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.

The Dominion

CANADA'S GRASSROOTS NEWSPAPER

WWW.DOMINIONPAPER.CA • OCTOBER, 2005 • Vol. II, #12

The Blockade Between Hope and Destruction

» p. 8

Insurgency in Occupied Alberta

» p. 13

The Battle of New Orleans

» p. 14

Génocide rwandais: La presse française au ban des accusés

» p. 10

Canadian Media and Climate Change

» p. 3

Argentina after the collapse

» p. 7

Copper and Ecology in Junín, Ecuador

» p. 2

& more...

Cover illsutration by Sylvia Nickerson

Copper vs. Ecology in Junín

Canadian mining company preaches development, reaps division

by Stuart Schussler, UpsideDownWorld.com

Junín community members want to continue with sustainable development based on ecotourism in the neighbouring ecological preserve.

Junín, a small town in the mountainous Intag region of northwestern Ecuador, is home to about 500 Ecuadorians. The community is rich in many ways for local residents. Fertile land produces organic coffee, sugar cane, and oranges for export. The town is located next to the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve and the people of Junín created their own community ecological reserve 8 years ago. These protected areas cover a large expanse of cloud forest and protect one of the world's most biologically diverse ecosystems.

The social fabric is also rich. Public works projects such as road maintenance or repairs on the school house are done with the traditional minga system, where members from each family volunteer to do a couple days of work each week for the common good.

However, in the eyes of Ascendant Copper Corporation, a Vancouver-based mining company traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange, Junín's wealth isn't in its people or its diverse ecosystem–it's in its rocks. Junín's community reserve contains an estimated 2.26 million tons of copper.

This copper isn't a recent discovery. Bishimetals, a subsidiary of the Japanese-based Mitsubishi Corporation, tried to mine the area in the mid-1990s. The company even got as far as building a provisional mining camp. But local community members learned of the estimated environmental and social impacts of the proposed open pit mine; potential cyanide contamination of the local water supply, increase in crime, and the forced relocation of the area's residents.

Cloud forest near Junín.

The residents organized and educated each other in order to protect the community and their health. They tried to contact Bishimetals and express their opposition to the project. Finally, as Bishimetals continued to ignore their requests, the people of Junín burned down the provisional mining camp in May of 1997. The company left.

Today Ascendant Copper is trying to lay the groundwork for a mine and do what Bishimetals couldn't. Community support and preliminary exploration are needed before mining can occur. To win this support, Ascendant says they are "developing a strategic development plan for the communities in the area." They see Junín and its neighboring communities as poor, backwards areas whose only hope for salvation lies in foreign investment and mining.

Olga Cultid disagrees.

"They say we're in extreme poverty," said Olga, as she sat in Junín's ecotourism cabañas. "But it's a lie. I'm not rich, but I'm not lacking either."

One of the company's "development strategies" has been to buy people off–giving them jobs and handouts if they support the mine. Olga, whose son goes to school in the neighboring community of Garcia Moreno, was offered a bribe in exchange for her support of the mine.

"They offered to pay for transportation, lodging, everything for my son. They offered me a job as protector of the environment," she said.

But she refused. In her eyes it is more important that the community own its land and remain contamination-free for future generations. Those who support mining "don't think about our children," she says.

Ascendant's proposed mine, and the company's unscrupulous actions to gain "support" for it has been a very divisive force in the community, more so than any other local development project.

While Junín is steadfast in its opposition, the neighbouring town of Garcia Moreno by-and-large supports mining. Since Ascendant began working in the area, the relationship between the two communities has progressively worsened.

"We used to be like one big family, but now everything has changed," said Olga. "Now you can't go and have friendly conversation. It's not the same."

Relations between the towns have degenerated beyond

continued on page 16 »

~ ISSN 1710-0283 ~
www.dominionpaper.ca
dru@dominionpaper.ca

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

The Dominion is a pan-Canadian media network that seeks to provide a counterpoint to the corporate media and direct attention to independent critics and the work of social movements. *The Dominion* is published monthly in print and on the web.

New Orleans is sinking, man, and I don't wanna talk about climate change ¶ Canadian media ignore scientific debate

by Dru Oja Jay

For the most part, discussion of climate change in the context of coverage of the recent flooding and destruction on the Louisiana coast doesn't exist. Traditionally, journalism about extreme weather–particularly the recent slew of hurricanes like Juan–does not take into consideration the possibility that global climate change might be partially responsible for the destruction that merits hours upon hours of coverage. Exceptions are rare, and usually brief.

Coverage from the week following Hurricane Katrina's landfall has exemplified this dynamic.

But at the margins–and largely south of the border–a polarized debate is stirring.

In an article entitled "For They That Sow the Wind Shall Reap the Whirlwind", Robert F. Kennedy Jr. called attention to Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour's role in dismantling US support for the Kyoto protocol.

Hurricane Katrina, Kennedy wrote, "is giving our nation a glimpse of the climate chaos we are bequeathing our children."

In an opinion piece, Germany's Environment Minister Jürgen Trittin wrote that "[Bush] is closing his eyes to the economic and human costs his land and the world economy are suffering under natural catastrophes like Katrina." Tritton called for a renewed commitment to Kyoto.

A lone opinion piece in Mississippi's Clarion-Ledger entitled "Global Warming Beefs Up Hurricanes" pointed to a recent study linking the force of hurricanes to increases in water temperature due to climate change.

The eye of Hurricane Katrina. *NOAA*

Some commentators accused Trittin and others of "exploiting the death and misery in New Orleans for their own political agenda" and "politicizing Katrina". Germany's Der Spiegel published a sampling of angry letters from Americans blasting Trittin for his insensitivity.

"It is easy to assume that the recent rise in [the] number and ferocity [of hurricanes] is because of global warming," said the New York Times. "But that is not the case, scientists say," the Times continued.

Cited as "one of the leading experts" on hurricanes, Dr. William M. Gray told the Times that hurricanes are a matter of "natural cycles" of weather.

So which view is correct?

It depends on the question. Did human-caused climate change cause the massive and tragic devastation in New Orleans? Few scientists would be willing to endorse such a claim, due to the multiple possible factors involved. Dr. Kerry Emmanuel, the author of a July 2005 study published in Nature linking hurricane strength to rising temperatures, told the Times that "What we see in the Atlantic is mostly the natural swing." Emmanuel explained to Democracy Now: "we don't fully understand it... I don't think anyone pretends that we do, but there have been... periods of 20 or 30 years of inactivity followed by 20 or 30 years of activity," which are fairly regular.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) seems to agree. The group's 2001 technical summary states that "There is little consistent evidence that shows changes... in tropical cyclones" from climate change. The report goes on to add, however, that "precipitation intensities... are likely to increase appreciably" with average temperatures rising globally, meaning that flooding is likely to be more substantial when hurricanes hit. Emmanuel's projection of hurricane force falls along these lines: "for every degree centigrade of warming of the tropical oceans, you might get about a five per cent increase in the peak winds."

There are other questions, and other answers. What is the effect of climate change in the impact of Hurricane Katrina and future storms? What is the role of human-caused ecological damages in the devastation currently on display?

In March, a study published in Science by the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) stated that with a half-degree increase in ocean temperature, sea levels could rise 11 centimetres from thermal expansion alone (i.e. not counting melting glaciers, ice shelves, etc.).

A 2003 report on climate change in the Gulf Coast region released by the Union of Concerned Scientists said that "coastal flooding and erosion will increase because rising sea levels will generate higher storm surges even from minor storms."

"Whether or not global warming increases the number or intensity of hurricanes, future storm damages are likely to rise substantially because of the increased amount of development in harm's way and the aggravating impacts of higher sea levels and degraded coastal ecosystems," said the report.

Climate change, however, isn't the only human factor being examined in the aftermath of Katrina.

In the online magazine Salon.com, former Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal wrote that the Bush Administration "cut New Orleans flood control funding by 44 percent to pay for the Iraq war." Blumenthal also notes that the Bush Administration reversed a policy of restoring lost wetlands surrounding New Orleans, "unleashing developers" on wetlands. The result is greater damage from

continued on page 17 »

The Rising of The Rising

Canadian film critics pass on Bollywood's hard look at imperialism

by Rajiv Rawat

A strange Canadian silence seems to have descended over the Bollywood film, The Rising: Ballad of Mangal Pandey, a historical epic depicting the Indian sepoy uprising against their British masters in 1857. It is the year's most anticipated Indian film, with an unprecedented number of UK and North American screenings in mainstream movie theatres. Yet it has been completely bypassed by Canadian film critics.

