andrea Smith

Approximately 68,000 people will die this year from cancer in Canada, and an estimated 1 in 3 will be diagnosed with the disease during their lifetime, a situation that has drawn the concern of many. Yet according to the National Cancer Leadership Forum (NCLF), an organization representing cancer care and advocacy agencies across the country, the federal government has yet to implement a cancer control strategy.

In 2002, the federal government announced it had devised the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control, a plan to improve the coordination and delivery of treatment, prevention, palliative services and research in Canada. Proponents of the strategy state that it is unique because all major cancer players in Canada sat at the table during its development, including provincial cancer agencies, major charities, research agencies, professional associations, patient advocacy groups and pharmaceutical companies. The strategy was developed after numerous consultations with representatives from the cancer care sector, who saw it as a means of meeting the need for a more coordinated and concerted effort to address cancer.

To date, the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control is still an idea on a shelf. Fed up with the federal government's lack of action, the National Cancer Leadership Forum launched its Canadian Campaign to Control Cancer (CC2C). The campaign aims to inform the public of what the National Cancer Leadership Forum sees as the government's lack of commitment to the treatment, detection and prevention of cancer. Mobilizing public support through circulating a petition, they hope to impress upon politicians the



**Prevention campaigns emphasizing lifestyle choices will do little to protect residents of industrial areas. For example, Sarnia, Ontario—known as Chemical Valley—residents' higher rates of cancer have been attributed to the local activities of petrochemical**

urgency of taking action.

While focusing on palliative care and treatment, the campaign also addresses the need for prevention. People are urged to quit smoking, improve their diet, increase their physical activity, and avoid overexposure to the sun, activities which can reduce an individual's risk of developing cancer.

Yet not all have received the Canadian Campaign to Control Cancer with open arms. Numerous health and environmental activists have argued that the prevention strategies suggested by the CC2C aren't what Canadians need. "Yes, more funding and action are needed on cancers linked to smoking, diets poor in fruits and vegetables, obesity, and over-exposure to sunlight," says cancer prevention activist Liz Armstrong.

"However, there also needs to be much more focus and action on cancer hazards over which Canadians personally have no control."

While the Canadian Campaign to Control Cancer addresses those activities that increase an individual's risk of developing cancer, it does nothing to address the causes of the rising prevalence of cancer within the population as a whole. Environmental health activists point to the role of the approximately 500 new chemicals being used in commercial processes each year, on which no or minimal toxicological information is available. And as the ecosystem becomes more and more permeated with chemicals from agricultural, industrial and residential uses so to do the human residents.

Scientists have called the chemical contamination of humans "body burden." Armstrong points out that "Every Canadian carries such a burden, from the moment of conception throughout life.

With more and more evidence that childhood and other cancers begin in utero, this ought to be at the top of the cancer prevention agenda at every level of government." To make the situation more troubling, cancer is only one of the potential negative health outcomes resulting from exposure to environmental contaminants.

Some have also questioned whether the omission of environmental contaminants is to defend the interests of the several major pharmaceutical companies sponsoring the campaign. Dr. Bell, from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) notes "drug companies, like all corporations, never involved themselves in a project unless it will enhance their bottom line."

Drug companies have a vested interest in detection and treatment, as they profit from the sale of their products. Prevention on the other hand, particularly the type that would reduce the overall cancer rate, isn't a profitable affair. Anne Rochon Ford of the national working group, Women and Health Protection questions the companies' role in the Canadian Campaign to Control Cancer. Ford says "there is both a real and perceived conflict of interest present when the funders will profit financially from the success of this campaign."

Such criticism is not meant to detract from the importance of ensuring adequate resources for the treatment of cancers, but instead to highlight the need for prevention strategies that will protect the public's health, in the present and future.

# Burma and Divestiture

## Canadian corporations in Burma, after the tsunami

by **Shaughn McArthur**

Coming from Southeast Asia's most xenophobic military government in the aftermath of the tsunami that caused a wave of humanitarian zeal around the world, a low official death toll in Burma does not inspire confidence or provide consolation.

UN estimates place Burma's tsunami casualties at 90, while the country's military government confirms only 61 casualties along some 2000 kilometers of coastline.

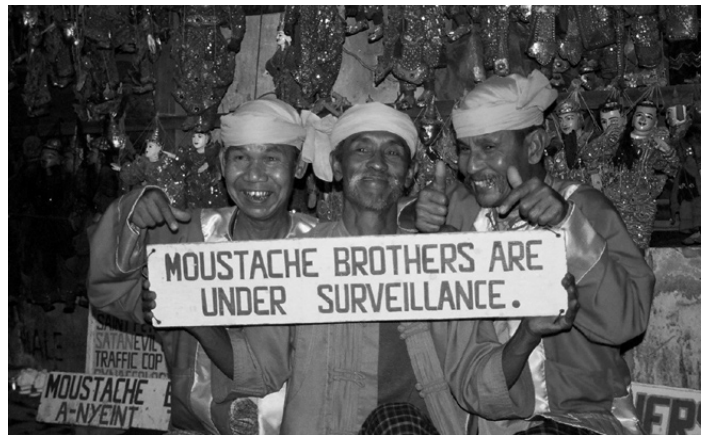
Refusing all international aid, Burma's authorities have not allowed any international monitors to enter its borders, even to assess damage.

Although the figures pale in comparison with those of neighbouring Thailand or India, critics of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)—Burma's ruling junta—are not concerned with the numbers themselves, but rather the discrepancy between them.

To those familiar with Burma's history, it symbolizes a more complicated conflict, rooted in 45 years of military rule, which over the past 15 years has left the South Asian nation effectively cut off from the world.

The (SPDC) has a reputation for downplaying disasters, and for keeping stringent control over outbound media.