In the week following its August opening, neither the National Post, Globe and Mail, nor Toronto Star have reviewed the film, nor have the alternative weeklies from Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver. The only article to appear relating to this movie was an Associated Press story reprinted in the Toronto Star and Montreal Gazette, which related the experiences of white tourists enlisted to play extras in the film! The movie itself was not reviewed.

While this is unsurprising, considering the Canadian media's grave disconnect from the cultural milieu of ethnic minorities, this particular silence has disturbing implications. The Rising has a powerful anti-imperialist message, one resonant with contemporary American hubris in Iraq and the brutality and bloodshed it has entailed. The movie's depictions of what the British call "the mutiny" and what Indians call their first war of independence frames the main character and his passage from servitude to outright rebellion, and retains strong social commentary. The nature of the racist and capitalist oppression of Company Raj (India was then ruled by the East India Company) is also explored, as are the ambiguous relations between culture and religion in the fight for freedom.

From *The Rising*.

In the UK and India, some British historians have pilloried the film for depicting the British East India Company in a negative light. Even the Conservative Party and right-leaning newspapers have stepped into the fray, demanding an explanation of why the UK Film Council helped fund the film. Their indignation must stem from the fact that it is no longer solely the victors who are writing the history books, and that subaltern views are finally permitted vivid expression in the mainstream. The sour response may also stem from the fact that the film offers a powerful rebuke to recent attempts by hawkish neo-conservative scholars and politicians to rehabilitate imperialism. This trend reached its height with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's recent statements at Oxford, declaring that the British empire was "an act of enterprise, adventure, creativity", comitted to "fair play" and the "rule of law". Toby Stephens, the English lead in the film admitted to a "shameful ignorance" about the East India Company's record in India, a record that has been whitewashed in British history.

Even inside India, the issue of historical licence has been used to discredit a profound examination of the nature of corporate colonial rule. Residents of Pandey's hometown of Ballia have objected to the depiction of Pandey's love for a dancing girl as being out of keeping with the town's socially conservative values. This minor change to the story misses the artistic purpose of the change– the comparison of prostitution of the body to the prostitution of the soul.

Criticism based on alleged historical distortions are something of a red herring; not only has cinema long been tinkering with facts to suit the exigencies of compelling plots, but it is made clear from the outset that the film is a ballad and not the definitive story, in keeping with the Indian oral tradition.

Yet it is the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity, as well as strong social commentary on untouchability and prostitution, that are likely to be fuelling the British and Indian media campaign against the film. Aamir Khan, who plays Mangal Pandey and is also one of India's most respected and popular actors, has made the film's anti-imperialist message abundantly clear. In recent interviews, he has drawn a direct link between the behaviour of the East India Company and the United States' imperialist actions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and previously in Vietnam. (On a historical note, the East India Company's red and white striped ensign is the direct inspiration for the stars and stripes.) The film also carries a pointed economic critique, with a notable opium subplot illustrating the company's corrupt practices in the name of the "Free Market." Mangal Pandey's Scottish officer friend explains in the film how the Company can be described as Ravan, Indian mythology's most notorious villain, except that instead of ten heads, the Company has a thousand all stuck together by greed. This is capped off by a song (and dance) about commodification, entitled "Takey, Takey" where everything–including human beings and love itself–can be bought and sold.

The film itself is technically and aesthetically brilliant, a point that can hardly be disputed by even the most hardened critics. Some of its jarring elements are a result of the attempt to squeeze a historical epic inside a Bollywood frame; this form is not usually a vehicle for contemplation of serious political matters. However, this risky blending of genres was attempted in order to ensure that the film would reach a wider audience, both on the Subcontinent and internationally. While its outstanding leads alone, Aamir Khan and Toby Stephens, make The Rising a great movie, important messages about oppression and freedom, collaboration and resistance are what make it an instant classic, and a courageous cinematic threat to the interests of the powerful.

Treble
Evelyn Lau
Raincoast Books, 2005

Here a certain self-conscious femininity is at work: the lavender cover with budding flowers coyly leaning into each other, the slightly forced-feeling reflections on domesticity and babies, the musings on Cupid. Yet some of the section titles (The Red Woman and Fatal Attraction) reveal a darker femininity that Lau never properly develops. *Treble* reads a little like an attempt to decorate a home in the suburbs after living in urban dives for years, or like a beginner's first attempt at floral arrangement: there are a few bright blossoms — such as "Infidelity" and "Forced Knowledge"–but on the whole too many carnations, too much baby's breath and undifferentiated green, so that the final outcome is unintentionally funereal. While some poems seethe with astute imagery, others drift into meaninglessness: "I wanted to tell you about this drowning,/ to stir a space in the snow/ and show a hand, but in this place no echo/ or cry for help could score the air./ We were already too far past each other/ in the bright and tumbling world." *Treble* is an odd mixture of good poetry and Hallmark-worthy two-liners.

–Matthew J. Trafford

Bloodknots
Ami Sands-Brodoff
Arsenal Pulp, 2005

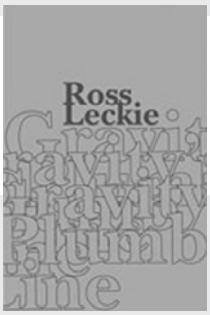
Brodoff's latest work explores relationships afflicted by tragedy and absurdity; Bloodknots' sentimental stories show crippled characters inextricably linked by blood, heritage, and friendship. This theme is exemplified by object- and place-motivated narrative shifts, which explore connections between past and present, as in "Extremeadura", in which the young narrator, sitting on an airplane bound for Spain, is reminded of the model planes he built with his father years ago. Such juxtapositions result in Bloodknot's more successful moments. However, the narrating characters are often unconvincing, especially in Brodoff's attempts at interior monologue. Consider her rendering of a jealous child: "But. Everything's messed up with Dufus around. I mean, different. The light, sounds, even the smell of things." And although multiple points-of-view are employed throughout the collection, they are sadly united by Brodoff's collection of lifeless metaphors. For instance, in "Love out of Bounds," a character describes the feeling of being on a roller coaster: "Plunging down, my heart rises with a live flutter, leaving me weightless, emptied out, like free-falling in a dream". There is little here to make Bloodknots anything other than a frustrating and dull read.

–Henry Svec

Yesterday, at the Hotel Clarendon
Nicole Brossard
Coach House, 2005

This novel is a poetic, elusive rumination on creation and loss. Set in Montreal and Quebec City, Brossard's book is anchored by four likeable and diverse female characters, all of whom make a living through some form of creation. Three of them, Carla, Simone, and the nameless narrator, create shrines to or representations of the past, where they find lost families, lost cultures (two characters work at the Museum of Civilization), or lost lovers. Brossard's book is divided into two roughly equal parts, the first being a series of short poetic vignettes, many of which contain no dialogue and little action. When the four women meet for the first time however, in a lounge at the Hotel Clarendon, the book changes form. Reversing her initial ethereal approach, Brossard could now be writing a play, her narration has become so strictly temporally located. While some of the earlier passages are a slog to read through, with the sudden switch Brossard brings her characters more sharply into focus, allowing the reader to appreciate the plot twists she's been working us up to all along.

–Sam Fraser



Gravity's Plumb Line
Ross Leckie
Gaspereau: NS, 2005

Leckie is an old war-horse on the Canadian literary scene, and *Gravity's Plumb Line* is a paeon to green pastures that invite a bit of a lie-down. There is not much that crackles about this book, focusing as it does on landscape and vegetation in the Atlantic region. Sometimes Leckie's eye leads him to make swift, apt comparisons: each water lily pad is "an ear connected by an auditory nerve/ to the brain-muck of the lake's bottom". More often, however, the reader misses that sense of active consciousness behind the perceiving eye which is the spark for nature poetry. Leckie often seems to be looking without seeing, and describing without communicating. Some of this gap may be accounted for by an overly precious positioning of the natural world, as in "Psyche", where Leckie, in a description of spring irises, invites us to "imagine for a moment the metempsychosis of these little souls into two or three butterflies". Likewise, phrases describing water as "lit by the light", or the pages of a book as "papery thin" do little to add to the reader's sense of the particularity of Leckie's poetic offerings.

–Linda Besner

Supportive, Not Insular

Senior community on Ward's Island aims for sustainable long life

by Leah Schnurr

The Shaw House is a stately building. Set back from the road, it provides affordable living for eight seniors with its tall vaulted ceilings and spacious, airy rooms. In the back, a garden of indigenous wildflowers and trees provides shade and a view of the water.

Opened on Ward's Island in 2002, the Shaw House was built so that seniors who could no longer take care of their own homes on the island were not forced to move to a facility in the city.

A 10-minute ferry ride away from Toronto, residents first put up stakes in Ward's at the turn of the century when it was nothing fancier than a settlement of tents, says Albert Fulton, the island's archivist.

The settlement grew to 150 lots with tents and shacks on them, "which came to be the footprint for what Ward's is today," says Fulton. These sites were liveable only in the summer and were rented out from Victoria Day to Labour Day.

"It was a way to escape the city," says Fulton. "On a hot day, there's always a breeze on the island and there were theatres, dancehalls and beaches, so there were lots of things to do."

Today, there are approximately 500 people living in the small, cottage-like homes on Ward's and Algonquin islands, which make up the eastern portion of the four connected pieces of land that are known collectivley as the Toronto Islands.

Ward's small population and the physical proximity of the houses mean that the community on the island is a tight one.

"Everyone here knows everyone," says Jimmy Jones, who has lived on the island for 73 of his 75 years. A walk through the island with him confirms that Jones, at least, knows everyone, as he waves and chats with everyone he meets.

Jimmy Jones near the Shaw House on Ward's Island.

This neighbourly closeness extends beyond social pleasantries to a philosophy of making sure everyone on the island is taken care of. The Shaw House exemplifies this: not only does it serve a social need, it was also designed to use many environmentally sustainable building techniques.

Graham Mudge, treasurer of the Shaw House, says the idea was to build something holistic that would serve both the community and the environment.

"We wanted to build a house that would last a hundred years," he says.

The house boasts walls constructed from straw bales. This makes the building extremely well insulated, and if it were ever demolished, the walls would simply turn to dust rather than taking up space in a landfill.

The floors of the halls are made out of bamboo, which grows very quickly, and is considered a more sustainable resource than wood. The roof is made of zinc, which will not rust or deteriorate the way copper or ashphalt shingles will.

The house is also heated and cooled through a system that pumps a glycol solution underground and up to a fan or a heating pump, depending on the season. This uses far less energy than a regular system would and cost of heating is about a quarter of what it would normally be.

The process of constructing the house was turned into an opportunity to help disadvantaged youth. Using a government grant, 15 long-term unemployeed youth were hired for six months. They were taught carpentry skills and decently paid for their work. While the program was not meant to be a mentoring one, Mudge says the managers helped the youth with life skills, provided accomodations if needed, and fielded crisis calls at all hours.

The program was a success: three months after finishing the program, 14 out of the 15 had either gone back to school or had found employment, mostly in carpentry.

"I think one of the reasons that led to (the program's) success was that this was not an ethereal project," says Mudge. "They could see what was rising was a building where people were going to live."

Beyond the ties islanders have to each other, they also have unbreakable ties to the island itself.

"When you step off the ferry, you just go, 'Ah, I'm home,'" says Jones.

Indeed, the voyage from the Toronto Ferry Docks to the island gives one a symbolic clean break from the hectic city, traveling to a breezy retreat with a close relationship with nature.

There are no stores or ammenities on the island, and cars are not allowed, making for an abundance of bikers and roller-bladers gliding down the wide paved roads.

Jones estimates he goes into Toronto every two weeks to pick up groceries and other items but readily admits he would just as soon not make the journey.

"I find reasons not to go," he says grinning. "If it's raining, I don't mind going in-land but I don't want to miss a beautiful day on the island."

Plans are in the works to build an addition that will double Shaw's occupancy. Mudge says they want to begin building next April, and hope to employ youth through the same program.

Although preference is given to current islanders, Mudge says over the years they have received a large number of applications from people living in Toronto who want to move to the island.

"They're always thinking about the convenience because it's close to downtown [Toronto]," explains Mudge. "But even more important is the nature of the community. This is not an insular community, but a supportive one."

After the Collapse

A review of *Argentina: Hope in Hard Times*

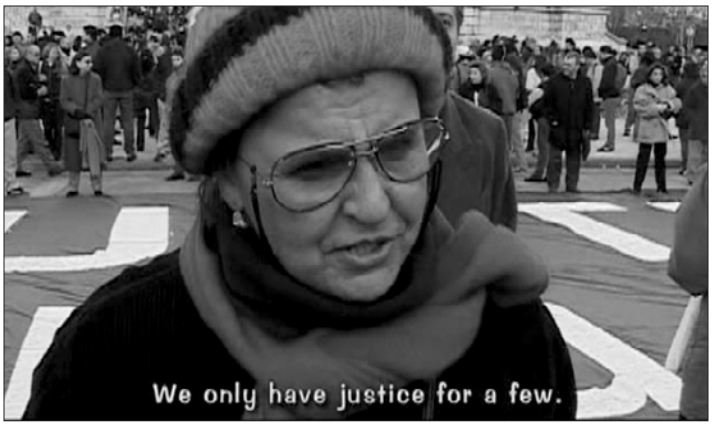
by Sean Cain

Throughout the nation of Argentina, tens of thousands of unemployed people search the streets and garbage dumps for recyclable products. Called *cartoneros*, many of them are young, some barely teenagers. Each Saturday, a truck drives through their neighborhood to buy some of what the cartoneros have collected. This is a means of survival in the new Argentina.

Illustrating this day-to-day struggle of unemployed and poverty-stricken Argentines is an inspiring new documentary by Seattle-based independent film makers Melissa Young and Mark Dworkin. Entitled *Argentina: Hope in Hard Times*, the film reveals how ordinary people in dire circumstances can overcome incredible challenges by working together for common goals.

The story of Argentina over the past decade has been a sad one: due to financial pressures from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the government privatized state assets, fired tens of thousands of civil servants, deregulated financial markets, slashed social program spending, raised interest rates, and cut public sector wages and benefits. Not surprisingly, the incomes of the wealthy and powerful increased almost exponentially, while unemployment and poverty skyrocketed for the poor and working class, leaving the country with greater inequality and poverty. Added to this is the financial collapse that began in 2001, when even the hundreds of thousands of middle-class Argentines began losing their jobs and savings.

When this crisis hit, Young and Dworkin were actually on vacation in South America. But with millions of Argentines taking to the streets shouting "Que se vayan todos!" ("throw them all out!") and thousands of desperate workers taking over abandoned factories to protect their jobs, the film makers went back to the United States and later returned to Argentina with their film equipment.



From *Argentina: Hope in Hard Times*.

Whereas other documentaries such as Naomi Klein's *The Take* focus on democratically-controlled businesses in Argentina, *Hope In Hard Times* embraces a much broader perspective on the Argentine free market tragedy. The documentary not only examines how Argentines have adapted their lifestyles to a crumbling economic system, but asks larger questions about human nature and the possibilities people have of building a different kind of economy and a new society.

It is difficult to believe that 100 years ago, Argentina had one of the largest economies in the world, and the per capita income was about 70% of that of the United States (today, that number is about 25%). Citizens of what was historically the richest country on the continent, many Argentines used to consider themselves more European than South American, although recently this attitude has begun to evaporate.

Some of the more memorable scenes from the documentary include its dire illustrations of shanty towns that look remarkably similar to those of apartheid-era South Africa, demonstrating the widening divide between the rich and the poor. Young and Dworkin also take the viewers into street corners of Buenos Aires, where organized groups of activists, many of them unemployed, gather on a regular basis to discuss ideas and proposals for future actions, such as street demonstrations, tax revolts, land occupations, and more ambitiously, lobbying government officials to refuse additional IMF loans. Every suggestion is voted on democratically, with each member of the group having a vote.

This egalitarian form of organization mirrors that of many of the factories recently taken over by workers throughout the country. With the economic collapse came the abandonment of hundreds of businesses by their owners. But instead of joining the ranks of the unemployed, some workers decided to not-so-legally take control of their companies and manage them democratically, without bosses. The film examines the worker-controlled Ghelco company, Industrias Metalurgicas Y Argentina (IMPA), and the celebrated Brukman clothing factory of Buenos Aires.