Condemned by critics for outlawing fax machines, censoring television broadcasts and taking prisoners of conscience, Burma has been called the most information-starved country on earth. One example involved an attack on the convoy of Nobel Peace Laureate and democratic opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, during her brief release from house arrest in 2003. Eyewitnesses estimated some 60 dead in the ensuing clash, while the SPDC reported only four. The event got little international coverage.



**The Moustache Brothers are a traditional comedy and A-Nyeint Dance Troupe. Brother Lu-Maw (right) did six years of hard labour on a chain gang after telling political jokes at a pro-democracy rally in 1995.** *Shaughn McArthur*

On August 8, 1988, at the height of three-weeks of carnage, junta soldiers opened fire on thousands of unarmed demonstrators in the streets of Yangon. Reporting some 500 dead, military officials assured the world that everything was under control and that law and order would soon be restored.

Yet again, their figures differed drastically from those of civilian observers.

Referred to now by its date, the massacre of 8-8-88 is believed by the ambassadorial staffs that witnessed it to have claimed over 10,000 lives—more, that is, than Tiananmen Square. Following the uprising, the military government embarked on a campaign to “cleanse” its national identity.

‘Burma’ became ‘Myanmar’; and many cities, rivers—even the SPDC itself (formerly State Law and Order Restoration Council)—were also renamed. Not everybody acknowledged the changes, however.

In Canada, the colonial name “Burma” still applies.

“The Canadian government does not legally recognize SPDC sovereignty,” explained Ranjan Banerji, of International Trade Canada. “Canada doesn’t say, ‘Myanmar.’”

In 1990 the SPDC held

Burma's first free election in 30 years. The National League for Democracy had won a landslide victory, carrying 82 percent of the vote, yet the military regime refused to step down.

In August 1997, the government of Canada placed Burma on its Area Control List (ACL) - a position it shares only with Angola—and encouraged Canadian firms not to do business in that country, until it showed significant improvements. Implicit in the ACL are so-called “selective” trade sanctions, which required Canadian companies to obtain permission for all new exports to the listed countries, with humanitarian goods excepted.

Unable to punish the firms post facto, the government's sanctions had little effect on companies already invested in Myanmar. The government did not suggest that companies should renege on existing investments, so most of them carried on as usual.

Sears Canada and the Hudson's Bay Company, however, were among the few exceptions.

In 1999 and 1997 respectively, each voluntarily stopped sourcing products from Burma, becoming two of Canada's most important corporate divestitures.

Often acting upon the

wisdom of Ms. Suu Kyi, Burma solidarity-from-abroad groups have since the early 1990s campaigned against foreign companies operating in Burma, labeling them as the sponsors of state terrorism.

In 2000, the International Labour Organization (ILO) led a campaign against the use of forced labour in Burma, to which the SPDC responded by issuing an order prohibiting the practice.

Five years later, the ILO says forced labour is still common practice.

Ivanhoe Mines is Canada's biggest investor in Burma. It wholeheartedly denies any use of forced labour in clearing the way for their two copper mines in central Burma—“voluntary” labour is the term they used in a statement to their shareholders.

Ivanhoe has also come under scrutiny for the forcible relocation of eight villages in June 2000 to make way for the mine. Company profiles for Ivanhoe point out that over 5,000 local livelihoods depend either directly or indirectly upon the two mines in Burma.

In a joint venture with Mining Enterprise No. 1, of the SPDC's Ministry of Mines, Ivanhoe Mines is soon to be Myanmar's largest foreign investor ever. The mining industry in Burma represents some \$523 million in revenues annually. Ivanhoe itself is worth significantly more to that country than the sum of Canadian imports and exports, which in 2003 were worth less than \$30 million (US).

Because most of its copper is sold in Japan and Ivanhoe contributes not goods to the project but personnel and money, it is free under Canadian legislation to do business in Burma. The problem in many cases is that companies in Burma have

*continued on page 15 »*



# Nanotechnology and the Rebirth of Alchemy

## Are converging technologies laying a golden egg?

by Yuill Herbert

This February, the smallest test tube in the world was manufactured by scientists at Nanotech.org, a joint venture between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and Hitachi Europe Ltd. The test tube is so small that around 300 billion of them would fit into one of the periods (.) on this page.

In January of this year, researchers at the University of Toronto reported that they had combined quantum dots with a polymer to create a new type of solar panel five times more efficient than current technology.

In Thailand, scientists at Chiang Mai University's nuclear physics laboratory have rearranged the DNA of rice by drilling a nano-sized hole through the rice cell's wall and membrane and inserting a nitrogen atom, changing the colour of the grain from purple to green.

Kraft, Nestle, Unilever and others are employing nanotech to change the structure of food. Kraft is creating "interactive" drinks, for example, that can change colour and flavour.

Even in an era of radical technological change, it sounds like science fiction. But this type of research is typical in a field that is working at a scale so small that the laws of physics and chemistry governing everyday life no longer apply.

Two years ago, the ETC Group, an Ottawa-based think tank that monitors technological developments, called for a moratorium on nanotechnology research. Their justification: research and commercialisation of nanotechnology is happening below the radar screen of regulatory agencies, limiting society's ability to assess risks and regulate dangerous uses.

Two years later, the call for a moratorium still stands. In a

telephone interview, ETC Executive Director Pat Mooney said "Today, there are more reasons to be concerned, as there are now [nanotech] food products and pesticides on the market".

A number of recent studies point to possible health and environmental impacts of nanotechnology. Guenter Oberdoerster, an environmental toxicologist from the University of Rochester, reported in *Inhalation Toxicology* (2004) that inhaled nanoparticles accumulate in the nasal passages, lungs, and brains of rats. In *Toxicological Sciences* (2004), NASA scientist Chiu-Wing Lam reported that a suspension of carbon nanotubes (one of the most widely used nanoparticles) placed directly into mouse lungs caused unusual lesions that can interfere with oxygen absorption.