Related to these industries are the newly-developed cooperatives that have sprung up throughout the countryside, all of which integrate significant levels of democratic decision-making. The Light of Hope Community Centre, which was created on the site of a former garbage dump, includes 340 families. Just a few miles down the road is another cooperative where more than 130 people farm on nine hectares of land. Child-care cooperatives, barter fairs (where people can freely exchange goods and services), and a growing array of charitable organizations further symbolize the new forms of collaboration growing in the country.

Viewers might expect the documentary to deal with the politicians, IMF officials and other elites who were largely responsible for the crisis. This the directors have refused to do, and it is the film's interaction with ordinary Argentines that is most stimulating. A young protester interviewed proudly states that his local church raised funds for the victims of 9/11. He then ironically asks "if someday the U.S. will help us." One elderly woman, a member of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who march every week through a square in Buenos Aires carrying pictures of their sons and daughters to remember the 30,000 people 'disappeared' by the military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, comments on the larger picture: "Globalization is still capitalism, they've just given it another name. Capitalism always turns into imperialism."

It is this collective outlook that reveals the true character of the Argentine people. One would think that desperate people would turn inwards and concern themselves with their own well-being. As Hope in Hard Times illustrates, millions of people decided instead to work together to improve everyone's condition. During a political or economic crisis, what is it that makes one society turn to equality and democ-

continued on page 17 »

The Blockade Between Hope and Destruction

Grassy Narrows, Abitibi Consolidated and the Canadian Governments

by Macdonald Stainsby

Chief Saskatcheway, who was chief when Treaty Three was signed, appears on flags and other designs.
Macdonald Stainsby

Many years before the arrival of the white man to the land of the Anishinabe Nation, there was a prophecy that when the white people arrived, they would bring the destruction of the forests and the land that sustains the Anishinabe people. When Montréal-based Abitibi Consolidated began logging the land in the late 1980s, the sound of the machines was enough to cause great concern for many elders.

Years of massive clearcutting took a serious toll on the Anishinabe population living in Grassy Narrows. In 1996, members of the nation decided that it was time to try and do something about it.

Initially, Abitibi held open houses and public gatherings in the nearby settlement town of Kenora, Ontario. In an attempt to deal with the loss of forests to Abitibi, some concerned Anishinabe people attended the consultations and tried to enter into dialogue with Abitibi Consolidated. The concerns of Indians living with the land were not addressed. Several more steps marked a slow but inevitable escalation. When Abitibi held shareholder meetings, some Anishinabe set up pickets outside; letters were written; petitions were signed.

These were either ignored or treated as a minor nuisance. Meanwhile, the centuries-old prophecy took on a deadly accuracy.

For many years, logging went on in the Whiskey Jack forest without generating much concern. People knew the loggers were working there. People tending their traplines would often hitch rides on back roads with logging trucks. At the time, the logging was selective and not deeply damaging; the operations did not directly gouge the land.

When Abitibi introduced clearcut logging practices to the area, however, the devastation to the entire ecosystem was immediately apparent. When a forest is clearcut, nothing is left except a few trees deemed not profitable enough to cut by the corporation. Moss, mushrooms and the soil itself are torn up, exposing giant patches of barren land.

"I'm not against logging," says Joe Fobister of the Anishinabe Nation. "I'm against how they're doing it, and who is doing it, making millions of dollars off of our land and leaving us nothing."

"This land is so wealthy. It's our land, and yet we remain the poorest of the poor."

This view is not a monolithic one. The youth, in pushing for more permanent forms of resistance, carried a simple slogan: No negotiations, no compensation, no more clearcutting.

The reason for the first part of the quote is that a) Abitibi wanted to talk while continuing to work in the Whiskey Jack forest, and b) negotiating with any corporation on this level inherently confers upon it a nation-like legitimacy, a political shift which many Anishinabe from Grassy Narrows reject.

Part of the blame, says Fobister, should be laid at the feet of a corrupt band council that acts on behalf of the settler state of Canada.

"The council and the chief make a good living, and get a very good income. In this very poor community, that's why people join the council. They have no real power, but they are scared to risk their funding," he explains. This dynamic — the creation of a de facto ruling comprador class of Indians to implement colonial expropriation of resources — is an all-too-familiar refrain in the political set up of Nations that resist the assimilationalist policies of Canada and refuse to give up their land to corporations like Abitibi.

Fobister continues, "They are not there for the good of the people, but simply for an income."

The entire Whiskey Jack forest is part of the homeland of the Anishinabe Nation. As Abitibi's work has progressed, the land has been damaged. To date, slightly more than half of the Whiskey Jack forest has been destroyed.

"When they destroy the land, they are attacking my spirituality," explains Fobister. He describes how deer like the grasses that grow in areas recently clearcut, and deposit copious droppings in the area. These droppings enters the water, which the moose drink, causing a brain disease very similar to mad cow disease. Anishinabe People might eat these moose with potential dire consequences.

"I used to be comfortable in the bush, but I'm not anymore," says Fobister. "The bears are acting very strangely and are no longer afraid of people; they don't just run away when they see you."

Meeting with people on the reserve, the greatest threat to the health of the nation becomes apparent: clearcut logging causes massive soil erosion, and this in turn releases a normally non-threatening natural form of mercury. This mercury ends up in the reserve's water supply as well as in the animals, fish in particular. The Anishinabe

nation depends on the land, harvesting and eating the animals and fish as they have for thousands of years.

"Some people have the shakes. [This one elder], his arm shakes badly when he's trying to do something and he can't stop it. You can also lose your sight [from the mercury]. The ones who trap and fish off the land get it especially," explained Ashopenace. "We take it very seriously when someone loses a trapline [to clearcuts] or when more contamination comes in. We hear that more mercury is supposed to come by soon."

Here, one can witness the poisons draining the life out of the people, one at a time. The Canadian and Ontarian governments have done nothing to address the poisoning and the ecological devastation caused by the clearcutting.

Several women from the nation delivered an ultimatum to Abitibi workers inside the Whiskey Jack forest in February 2003. After protests at the Montreal head office of Abitibi failed to elicit any response, some members of the community decided to symbolically demonstrate their power to the corporate giant. A plan was launched to blockade the logging roads where Abitibi had access to the forests. Several women from the nation delivered a notice: if you have not evacuated the forest by 5 PM tomorrow, you will be blockaded in and you will not get out.

The workers left.

The Anishinabe youth have been among the strongest voices advocating for the rights of the Nation and the preservation of both the land and their traditional means of using it. They argued that a one-day symbolic protest and blockade would not be enough to deter Abitibi in any real way. They argued for a complete shut down of the forest roads period, thus bringing an end to logging at least for the time being.

Ashopenace remarks, "We [the youth] already wanted to do something more, we knew that one day wouldn't be enough. We wanted to do more damage. [Now] we are slowing them down and reducing their profits."

It was only after a year of round-the-clock rotating blockades that Abitibi saw a need to talk to the people who live in Grassy Narrows.

"We fed them and tried to get them to relax, but you could see they were still very nervous to be here," explains Ashopenace.

He describes the corporate representatives' defence of their logging practices: "Abitibi said they are trying to provide economic development for the community." He says, "It was hard to hear the debate because the youth were openly laughing at how ridiculous the arguments were. The argument was that Abitibi doesn't have obligations because the treaty [Treaty 3] was between Canada and Anishinabe and had nothing to do with them." When it comes to responsibility for the poisoning of the community, their food supply, the animals and the land itself, "Abitibi blames a paper mill that comes out of Dryden [approximately 200 kilometers away from Grassy Narrows] and says 'you need to talk with them.'"

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has the official responsibility to uphold environmental regulations. While MNR holds jurisdiction, regulations allow for almost all mining, forestry, oil drilling and similar resource extraction work to be "assessed" by the very same company that wishes to dig, drill, cut and so on.

In Canada, the fox is in charge of the henhouse.

Chief Saskatcheway, before the Indian Act was brought into law, signed treaty 3 from the traditional, non-hierarchical political system that many nations including the Anishinabe practiced before the imposition of the band council system. It was not interpreted or understood by the nation — who then decided on such matters by consensus - as a surrender of title or land. To this day, the elders maintain that they would not have signed any such treaty.

The legacy of Treaty 3 is still disputed. Yet, not even the Canadian government's own interpretation of the treaty is honoured. Members of the Nation are trying to challenge the rights of Ontario, Abitibi or Canada itself to claim the Nation's land.