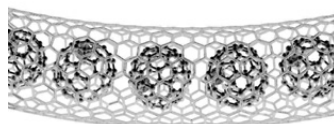
The first study of the impacts of nanoparticles on a species in their natural habitat was conducted by Eva Oberdoerster in 2004 and the results were published in the *Environmental Health Review*. Largemouth bass suffered oxidative damage to their brains and water clarity increased, possibly indicating that bacteria were being killed.

The UK government commissioned the Royal Society to investigate the ecological and health risks associated with this new technology and the resulting report, released in the middle of 2004, was strikingly cautious. "Until more is known about environmental impacts of nanoparticles and nanotubes, we recommend that the release of manufactured nanoparticles and nanotubes into the environment be avoided as far as possible."

According to Mooney, "The report shocked the Americans that the British were expressing so much concern. They were taken off guard. Industry was

caught with its pants down. They are embarrassed that there are more than 400 products in the market place that are not regulated."

Sean Murdock, executive director of the NanoBusiness Alliance, a nanotechnology trade association, is quoted in the *Environmental Health Review*, "The risks are there, they're real, but they're manageable," he says. "And on balance, with the right processes in place, we're going to be able to deal with all of those risks, we're going to mitigate those risks, and we're going to realize the



**A computer generated illustration of the 'pea pod' system, a nanotube filled with fullerenes.**  
*Nanotech.org*

upside of the potential."

There is now a flurry of discussion in industrialised countries about regulation. In Canada, the issue is being considered by an interdepartmental committee. Canada has also placed it on the agenda for the upcoming Edinburgh G8 meeting to initiate international discussions.

Nanotechnology is unusual in its scope; its interdisciplinary nature spans the physical, biological and engineering sciences and leaves no major research area untouched. On agriculture alone, its potential impact is overwhelming, according to a report published by the ETC Group last fall. Hope Shand, ETC Group's Research Director said, "Over the next two decades, technologies converging at the nano-scale will have a greater impact on farmers and

food than farm mechanisation or the Green Revolution."

In Canada there are active nanotechnology clusters of approximately fifty firms in Edmonton, Montreal and Vancouver. In 2001, the Canadian and Albertan governments and the University of Alberta jointly announced the creation of the National Institute for Nanotechnology, a \$120 million investment over five years.

Global investment in nanotechnology research and development has increased approximately seven-fold in the last six years from \$432 million in 1997 to \$3 billion in 2003 with at least thirty countries initiating publicly funded activities. If private investment was included, this total would reach \$8.6 billion by 2004, according to US analysts at Lux Research.

The issue goes beyond nanotechnology to the convergence of a range of technologies. ETC writes "the US government refers to convergence as the integration of Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology and Cognitive Science (NBIC) and envisions that the mastery of the nano-scale domain will ultimately amount to the mastery of all of nature. At the molecular level, in the NBIC worldview, there exists a "material unity" so that all matter-life and non-life-is indistinguishable and can be seamlessly integrated. The goal of NBIC is to 'improve human performance,' both physically and cognitively (e.g., on the battlefield, on the wheat field, on the job)"

Nanotechnology challenges society with fundamental ethical issues, according to Pat Mooney, "What is life and who is human? ...bio-nanotechnology raises questions around biodiversity and what constitutes living material that have to be addressed right now".

# “Canada is Legitimizing Suppression of Haitian Democracy”

## Filmmaker Kevin Pina slams role of Canadian government, media

by Dru Oja Jay

California-born, Haiti-based filmmaker Kevin Pina recently finished a tour of Canadian cities. He was showing his film, *Haiti: Harvest of Hope*, which covers the elections that brought Jean Bertrand Aristide's Lavalas Party to power. Crowds of hundreds in Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver and Victoria also saw parts of Pina's forthcoming documentary, *Haiti: Betrayal of Democracy*, which covers the events surrounding the events (one year ago as of this writing) which led to the removal of an entire elected government and its replacement with a military occupation and an “interim government” led by US citizen, Florida resident and former talk show host Gerard Latortue.

The day after the Montreal screening, I attend a press conference set up by the Montreal organizers. My first question to Pina is “why did no other journalists show up?”

Pina is not surprised. “We have the same problem everywhere. If they were interested in that side of the story, they'd be reporting about it. They're not.”

Pina explains that even journalists from Canada who live in Haiti are “only interested in the perspective of their government,” attending embassy press conferences but not Lavalas rallies. As an example, he cites the days leading up to the coup of last February 29th, when the international press provided comprehensive reporting of an anti-Aristide rally. While the largest estimate of attendance at the rally was 2,000, the same press ignored hundreds of thousands of Aristide supporters. Pina wrote at the time, “not one photo of the much larger pro-Lavalas demonstration was ever published in the corporate media.”



Thousands attend a pro-Aristide rally in Port-au-Prince. Kevin Pina says that such rallies have received no coverage in the corporate press. *Kevin Pina/Haiti Information Project*

Today, Pina says the Canadian press is neglecting key information about Canada's role in suppressing Lavalas, which he says remains “Haiti's majority political party”, though most of its leaders and key activists are in jail, dead, or in hiding.

### Peacekeepers complicit with campaign of suppression

Contrary to its reputation as a peacekeeping force, Pina says that “the United Nations military forces—the Jordanian, Chinese, Brazilian and Chilean military forces—have been part and parcel of this machine that is physically exterminating the majority political party.”

Pina explains that while the UN does not, to his knowledge, directly commit human rights abuses, it plays a supportive role to the Haitian National Police (HNP), who do, according to Pina and VARTI.

“The Jordanian forces just recently arrested a man named Jimmy Charles, and turned him over to the HNP. The next day, his body was found in a morgue. The UN forces are making arbitrary arrests without warrants, without cause; they're providing cover for the sweeps of the poor neighbourhoods.”

Pina says that Canada—

particularly the RCMP—is playing a key role in whitewashing crimes carried out by the HNP. Members of the HNP, which is integrating members of Haiti's feared military forces that were disbanded by Aristide, are currently being trained by the RCMP. The RCMP is also responsible for vetting former members of the military before they join the RCMP.

“[The RCMP are] boasting about training the HNP as an institution, and yet they're not accepting any responsibility, particularly when the HNP goes into poor neighbourhoods and performs massacres against Aristide supporters.”

Pina says that Canada has not disclosed the components of their police training program. “They claim that there's a Human Rights component, but other than that, they're very circuitous.”

“They're talking about incorporation of the former military into the police force at this point—the RCMP is deeply involved in that, but they're not talking about what process is in place to ensure that people who committed massive human right violations are not now being incorporated into the Haitian police—especially in light of the fact that these massacres are taking place in these

poor neighbourhoods.”

Asked whether there is any tension between the UN forces and the abuses of the HNP that have been documented by numerous human rights organizations, Pina says that any criticism is tantamount to “lip service”. “At the end of the day, they will always side with the Haitian police, no matter what atrocities they commit.”

### Role of the UN

Pina says that “the UN lost its independence from US foreign policy a while back.” “In the case of Haiti, the UN is a purveyor, an enforcer of US foreign policy in the Caribbean.”

“If you look at who is leading the coalition in Haiti today, it's primarily... Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. Each of these nations receive US largess, in the form of financial aid and military aid in particular.” Pina points to Brazil's desire to gain a permanent seat on the UN security council. “Many people inside his [Brazilian President Lula's] party believe that he is taking this position in order to curry favour with Washington,” so that Bush won't oppose Brazil's security council appointment.

“The international atomic energy has dropped its investigation into the possibility that Brazil is producing materials to make nuclear bombs - a lot of people are wondering why, given the US' obsession with nuclear capabilities in countries like Iran and North Korea.”

### The coming elections

Canada, says Pina, is “deeply involved” in planning for elections in Haiti, and is implementing what he calls “draconian rules” to make it

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# No One Is Illegal

Group aims for “regularization of everyone” through solidarity, not charity

by Matt Mundy

In the years following 9/11, the tenuous situation of many immigrants and refugees in Canada has been exacerbated by political pressure from south of the border and antiterrorism legislation. Partly a response to Tom Ridge and John Manley’s collective effort to build a “Fortress North America,” Montreal activists initiated the No One Is Illegal Campaign (NOII) in August and September of 2002.

Rejecting the sentiments of charity that occasionally motivate such campaigns, NOII sees itself as an ally for immigrants or refugees in need. Jaggi Singh, a member of the campaign, says that NOII’s role is “to act as allies with the people directly affected. We believe very strongly that people who are directly affected by injustices are the ones who should determine how their struggle is led and how it is determined.”

NOII emphasize the broad-based nature of their assistance, and support refugees and immi-

*“If you can’t claim status, it’s that much easier to exploit people and it’s that much harder for you to claim your full rights and your full dignity.”*

grants in many campaigns and styles of activism. The group circulates urgent action appeals for phone calls to government officials, collects signatures for petitions, arranges delegation visits, organizes demonstrations, helps with media work, and even provides legal support, child care, and counselling.

One of NOII’s current focuses is Solidarity Across Borders, an initiative which unites approximately 15 groups under four fundamental demands:



“No One is Illegal”-style campaigns have emerged in Europe, North America and Australia.

:neonymphoto [neo@null.net]

regularization of all non-status people, an end to detentions, an end to the deportation of immigrants and refugees, and - reflecting the link between immigration and the war on terrorism - an end to security certificates. These constitute a legal provision that has allowed the Federal government to detain immigrants indefinitely without charges, and keep evidence and charges secret from detainees.

NOII differs from many mainstream immigrant and refugee rights organizations in their support for the regularization of all immigrants and refugees. Singh explains that this position arises from NOII’s work with non-status Algerians, among others. “We work as allies with the Algerians, Palestinian refugees, individuals in detention centers...[and] the non-status Algerians from the beginning wanted regularization for everybody.”

Although much of their work directly involves immigrants and refugees, Singh stresses the broader impact of their struggle as well. “We don’t want to be pigeonholed...we’re a working class struggle, an indigenous struggle,” he said. “Non-status workers are on the

cutting edge of worker’s rights, as they can’t even unionize.”

Singh says that the fight for immigrant and refugee rights must be seen in the larger context of a struggle for social justice. “Why are people migrating?” asks Singh. “It’s not about curiosity, it’s about displacement. There are underlying political, social and economic realities that force people to migrate...we see this dynamic because of poverty, unemployment, destruction of rural economies and other underlying pressures.”

Singh emphasizes the contradictions of “Fortress North America”:

“Consider who’s pumping gas, who’s working in the back of fast food restaurants, who’s working domestic labor, who’s picking fruits and vegetables—you get an idea of what this migration is doing,” he noted. “If you were to deport these people overnight, these economies fall apart...we know that our economies are dependent on migrant and non-status labour.”

The contradiction, according to Singh, is explained by the economic logic that drives corporate globalization. “You

create a situation where there is a whole mass of exploitable people...if you can’t claim status, it’s that much easier to exploit people and it’s that much harder for you to claim your full rights and your full dignity,” he said.

The concept of ‘no one is illegal’ arises out of their analysis of immigration; NOII sees immigrants and refugees as people who, denied their basic rights, are now fighting to achieve them. Singh explains, “We have in our cities thousands of people who are fighting for self-determination and what’s insidious is that it is never seen as such. That’s why we say no one is illegal...there’s no such thing as an illegal human being,” he continued. “We’re trying to put out a new paradigm for looking at immigration.”

Finally, NOII places considerable importance on indigenous rights and struggle within Canada. “We feel that these policies reflect both colonial and neocolonial realities,” Singh said. “We’re predominantly a people of colour group and feel that it is important to openly support indigenous sovereignty and the basic inherent rights of indigenous peoples to these lands.”