Fobister says: "They are afraid that if we can control our land, if we can prove it is ours and always has been, that this will mean the same thing elsewhere, that then other nations will follow."

"I told them that that's their problem, not mine," he adds.

The idea of having talks at all with Abitibi—rather than the state of Canada—continues to be problematic. Many nationals point out that even talking to Abitibi at a table that includes both the nations of Anishinabe and Canada confers on a forestry corporation the same status as a nation. The only legitimate talks, say many Anishinabe, would take place between governments who make laws.

But for the Canadian government, it appears that Nation to Nation talks between the Anishinabe and Canada must be avoided at all costs. If Abitibi were accountable to the law of the land as negotiated between Nations, it would establish the de facto existence of the Anishinabe as a Nation. Judging by the government's across-the-board intransigence in sovereignty negotiations, this would be a worst case scenario for the colonial state. But talks have continued, meetings are still held and money is even accepted in the short term from Abitibi, which offers cash in exchange for non-interference with its operations.

"Those who want a deal are operating for today, just to get the money, and not even that much money really," explains Judy Da Silva. "It is the youth and others who blockade that are thinking long term, thinking about the future, about preserving the forest, our traditions with the land and our way of life."

Roberta Keesick makes the case more bluntly.

"The government wants us off the land, they want us to be assimilated," she states. "They don't want us to be who we are."

Ashopenace explains the dynamic.

"With the destruction of the forests, it's our whole way of life and culture that's getting sick." He describes areas in the Whiskey Jack forest that might hold the key to the ancient history of his people.

"[In the Whiskey Jack Forest] there are some historical rock paintings that are thousands of years old. These are in areas we call virgin land. If Abitibi continues doing what they are doing, with their roads, their cutting and so on, we might lose these."

His assessment is severe.

"What Canada is doing is ignoring us when we try to bring attention to how our rights are being violated. The world needs to open their eyes as to how Canada really is."

Many say there are only three ways to deal with the social problems and poverty of the Nation. First, people could accept the clearcutting as "economic development", and try to secure temporary work while while the land is decimated and their connection to it destroyed. Second, they could try to develop eco-tourism as a means of using their knowledge of the land to bring in much needed dollars, but at the risk of commercializing their own history and reducing themselves once again to a secondary role in deciding the uses of their own woods and waterways. The third option is for things to remain as they are, with people living subsistence lives with no

continued on page 17 »

Génocide rwandais: La presse française au ban des accusés

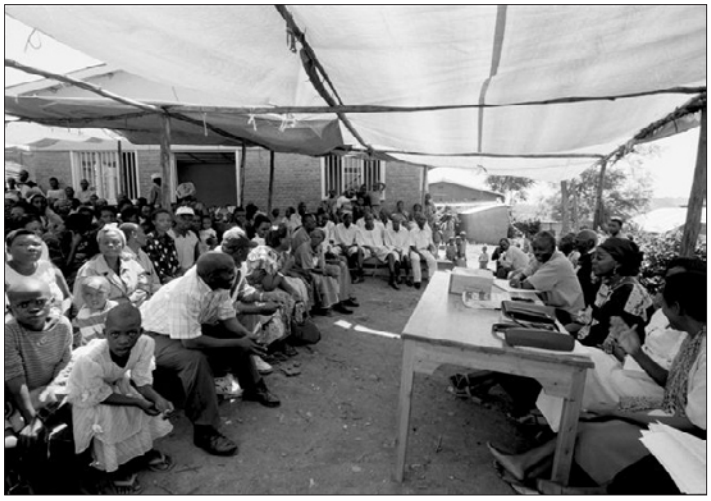
Entretien avec Jean-Paul Gouteux

Propos recueillis par Vivien Jaboeuf

Le rapport de la Commission d'enquête citoyenne sur le rôle de la France durant le génocide rwandais: L'horreur qui nous prend au visage est paru en mars dernier. Il dénonce entre autres l'implication française sur le plan médiatique. Jean-Paul Gouteux, spécialiste de la question rwandaise, nous rappelle la tendance néocolonialiste de la presse française en Afrique.

Le Dominion : La plupart des médias français ont décrit dans un premier temps le conflit rwandais de 1994 comme le résultat de l'exacerbation d'un antagonisme culturel et séculaire entre Hutus et Tutsis. D'un point de vue religieux, social, linguistique et historique, peut-on dire que Hutu et Tutsi font parties de deux ethnies distinctes ?

Jean-Paul Gouteux : Hutu et Tutsi sont des catégories sociales, déterminées autrefois par leur activité socioprofessionnelle : élevage pour les Tutsi, agriculture pour les Hutu. Ils parlent la même langue et ont la même culture. Aujourd'hui cette distinction en agriculteurs et éleveurs n'a plus de sens. En revanche la vision racialiste des administrateurs coloniaux allemands, puis belges et surtout de l'Église catholique s'est peu à peu imposée. Ces catégories ont été reprises par les colons belges, racialisées et inscrites sur les cartes d'identités rwandaises. Monseigneur Perraudin, représentant le Vatican au Rwanda, parlait des « races » hutu et tutsi. Il fut l'un des initiateurs d'une « révolution » sur fond ethnique qui à conduit aux premiers massacres de la population civile tutsi au début des années soixante.



Tribunal Gacaca. *photographe: www.juliepudlowski.com*

Historiquement, les guerres qui ont permis d'agrandir le royaume du Rwanda tout au long des siècles, opposaient l'armée rwandaise, comprenant Tutsi, Hutu et Twa à d'autres armées des différents royaumes de la région. La tradition des conflits entre Hutu et Tutsi, présentée trivialement comme l'explication du génocide, n'existe tout simplement pas, elle n'est qu'un des ingrédients de la propagande servant à attiser ces conflits.

Le soi-disant conflit ethnique fut donc une construction idéologique servant les fins politiques du gouvernement et des extrémistes de l'époque ?

Désigner un bouc émissaire, en l'occurrence la population civile tutsi, est éminemment politique. C'est une vieille recette usée jusqu'à la corde pas les populismes et les fascismes européens. Les deux républiques hutu successives, la première dominée par des Hutu du centre, la seconde par des Hutu du nord, se sont largement servies de cette « arme de manipulation massive ». Avec l'avènement du Hutu Power, mouvement raciste transcendant les partis politiques, cette dérive prit la forme du « nazisme tropical » que l'on connaît et qui a abouti au génocide de la population tutsi en 1994.

La vision racialiste des colonisateurs a fini par être totalement intégrée par les intellectuels rwandais et certainement beaucoup moins par le menu peuple. Si les dirigeants pouvaient organiser périodiquement des séries de pogromes antitutsi en exacerbant la haine ethnique, c'est parce que nombre d'intellectuels hutu l'acceptaient et trouvaient là le moyen d'entretenir leur conviction et leur bonne conscience. Ce sont en effet ces intellectuels qui bénéficiaient de l'exclusion des Tutsi de la compétition pour les postes administratifs. Le jeu est donc complexe entre la manipulation du racisme par le pouvoir - qui permettait d'occulter les problèmes sociaux en désignant un bouc émissaire - et l'acceptation ou la surenchère de ceux qui en tiraient de petits privilèges.

Des victimes rwandaises du génocide ont même saisi la justice française de plainte contre X. Pensez-vous sincèrement que des responsables français, politiques ou militaires, puissent un jour être jugés et que la France fassent des excuses publiques aux victimes du génocide ?

Je suis intimement persuadé que la vérité sur un génocide ne peut être totalement occultée. Le phénomène est trop grave et fait appel à une conscience universelle, celle de l'humanité tout entière. Ceux qui pensent que leurs turpitudes politiques, parce qu'elles se déroulaient dans « le trou noir » de l'Afrique, « au cœur des ténèbres » pour reprendre l'expression de Joseph Conrad, serait à jamais méconnu, se trompent.

Cette plainte de victimes rwandaises est donc d'une importance fondamentale. Nous verrons bien dans la suite qui lui sera donnée où en est l'information et l'état des consciences en France sur ce drame, à la fois des juges et de la population. Mais il y en aura d'autres, comme il y aura d'autres révélations, toujours plus embarrassantes pour l'État français.

Dix ans après le génocide et autant d'années de dénonciation de la part des victimes et des associations militantes, la gravité de la complicité française commence seulement à faire surface. Les médias sont-ils pour beaucoup dans la lenteur de la sensibilisation du public et des politiques ?