# Ending Female Genital Mutilation?

## Rights, medicalization, and ongoing struggles to eliminate FGM

by Gemma Richardson

NAIROBI, KENYA—Being a deep-rooted cultural practice for many communities in Kenya, no one assumed it would be an easy task to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). For the first time in 1998, the Kenya Health and Demographic Survey included questions on FGM and found that 38 per cent of women had undergone the procedure. In 2003, the survey found that 34 per cent of women had undergone FGM, however in communities where FGM was almost universally practiced there was very little change. The slow rate of progress is discouraging to organizations that have been working on this issue for many years. Realizing just how much of a sustained and tailored effort FGM eradication campaigns require, international organizations and NGOs are trying to collaborate on research and intervention efforts to make greater inroads into eliminating this practice. At a conference held in Nairobi in December, UNICEF, Population Council and several other NGOs presented their latest research findings on FGM, with a particular focus on the Somali community in Kenya.

“How much longer?” said Abdi Abdullahi of National Focal Point at the conference. “There has been 80 years of campaigns and yet there’s been little impact.”

The papers presented at the conference showed many FGM intervention campaigns have had little to no impact, and some may have even contributed to further entrenching the practice.

FGM, female genital cutting or female circumcision, are the terms used to describe several types of mutilating operations performed to the external genitalia of girls and women. The types of procedures can be broadly classified

into four groups, ranging from the removal of a small part of the clitoris, all the way to infibulation, where the clitoris and labia minora are completely excised, the wound sewn shut, and just a small opening is left for urine and menstrual flow. According to No Peace Without Justice, an Italian NGO working to eliminate FGM, there are now between 120 million to 130 million women worldwide who have undergone FGM. Another two million girls and women are subjected to the practice every year, which takes place in 28 African and Arab countries, as well as by immigrant communities from these regions.

The Somali ethnic group in Kenya has the highest prevalence of FGM - 97 per cent of Somali women have undergone the procedure, and almost all are infibulations. As in many other communities, pre-marital virginity is very important for the Somali, and FGM is considered essential in preserving virginity and family honour. Many Somali also believe that FGM is an Islamic requirement, although some Sheikhs, community elders and Muslim women’s groups have clarified that infibulation is in violation of the Koran. This has led to a shift from infibulation to a less-severe form of FGM, and it is a complex issue for groups working to eradicate the practice to encourage its abandonment instead of the adoption a less-severe form.

There are many negative health consequences associated with FGM, including hemorrhage, cervical infections, urethral damage, urinary tract infections, dermatoid cysts, chronic pelvic infections, difficult and often dangerous childbirth, and a variety of other complications that can lead to death. While the health implications of FGM are very serious and form a key component of any campaign, many say that



**Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in Africa (darker shading denotes greater rates).**

focusing almost entirely on the health aspects has not addressed the violation of rights or contributed to the elimination of the practice. Instead, a strong focus on health implications appears to have contributed to the adoption of less severe forms of FGM or having medical professionals carry out the procedure in a more sanitary manner. A Population Council study in 2001 found that 70 per cent of circumcised Abagusii girls in Western Kenya reported having been cut by a nurse or doctor, whereas virtually all of their mothers had been cut by a traditional circumciser. There are also reports that the amount of tissue cut in FGM procedures for girls in the Kisii area of Western Kenya is reducing in response to the sustained FGM campaigns that focus on adverse health outcomes.

“This is a logical reaction,” explains Ian Askew, senior program associate of Population Council in Nairobi. “People want to keep practicing and they want to do so safely.”

Medical staff undertake the procedure mainly for the financial incentive, while to parents they provide a relatively safe and hygienic service. The preference for medical staff to carry out FGM has significantly increased in the past decade, although trained health providers performing these services

are contravening medical ethics, disregarding the Ministry of Health policy, and violating the 2001 Children’s Act. According to some activists, the trend of medicalization is a major impediment to the abandonment of FGM because it only decreases the risks involved, rather than eradicating the practice altogether.

In 1999, the Ministry of Health developed a National Plan of Action for the Elimination of FGM in Kenya to eliminate the practice by 2019, and in 2001, the Children’s Act made FGM illegal for girls under 17. However, the Children’s Act is not well-known or understood by many communities, and there is little support for enforcement of the law. The threat of imprisonment for those caught performing the procedure has driven the practice underground in some communities, and politicians representing regions where FGM is prevalent speak cautiously on the issue in fear they will not return to parliament if they openly condemn the practice. While laws banning FGM are seen as important, there is a general consensus that a grassroots, community-level approach is best, as top-down legal policies have shown to be ineffective in changing people’s attitudes.

The idea that FGM is a violation of girl’s and women’s rights is not accepted in many communities. Population Council found that in Somali refugee camps in Northern Kenya, most people considered FGM beneficial because of the social acceptability it brings. Women who abandon the practice have a lot to lose; their position in the community is affected, they have a harder time finding a partner for marriage, and often their dowry is affected because they are not considered vir-

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# L'Argentine: Survivre par le Troc

Rim Boukhssimi

Le 9 mars 2004, le gouvernement argentin et le Fonds Monétaire International sont parvenus à un accord de dernière minute évitant ainsi la cessation du paiement de la dette de l'Argentine évaluée à plus de 150 milliards de dollars. Déconsidéré par la grande organisation financière, en 2001, l'ancien «bon élève» du FMI avait sombré, du jour au lendemain, dans une crise économique sans précédent. Les gouvernements sont tombés les uns après les autres et les Argentins, après avoir tout perdu et s'être vu refuser l'accès à leurs épargnes bancaires, ont été forcés d'imaginer des solutions pour survivre.

A cause de ce désastre économique et social, le pays a même fini par être classer parmi les pays du Tiers Monde: 14 millions de démunis (sur 37 millions d'individus), dont 5 millions vivant au-dessous du seuil de pauvreté. Plus de 200 000 argentins ont quitté le pays et 20 % de la population vit maintenant grâce à une économie parallèle ingénieuse où l'argent n'existe pas : le troc, soit la forme d'échange économique la plus vieille du monde. Totalisant des transactions d'un montant équivalant à 100 millions de dollars par an, les «clubs de troc» semblent s'imposer comme le remède à la pauvreté et au chômage dans lesquels s'enlise la population.

## Alternative à une monnaie qui n'a plus de valeur

Le premier «club de trueque» (club de troc) est né en 1995 à l'initiative d'une vingtaine de personnes pour pallier la crise mexicaine dont la rapide propagation, appelée «l'effet tequila», avait touché l'Argentine de plein fouet. Le troc est vite devenu populaire auprès des citoyens apeurés et ne pouvant plus faire confiance à un gouvernement incapable

de les nourrir.

Dès 1999, plus de 150 000 personnes et plus du double après 2001 ont participé au système de troc. Tout est parti de la banlieue de Buenos Aires où la population, à défaut d'argent, a commencé à s'échanger des services. Par exemple, un jeune étudiant aidait une dame à réparer sa plomberie et cette dernière, en guise de paiement, lui préparait des plats cuisinés pour la semaine.

Rapidement, leurs idées ont évolué en fonction des besoins de la population. Ce système d'échange touchant bientôt tous les secteurs d'activités (certains services de santé se troquant contre du pain ou des œufs), il est apparu nécessaire pour les citoyens de se constituer en club. Les clubs de troc ont encouragé alors les chômeurs et les plus démunis à produire leurs propres biens et services puis à les échanger ensuite sur le marché «social».

Le nombre de personnes concernées par le troc augmentant de façon constante, les participants ont été obligés de comptabiliser les échanges et de les instrumentaliser. Désormais, des bons, portant le nom de «credits», sont émis sur une base de confiance, principe fondamental du Réseau Global de Troc regroupant tous les clubs de troc : «Les seules conditions que nous demandons aux membres du Réseau de respecter sont d'assister aux réunions périodiques des groupes, de s'engager dans les programmes de formation, de produire, de consommer des biens et des services et d'échanger le savoir à l'intérieur du Réseau. Nous soutenons que chaque membre est l'unique responsable de ses actes, produits et services».

Les «credits» sont des «crédits à l'heure» qui permettent de revenir à la véritable «monnaie» d'échange qu'est le travail : on échange des heures de travail plutôt qu'une monnaie



Indymedia Argentine

abstraite. Il circule aujourd'hui plus de 200 millions de crédits, soit 80 % des monnaies existantes en Argentine (pesos, dollars, monnaies provinciales).

## Une économie parallèle qui prend de l'importance

Les réseaux de troc ont permis à la population de remédier à ses problèmes d'argent en jonglant avec deux systèmes économiques : d'un côté, les pesos des salaires paient le loyer, les frais scolaires et les impôts ; de l'autre, les «credits» permettent de remplir le frigidaire et de s'habiller.

Selon Eduardo Ovalle, du groupe de réflexion «Nueva Mayoría», «rejoindre les milliers de gens qui vivent actuellement sans argent -ou presque- grâce au troc, c'est la seule manière de subsister en Argentine. Celle-ci est assez commune dans la classe ouvrière, mais elle s'est récemment répandue dans tous les échelons de la société et même dans les pays voisins».

En effet, des expériences similaires se développent au Brésil, en Uruguay, en Bolivie, en Équateur ou encore en Colombie. Synonyme de coup de pouce de fin de mois, les clubs de troc ont donné lieu, par la suite, à une véritable économie parallèle qui a permis

la participation d'autres acteurs sociaux, en particulier l'État. En 1997, le secrétaire des Affaires sociales de Buenos Aires, ayant compris les bénéfices des échanges de biens et services, a établi un programme d'appui au troc multi-réciproque qui légitime implicitement les opérations en crédits émis par les usagers. Le soutien officiel de la capitale à ce système ouvre de nouvelles perspectives à ce qui était jadis considéré comme un «marché noir».

Ainsi, le gouvernement pousse-t-il les entreprises à s'adapter aux exigences d'un système économique à deux marchés autonomes. Certains maires acceptent même le troc direct en paiement des retards d'impôts : un mécanicien peut rembourser sa dette en réparant des voitures.

Selon Heloisa Primavera, professeur à la Faculté des sciences économiques de Buenos Aires et participant actif au réseau, la «victoire n'est pas seulement d'avoir réinventé la vie en réinventant le marché, nous avons surtout ouvert un chemin aux exclus du progrès social et de la croissance économique».

## Solution vouée à l'échec?

Cependant les économistes sont de plus en plus inquiets devant la montée fulgurante de cette économie où l'argent n'existe plus. Selon Marshall Goldman, économiste américain, le troc pourrait avoir des conséquences aussi désastreuses en Argentine qu'en Russie il y a dix ans.

Avant la chute de l'économie russe, en 1998, le troc équivalait à près de la moitié des transactions commerciales. Or, à cette échelle, rappelle Goldman, l'échange de biens et de services encourage l'évasion fiscale, l'inefficacité et

## World Social Forum, continued from page 3:

produced for the WSF, Lula was “perhaps the only known link between the two forums.”

In contrast to this lukewarm reception, the welcome received by Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez was overwhelmingly positive. Speaking before a crowd of over twelve thousand on January 30th, he spoke of the need to “transcend capitalism by way of socialism” and denounced the interventionist actions of the U.S. The people’s consciousness of the need for profound changes is greatest in South America, he said. “When these people choose freedom, there is no force capable of stopping them.” His remarks were met with wild applause.