Pour ce qui concerne l'Afrique, il y a une tradition journalistique qui est de limiter l'information aux clichés ethniques, sans aucune analyse digne de ce nom et surtout de répercuter la politique africaine de la France sans aucune critique. Les médias français ne s'intéressent jamais aux questions de fond sur l'Afrique. L'image cultivée est celle de l'ethnicité et du tribalisme, c'est-à-dire qu'ils ne parlent que de la forme et des

moyens de ces manipulations politiques, jamais des manipulations politiques en elles-mêmes. En France les médias restent obéissants et l'opinion est toujours sous contrôle. Cela peut changer.

Il faut que l'opinion européenne s'émancipe de l'expertise française en ce qui concerne l'Afrique. On peut considérer deux cas de figure : ou l'Europe refuse l'hégémonie des dirigeants français sur la politique africaine et constituera le moteur du changement de l'opinion publique française, ou nos spécialistes, les diplomates et leurs officines, parviennent à la contrôler, ce qui serait un scénario catastrophe que l'Afrique payerait très cher.

En 1994, on était en plein dans ce schéma de désinformation larvée. Il est rétrospectivement accablant, devant l'horreur et la dimension du drame qui s'est déroulé pendant trois mois au Rwanda, de relire la presse française de cette époque. La couverture a été minimaliste. Certes, la responsabilité de la presse a été ainsi engagée. Il y avait au moins deux façons d'empêcher le drame. La première était de révéler l'ampleur du crime dès avril 1994 et ainsi de susciter un mouvement d'opinion pour arrêter l'intolérable. La seconde était de révéler l'implication des autorités françaises, qui auraient alors été obligées de bloquer leurs alliés génocidaires. Ni l'un ni l'autre n'a été fait. La presse et les autres médias français ont été au-dessous de tout, restant fidèles à leurs habitudes sur l'Afrique.

Globalement, l'information sur ce domaine en France reste toujours désertifiée, limitée à la langue de bois des discours officiels que critique, très mal, les incompréhensions de la presse contestataire. *« C'est le discours de "la France, meilleure amie de l'Afrique", "plus grande donatrice", "patrie des droits de l'homme", "avocate de l'Afrique", tous ces slogans politico médiatiques que l'on entend si souvent et qui ont encore une étonnante efficacité »* comme l'explique François-Xavier Verschave de l'ONG Survie.

Citons un exemple assez récent, un entretien avec le rédacteur en chef de La lettre du Continent paru dans le journal contestataire français Charlie Hebdo du 23 février 2005 et dont le titre résume l'essentiel du message de désinformation : *« La France n'a plus les moyens de jouer les bons pères de famille en Afrique »*. La Lettre du continent est une publication bien renseignée, trop bien même, de toute évidence très proche des services secrets français et pour cela très prisée dans les milieux de la *« Françafrique »*.

Il semble aujourd'hui que la situation change lentement, mais sûrement. Ainsi la répression du pouvoir togolais contre la population civile qui s'oppose à son hold-up électoral ne passe plus comme une lettre à la poste. Même RFI ne semble plus totalement contrôlé par le pouvoir chiraquien, l'information est beaucoup plus objective et les journalistes de cette radio ont protesté contre la suppression du site Internet de RFI et des informations qui contrevenaient au soutien que Paris apporte toujours à la dictature togolaise.

Dans votre livre, *Le Monde, un contre-pouvoir ?*, vous critiquez sévèrement les méthodes de désinformation et de manipulation sur le génocide rwandais, et notamment l'attitude malhonnête des envoyés spéciaux de l'époque. Vous dites entre autres que « Le Monde, *en tant qu'instrument docile [de la politique française de collaboration avec le Rwanda] a sa part de responsabilité dans l'incompréhension des Français et leur passivité devant l'horreur qui s'accomplissait »*.

Les conclusions provisoires de la Commission d'enquête citoyenne sur les médias et idéologies nuancent leurs accusations. Je cite : *« La plupart des envoyés spéciaux ont fait leur travail et rapporté les faits (...), ils n'ont pas déguisé la responsabilité de la France depuis 1990 », puis « Cependant, certains de ces envoyés spéciaux, des éditorialistes et des rédactions parisiennes ont eu tendance à répercuter le discours de diabolisation du FPR (...) »*. Souscrivez-vous à cette analyse des faits ?

Pas exactement. D'abord je ne pense pas qu'il y ait une *« responsabilité de la France »*. Il s'agit de diverses responsabilités de dirigeants français, politiques et militaires, engagés dans une étroite collaboration avec un État pré-génocidaire, puis génocidaire. Parler de « La France » évite simplement d'avoir à les identifier et d'avoir à analyser les responsabilités de chacun. L'utilisation de cette expression globalisante évite l'analyse et révèle clairement les limites de cette commission, ou plutôt l'intention de certains de ses membres, notamment ceux qui ont travaillé sur le dossier médiatique. Mais heureusement les faits sont là, et ce sont eux qui ont eu le dernier mot.

L'occultation médiatique du génocide a été très consensuelle et s'est poursuivit jusqu'en 1998. Elle a été brisée par la série d'articles de Patrick de Saint-Exupéry publiée dans Le Figaro au début de 1998. Ces articles ont libéré la presse et provoqué immédiatement la mise sur pied d'une Mission d'information par le pouvoir français pour étouffer le scandale. Il y a évidemment des nuances sur la responsabilité de la presse. Relever comme je l'ai fait la désinformation dans un journal comme *Le Monde* n'empêche pas de reconnaître qu'il y a d'excellents journalistes dans ce journal et qu'il s'y écrit de très bons articles.

Pensez-vous également que la désinformation a pour origine une discordance des points de vue entre journalistes et rédactions ou bien qu'il s'agit d'un problème de méconnaissance du contexte historique, social et politique des évènements de l'époque de la part des journalistes ?

Il est clair qu'il existe un journalisme de connivence et une indécente proximité entre hommes politiques et hommes de médias, c'est-à-dire journalistes, rédacteurs en chefs, directeurs et propriétaires. La connivence entre *Le Monde* et le chef des services français, la DGSE, est même apparue au grand jour de l'aveu même du directeur de la DGSE, Claude Silberzahn. Il écrit que le directeur de ce journal, Jean-Marie Colombani, et son spécialiste militaire, étaient « ses amis » avec qui il « complotait » quelques bons coups médiatiques.

Mais d'autres journalistes évitent de rentrer dans ce jeu, dangereux pour la liberté, avec les officines du pouvoir. Corinne Lesnes par exemple a écrit dans *Le Monde*, en 1994 de très bons articles, s'engageant dans l'analyse et apportant ainsi des éléments indispensables pour la compréhension de la crise. Disons aussi, et je le tiens d'une amie commune, qu'elle a été censurée par sa rédaction au point d'en pleurer.

Il en est de même pour Agnès Rotivel, journaliste au journal chrétien La Croix. Elle l'explique très bien elle-même : *« Le problème s'est posé avec la rédaction lorsque j'ai ramené un papier sur l'Église au Rwanda, (...) La Croix n'a pas été capable d'assumer cela jusqu'au bout. C'était un article qui s'appuyait sur des faits réels [évoquant notamment Monseigneur Perraudin]. (...). J'étais très furieuse. Je lui ai dit [au rédacteur en chef] qu'il fallait faire très attention, que l'on avait affaire à des prêtres et que cela arrangeait tout* Le Monde *de voir les problèmes à*

page 17 »

A Fourth World Revolution

Bolivia's indigenous peoples and the struggle for rights

by Kim Petersen

Bolivia is a landlocked "South American" country whose population is overwhelmingly Indigenous. For five hundred years the Indigenous peoples have been exploited for the country's wealth of natural resources including silver, tin, and natural gas first by the Spanish empire, then by the United States, and most recently by multinational companies. Rather than benefiting from the extraction of these resources, the Indigenous peoples remain the poorest peoples in Latin America and continue to be marginalized from political power; there has not yet been an Indigenous president. Neoliberal policies imposed from without and implemented by elite politicians have furthered the impoverishment of the Indigenous peoples. Consequently street revolutions have seen two presidents deposed in the space of two years amid widespread calls for a turning away from neoliberalism.