Chavez also announced a proposal for the creation of a Latin American television network which would provide a space in the media for perspectives which diverge from the world view imposed by the North and which, he said, could more accurately represent Latin American realities. Such a plan would certainly pose a threat to the current balance of media power, as UNESCO’s New World Information and Communication Order once did in the 60s and 70s. That revolutionary initiative, designed to democratize media by addressing the one-way flow of information from North to South, and supported by the Non-Aligned countries of the South, was opposed by Britain and the U.S. The withdrawal of funding and political support by both nations ultimately forced UNESCO to abandon the project.

If Chavez is able to implement such a plan, it will no doubt be in the face of substantial opposition from the Rupert Murdochs of the world. But for those who believe, as the Forum tagline goes, that “Another world is possible,” such a feat would only serve to increase Chavez’s rising star power.

While the WSF certainly

provides space for the exchange of a diversity of ideas, its critics argue that this is its weakness, that the Forum is little more than a talking shop, an ideology fair which produces a cacophony of voices but little concrete action or results. There were also complaints among participants that the Forum lacked organization and that the infrastructure was inadequate for the sheer number of participants. In the Youth Camp, where thirty-five thousand participants pitched their tents, a lack of security was blamed for some eighty accusations of sexual assault and rape.

However, say Forum defenders like Ramesh Singh, Chief Executive of Action Aid International, the WSF’s basic importance is as an event which has “facilitated various movements, processes and protests to come together, converge and synergize.” Beyond providing a place for like-minded people to rub elbows, Singh says, the WSF also “sent a message of formidable challenge, creating a sense of insecurity in the minds of the dominant power and discourse.”

In 2006, rather than holding the Forum in a single venue, there will be four or five events taking place simultaneously in different parts of the world. It was rumoured that one of these will be held in Caracas, Venezuela, but nothing will be officially decided before the meeting of the International Council in April. The Council has already decided that in 2007 the Forum will be held in Africa, though the exact whereabouts are as yet unknown. With over 120,000 attendees, the fifth World Social Forum was the biggest ever, and it’s clear that popular support for the WSF continues to grow. It remains to be seen what effect this burgeoning movement will have on the neo-liberal agenda it seeks to derail.

## International News, continued from page 1:

On the busiest day, over 6,000 houses were destroyed.

Finding themselves homeless and sleeping in rubble, many former slum-dwellers have discovered they are losing their democratic rights. Representatives of the National Congress Party recently filed a court injunction to remove those whose houses had been demolished from the voting rolls.

Many say that the Nationalist Congress party owed their success at the municipal level to the support of slum dwellers. Politicians had promised to regularize all huts built before

tions as a “human made tsunami,” Nationalist Congress officials are worried about a “growing perception” that their policies are anti-poor. (*Dru Oja Jay*)

**Swedish broadcaster blasts Italian media**

A diplomatic row has erupted between Italy and Sweden over advertisements for Swedish public broadcaster Sveriges Television (SVT) that claims that Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has used his ownership of Italian media to gain political power.

The ads, which claim that Berlusconi controls approximately 90% of Italy’s media industry, suggest that he used his media power to gain political office, and once in power, used his political influence to prevent moves to change Italy’s media ownership laws.

In an interview with Sweden’s daily tabloid Aftonbladet, Swedish Ambassador to Italy Staffan Wrigstad states that Italian officials are very “concerned” with the advertisements, and are demanding that they be withdrawn immediately.

SVT’s information director Helga Baagöe is quoted in the Svenska Dagbladet newspaper as saying that the station has no intention of withdrawing the ad.

*“While some have condemned the demolitions as a “human made tsunami,” officials are worried about a ‘growing perception’ that their policies are ‘anti-poor’.”*

the year 2000 but went back on the promise in a bid to “clean up” Mumbai.

Under intense pressure from the party’s grass roots, Nationalist Congress representatives have put a de facto hold on demolitions.

While some commentators have condemned the demoli-

**Le Troc, de page 13:**

la corruption. Mais, pour lui, tout n’est pas sans espoir : «Le troc est un signe que quelque chose ne tourne pas rond dans l’économie, mais c’est aussi la preuve que les gens tentent de s’en sortir et de relancer la production».

L’économie argentine est en effet malade, mais le troc

semble une solution plus que salutaire pour une population qui n’aurait jamais pu survivre sans entraide. Aujourd’hui, les «credits» donnent accès aux soins de santé, permettent de payer ses impôts et même de prendre l’avion. C’est à se demander si le troc n’est pas la solution d’avenir...

**Burma and Divestiture, continued from page 8:**

neither environmental accountability nor labour standards to meet, which creates significant opportunities for reducing costs.

Ivanhoe, for its part, is certified ISO 14001 - the so-called "green standard" - for its mines near Monywa, which use organic enzymes to break down the copper. Lacking the infrastructure to extract Burma's resources by itself, the SPDC provides manpower, incentives and 50 percent of the profits to foreign investors with better means.

Canada's selective sanctions are clearly no match for the junta's \$7.9 billion annual income—indeed, even the

United States' more stringent policies fall short of starving the SPDC. Occasionally the SPDC grants Suu Kyi her freedom—aid trickles in, until the coffers are filled - then she is re-sentenced, and foreign aid withdrawn.

Suu Kyi's latest sentence was extended by another year last November. Her phone was reported disconnected, and Democratic Party leaders said they had been barred from visiting since May.

On January 2nd, 2005, two days before Burma's 57th independence day, the SPDC released 5,588 prisoners. Among the prisoners were eight Democratic Party members, at least nine other political pris-

oners, and journalist Zaw Thet Htwee, 38, sentenced to death for treason in 2003.

Progress in Burma is painstaking, advances intermittent and forced; too often they amount to no more than jest, a minimum response to persistent critical dissent. However, and albeit silently, Burma's popular longing for democracy lives on.

It is unlikely that the SPDC will simply repent, and despite the UN's observances of increased openness of SPDC officials over the past few months, their behavior since the tsunami calls optimism into question.

It is impossible to know the

full extent of Burma's suffering—pre- or post-tsunami—just as we may never know exactly how many Burmese lives it claimed. In the meantime, tsunami relief funds have been withheld from Burma, with efforts concentrated on Burmese refugee camps in Thailand instead.

As for the peacekeepers distributing aid rations, several reports out of Southern Thailand have accused them of "structural discrimination" against the illegal Burmese population in the region. It is believed that some 120,000 Burmese migrant workers in Thailand have been affected by the disaster.

**Interview with Kevin Pina, continued from page 10:**

mandatory to vote, denying non-voters access to social security or government services. "It's similar to what happened in 1982 in El Salvador—people were so afraid—if they didn't have the electoral stamp on their ID card, they could be pulled aside by the police and killed, which did happen in El Salvador."

"Paul Martin, George Bush, Condoleeza Rice—they believe that they can maintain this illusion that there is a process of normalization going on in Haiti, but Haiti is not Iraq. They may come up with this proposal to allow Haitians abroad to vote in the next elections, so that they can have pictures of them with the ink on their thumbs and say jeez, what success this election was."

"What are they going to do when more than 50,000 Haitians hit the streets to protest against the elections and the RCMP-trained police force has to open fire on them."

Everywhere he goes, says Pina, people "do not want to legitimize this process... they don't want to legitimate that their president was taken out."

"They were tutored by the international community about 'one person, one vote'. They feel like they played by the rules of

the game, only to have it stolen from them again."

Pina says that it is impossible to have legitimate elections while the majority political party is being forced to hide in the woods, in fear for their lives. "Lavalas has made it clear that the conditions do not exist for them to participate, and I can't blame them."

"I've often felt that maybe the page should be turned, there's tremendous pressure to turn the page on Aristide, in order for Haiti to move forward. But the truth is, how can you say that there are conditions for elections when you have political prisoners."

"How can I fault Lavalas for not wanting to participate when there are massacres being committed against their followers in the poor neighbourhoods. How can I fault them when I have personally seen the climate of terror that exists in Haiti today?"

"Rightly or wrongly," the majority of Haitians are calling for the return of their elected president, says Pina.

"The role of Canada and the other countries in Haiti is to try to silence those voices, to prepare for the next election so that they can present to the world the facade that the page

has been turned."

Pina asserts that the coming elections will provide the illusion of choice, but will ultimately create disunity. "There are going to be 140 parties in the next election—140 parties!—more than 100 candidates for president... To me, that's plurality run amok."

"On the surface, it seems like Haitians have more choices, but in reality they have fewer choices. Who do you vote for for president when there are 100 candidates for president and each of them is from a tiny party, each of which wants to hold power in order to serve its own personal financial and political interests. That's not democracy, it's just a facade to cover the coup d'etat of February 29."

Pina, however, is not optimistic that the Canadian government will change course. "It gets to a level where they can no longer deny it, so they have to spin it. All that's left is to break off a couple of [Lavalas] opportunists who will take part in the elections."

**Better information**

Pina is also pessimistic about the prospects for more accurate media coverage of

Haiti. On the subject of Canadian media coverage, the veteran filmmaker becomes visibly irate, describing Globe and Mail correspondent Marina Jimenez's coverage of Haiti as an overt attempt to confuse the public about documented facts. In a recent article, Jimenez defined the creole word *marronage* to mean "obscuring reality", going on to note that she didn't know if claims about political prisoners were credible. Pina rebuffed Jimenez, explaining that *marronage* refers to escaped slaves "hiding from French masters, creating their own communities," a phrase that he says has a lot of resonance with Haitian activists in hiding from paramilitary groups and police. He becomes enraged, however, at Jimenez's use of the term to "confuse people about the facts," which he says are at this point are well established.

For Pina, the only way to get accurate information is for citizens to take responsibility to keep themselves informed. "We who have an interest in ensuring that our government represent the values of our communities—we have to create our own media. We have to be willing to do our own research in order to find out the truth."

**Female Genital Mutilation, continued from page 12:**

ginal. While a girl's mother and grandmother make most of the decisions about circumcision, many argue that the father still holds the most influence. If men continue to alienate uncut women and encourage their daughters to be cut, it seems the practice will never be abandoned. However, recent studies have shown that men appear to be more open to the idea of abandonment than women, which presents an opportunity for FGM campaigns.

Girls are now being circumcised at earlier ages, most frequently between seven to 12 years old, compared to 15 before. It is believed young girls are better able to survive the

painful experience and they are easier to convince. Circumcising girls at a younger age presents a major problem to campaigns aimed at empowering women to refuse FGM. A girl at the age of eight has considerable difficulty asserting her rights when no one is asking for her consent, and support is not available within her community. The alternative rite of passage, developed to replace FGM as a transition into womanhood without any cutting, also has little impact when girls are cut at earlier ages, because by the time girls reach the age where the ceremony would be relevant, their families may have already had the procedure done.

Education of girls is the key to the long term elimination of FGM, as women with higher levels of education are more likely to refuse that their daughters undergo the procedure. School curriculums should also teach the rights of the child and awareness on sexuality issues, which would provide awareness on what FGM entails. Some have urged NGOs working within communities where FGM is prevalent to offer support, and even temporary protection when necessary, to those who publicly declare themselves against the practice.

While FGM is a deep-rooted cultural tradition which is continued through taboos and

myths, culture is not static and some changes are inevitable.

"This is a gradual process of social change that we need to accelerate on, and it's already started in some communities" says Askew.

Programs for FGM eradication must be sustainable, collaborative, and multi-faceted if they are to achieve any significant change in attitude and practice, and must be tailored to meet the needs of each specific community. This requires massive resources, time and commitment, and until the international community and governments are willing to provide this, FGM will continue virtually unabated.