Indigenous cultures have inhabited Bolivia for over 20,000 years. Indigenous comprise 63 percent of the population, the majority being from the highland cultures of the Quechua and Aymara and, to a lesser degree, peoples from the lowland jungle cultures such as the Guarani. Another 25 percent is Mestizo (mixed white and Amerindian ancestry) with 12 percent of European descent. The political and economic power remains concentrated in the hands of the white minority so mobilizations for greater economic equality are synonymous with the struggle for the rights of the Indigenous peoples.

Bolivia has a history of political instability. In a century, the country has seen roughly 100 presidents, and dozens of coups and sweeping constitutional changes. The resulting economic instabilities made the country highly vulnerable to the economic agendas of international lending agencies. At the direction of the World Bank former president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada pursued the privatization of water and the resulting contract with the multinational Bechtel went so far as to restrict the collection of rainwater and increase water rates by 200 percent. It was met with fierce resistance and riots, which were met in turn with martial law. The government was forced to back down. The current movement for the nationalization of gas is an extension of the earlier actions against the privatization of water.

A woman confronts police in Cochabamba.

Jim Schultz, executive director of the Democracy Center in Cochabamba, Bolivia summarized the situation in the country. "Briefly, the current political crisis in Bolivia is a combination of two things. The first is the practical failure of the market-driven economic policies imposed on Bolivia by the IMF and World Bank for two decades. This is overlaid on top of the demands by the country's Indigenous majority to remake the political system so that they have a larger share of power in setting the future path of the nation. The Indigenous communities are also the poorest and therefore see themselves having a great stake in public control of and public benefit from the export and development of oil and gas. For these reasons the Indigenous communities are at the heart of the current protests."

Evo Morales, an Aymara speaker, is considered one of the key political figures of the Indigenous movements as well as leader of Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), a leftist political party that came in second in the 2002 elections. It nearly made Morales the president of Bolivia, which would have been a historical first in the post-Columbian history of South America.

US meddling in the elections backfired in MAS' favor. In the run-up to the election, the US ambassador to Bolivia, Manuel Rocha, had threatened Bolivians that a Morales victory would result in the closing of US aid and markets to Bolivia. MAS ran on this theme and wound up the opposition party in government.

Economic recession and longstanding ethnic tensions led to a revolt. The first stage of the Bolivian Gas War, a dispute over the exploitation of Bolivia's large natural gas reserves–estimates range from 1.5 to 3.5 trillion barrels–in the lowlands of the country led to strikes, blockades, and ultimately 60 casualties in Autumn 2003. Sánchez de Lozada was forced to resign and flee the country. His vice-president, Carlos Mesa, who promised to deal with the demands of the protesting Indigenous majority, succeeded him. Despite more than a year of trying Mesa' was unable to chart a course forward through the complex net of demands from international lenders, the United States, the social movements, and multinationals. He resigned on 6 June amid demands for his ouster. US-backed Senate leader Hormando Vaca Diez, next-in-line for the presidency, was unable to gain support from the demonstrators and so the interim presidency fell to the third-in-line and politically unscathed former Supreme Court chief justice Eduardo Rodríguez.

continued on page 18 »

A Voice From The Coffin
Insurgency In Occupied Alberta

by Stewart Steinhauer

At the 2005 commencement ceremony held at the University of British Columbia, all of the indigenous students receiving degrees refused to shake hands with UBC's Chancellor, former BC Supreme Court Justice MacEachern. They refused because of MacEachern's use of a quote from Thomas Hobbes' "Leviathan", in reference to the case known as "Delgamuuk", saying that before the "civilizing mission" from Europe entered the Americas, "aboriginal" peoples' lives were "nasty, short, and brutish".

The description "nasty, short and brutish" is fairly accurate, but MacEachern got the sequence of events wrong. After 513 years of invasion and occupation, my Peoples' lives have become nasty, short and brutish, as a direct result of Europe's "civilizing mission". Life on the rez, circa 2005, is not just random mayhem, although non-indigenous Canadians may think it so at a glance. On-reserve mayhem is carefully micro-managed by Her Majesty's loyal government servants, including Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Justice Department, Health Canada, HRDC, and a host of other federal and provincial departments all making their best effort to contribute to the civilizing mission.

One need only look at Canada's Indian Act to see the process in action. Here is legislation enacted over Peoples not its citizens, which destroys all of the social institutions which make Peoples what they are, and imposes a Euro-centric system designed to achieve total control over the lives of these target Peoples–at least those who physically survive the destruction of their way of life.

Does the average Canadian have a problem with this? When Canadian Prime Minister Chrétien criticized Indonesian President Suharto's human rights record at an APEC Summit meeting, Suharto's rejoinder was: "You've got your Red Indian problem".

In the late 1800s, on the northern prairies, Cree leader Mistiyamaskwa (the Big Bear) warned Cree Peoples about the advance of western civilization, which he likened to a "rope around the neck". The Cree syllabics on the glacial till granite boulder base say: "I am the big bear. There never will be anyone who can put a halter, snare or noose around my neck." The surface of the grey basalt stone bear has been fluted to represent the original fur trade gun barrels. A naturally-occurring fault line runs through the neck of the basalt bear, echoing the Big Bear's warning. *sculpture and photograph by Stewart Steinhauer*

Canada's Indian problem. I've been hearing about this problem all of my life. W.E.B. Debois, the first African-American to graduate from Harvard, asked the question, "What does it feel like to be born a problem?"

Naming the problem is problematic. Is there a problem? Whose problem is it? What does this problem look like, and how does it operate?

After the "Delgamuuk" decision came down–tying the legal definition of Aboriginal Title directly to a right to land, and declaring formal consultation with Aboriginal peoples to be the minimum requirement of development on disputed land–Canada began scrambling to cover its suddenly exposed backside. The Canadian government now has a huge team working feverishly to develop what Her Majesty's servants call "the Aboriginal Doctrine".

In 2000, indigenous legal scholar John Borrows published, on the Law Commission of Canada's website, under the Treaty Forum section, a paper titled "Questioning Canada's Title To Land". This paper carefully detailed how Canada's Indian Act violates the Canadian Constitution, international law, and the concept of "the rule of law". Borrows also demonstrated that the Canada state did not have legal title to land, nor legal sovereignty within the borders of the territory known as Canada.

We're getting down to the heart of the problem, the heartbeat of our Great Mother. Land. The indigenous insurgency in Alberta comes down to a call for Canada to adhere to international law, and recognize Indigenous title to land. The major shareholders and their corporate managers of energy corporations like Exxon Mobil, BP, and Royal Dutch Shell, to name a few, have other ideas, for oily reasons; powerful forces are keeping Canada from following the rule of law.

This distain for the rule of law, when it does not suit the interests of the powerful, is not a new phase in the history of Canada, or of western civilization. I came across a petition signed by my great-great grandfather, Henry Bird Steinhauer, and his son, Arthur, my great grandfather, among others, addressed to Canada's Lieutenant-Governor Archibald, calling for recognition of Indian title to land. The petition, dated 9 January, 1871, reads:

"We as loyal subjects of our Great Mother the Queen whom your Excellency represents, wish that our privileges and claims of the land of our fathers be recognized by Commissioners whom your Excellency may hereafter appoint to treat with the different tribes of the Saskatchewan... our friends the plains Crees, who have not been taught as we have, think that their lands and hunting grounds shall be taken from them without remuneration. As loyal subjects of our Great Mother the Queen, we pray that all the privileges and advantages of such subjects may be granted to us as a People by your Excellency's Government."

In 1871 the Canadian state had something else in mind. Ward Churchill, the American Indian Movement historian, calls it "a little matter of genocide". In Churchill's book of the same name, he quotes from Polish jurist, Raphael Lemkin, speaking in the pages of Lemkin's seminal work, "Axis Rule In Occupied Europe", published in 1944. Lemkin had this to say about genocide:

"Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group,

continued on page 16 »

The Battle of New Orleans

Race, class disparity set stage for New Orleans disaster

by Dru Oja Jay

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast, the Bush Administration and state and federal officials have come under heavy criticism for their handling of the situation.

"This is a national emergency. This is a national disgrace," New Orleans Emergency Operations head Terry Ebbert told the press. "[The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)] has been here three days, yet there is no command and control. We can send massive amounts of aid to tsunami victims, but we can't bail out New Orleans."

In an uncharacteristically tense interview with Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, CNN anchor Anderson Cooper said, "when [people] hear politicians thanking one another, it cuts them the wrong way right now, because there was a body on the streets of this town yesterday being eaten by rats because this woman has been laying in the street for 48 hours..."

New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin struck a similar tone in a passionate radio interview.

"I don't want to see anybody do anymore goddamn press conferences. Put a moratorium on press conferences. Don't do another press conference until the resources are in this city."

"Don't tell me 40,000 people are coming here. They're not here. It's too doggone late."

Responses to the disaster seem to be split between those who are on the ground and those who are experiencing the situation from afar. A CNN report called it "the big disconnect". Political commentary web site Wonkette joked that CNN anchor Anderson Cooper had "gone native", shedding the often-mocked feigned grief of the newscaster in favour of an angry demand for accountability.

New Orleans under water. *NOAA*

Newscasters aside, the victims are largely those who could not afford to leave the city, a group that is decidedly black and poor.

"When something happens like this, most aren't able to pack up and drive 300 miles and buy gas and check into a hotel with no credit card," Robert Bullard, founder and director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University told BET news.

"This is a race and class issue."

"Nearly every rescued person, temporary resident of the Superdome, looter, or loiterer on the high ground of the freeway I saw on TV was African-American," *Slate* editor-at-large Jack Schafer wrote.

"When disaster strikes, Americans—especially journalists—like to pretend that no matter who gets hit, no matter what race, color, creed, or socio-economic level they hail from, we're all in it together."

"But we aren't one united race, we aren't one united class, and Katrina didn't hit all folks equally," Schafer concluded.

A few days before Hurricane Katrina hit, census data revealed that 37 million Americans were living in poverty, up from 31.6 million in 2000 a total rate of 12.7 per cent. African Americans have a poverty rate of 24.4 per cent. According to census figures, 67 per cent of New Orleans' population is black, and evidence suggests that a much higher proportion of those left behind are African Americans.

As the storm hit, the dominant account in the media was that the tens of thousands who remained in the city "chose" to stay behind. While many chose to ride out the storm, many thousands of others were unable to leave the city.

Evacuation: History Repeated

"If the government asks people to evacuate, the government has some responsibility to provide an option for those people who can't evacuate and are at the whim of Mother Nature," said Joe Cook of the New Orleans ACLU.

Cook told a reporter that one year ago, when Hurricane Ivan forced the evacuation of New Orleans in September of 2004.

The same report, entitled Ivan exposes flaws in N.O.'s disaster plans, noted that "Those who had the money to flee Hurricane Ivan ran into hours-long traffic jams."

"Those too poor to leave the city had to find their own shelter - a policy that was eventually reversed, but only a few hours before the deadly storm struck land."

Another local news report noted that "approximately 80,000 residents... had no way to get out of the city" during Hurricane Ivan.

According to one eyewitness account, "Three days ago, police and national guard troops told citizens to head toward the Crescent City Connection Bridge to await transportation out of the area."

"The citizens trekked over to the Convention Center and waited for the buses which they were told would take them to Houston or Alabama or somewhere else, out of this area."

"It's been 3 days, and the buses have yet to appear."

New Orleans resident Jordan Flaherty wrote that buses stopping in at refugee camps continue to be haphazard and unorganized. "When a bus would come through, it would stop at a random spot, state police would open a gap in one of the barricades, and people would rush for the bus, with no information given about where the bus was going," wrote Flaherty.

"I was told that if you boarded a bus bound for Arkansas, even people with family and a place to stay in Baton Rouge would not be allowed to get out of the bus as it passed through Baton Rouge."

In an interview from the refugee-filled New Orleans Convention Centre, NBC photojournalist Tony Zumbado said that Harry Connick Jr., a well known musician, was the "only person of authority... to go in there and tell them that things are going to be ok."

"I don't want to sound negative against anybody or any official," Zumbado continued, but "[officials] left and they're there on their own–there's no police, there's no authority."

Zumbado described the scene: "Dead people around the walls of the convention center, laying in the middle of the street in their dying chairs. ... They were just covered up ... Babies, two babies dehydrated and died. I'm telling you, I couldn't take it."

Was Flooding Preventable?

In June 2004, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* reported: "For the first time in 37 years, federal budget cuts have all but stopped major work on the New Orleans area's east bank hurricane levees, a complex network of concrete walls, metal gates and giant earthen berms that won't be finished for at least another decade."

The *Chicago Tribune* followed up on September 1, 2005: "Despite continuous warnings that a catastrophic hurricane could hit New Orleans, the Bush administration and Congress in recent years have repeatedly denied full funding for hurricane preparation and flood control."

The *Tribune* report attributed funding cuts "in part" to the cost of the war on Iraq, and cited documents from the Army Corps of Engineers that showed that seven contracts had been delayed.

"I'm not saying it wouldn't still be flooded, but I do feel that if it had been totally funded, there would be less flooding than you have," former Republican Mississippi congressman Michael Parker told the *Tribune*. Parker headed the Army Corps of Engineers until March 2002, when "he was ousted after publicly criticizing a Bush administration proposal to cut the corps' budget."

On the day the hurricane hit, the *Times-Picayune* declared: "No one can say they didn't see it coming."

In an exclusive interview broadcast on ABC's Good Morning America, George Bush said "I don't think anyone anticipated the breach of the levees."

The interviewer, Diane Sawyer, did not pursue the line of questioning.

"This is what happens when there is a natural disaster of this scope," First Lady Laura Bush said while touring a refugee camp.

Many critics and journalists disagree.

At least one commentator compared the US relief effort to that of Cuba, which was hit by a Category 5 Hurricane Ivan last year. Despite seas that "surged 600 metres inland," 1.3 million people were successfully evacuated, amphibious tanks were used to retrieve people in flooded areas, and no deaths were reported.

Iraq Comparisons

The situation in New Orleans has been repeatedly compared to that in Iraq.

Admitting that he would "probably get in a whole bunch of trouble," Mayor Nagin made one of many comparisons. "Did the Iraqi people request that we go in there? Did they ask us to go in there? What is more important?"

"We authorized $8 billion to go to Iraq lickety-quick. After 9/11, we gave the president unprecedented powers lickety-quick to take care of New York and other places... You mean to tell me that a place where you probably have thousands of people that have died and thousands more that are dying every day, that we can't figure out a way to authorize the resources that we need? Come on, man."

"It's downtown Baghdad," tourist Denise Bollinger told the *Associated Press*, referring to looting. "It's insane."

When looters trashed government buildings, libraries, museums and stores following the US bombing of Baghdad in April of 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld told the press that "Freedom's untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things."

Following the appearance of gangs of looters in New Orleans, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco declared a shoot-to-kill policy for anyone found looting. "These troops are battle-tested. They have M-16s and are locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot and kill and they are more than willing to do so if necessary and I expect they will," Blanco added. Many of the National Guard soldiers being deployed are returning from tours in Iraq.

Some critics have said that officials are more concerned with protecting private property than saving lives.

The looting has unleashed invective from some commentators, who have referred to looters as "vermin" and "animalistic" and declared that they need to be "blown apart". 1,500 police were diverted from rescue operations and reassigned to "anti-looting duty".

A wave of popular outrage forced apologies from news services when captions on wire photos of white people taking items from a convenience store were labelled "finding", while similar photos of African Americans were marked as depicting "looters".

Pre-existing racial and class-based tension appeared to flare up with the looting, a dynamic left implicit in most reports. "To be honest with you, people are oppressed all their lives, man, it's an opportunity to get back at society," one young New Orleans native told the *Associated Press*.

Another man, reportedly seen carrying ten pairs of jeans in his arms, yelled "that's everybody's store" when questioned by a reporter.

Few media reports, however, have highlighted the oppressive poverty that predated the Hurricane. New Orleans resident Jordan Flaherty describes the city:

> The city has a 40% illiteracy rate, and over 50% of black ninth graders will not graduate in four years. Louisiana spends on average $4,724 per child's education and ranks 48th in the country for lowest teacher salaries. The equivalent of more than two classrooms of young people drop out of Louisiana schools every day and about 50,000 students are absent from school on any given day. Far too many young black men from New Orleans end up enslaved

continued on page 18 »

Insurgency in Occupied Alberta, continued from page 13 »

the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and colonization of the area by the oppressor's nationals."

So, what's the problem?

Canada has joined the "trillion dollar club", a group of nations whose annual GDP is over one trillion dollars; in 2004, the latest year available on the StatsCan website, Canada's GDP is listed at 1.3 trillion dollars. In the same year, Canadian consolidated government revenues were about 459 billion dollars. Canada sits with the G-7 nations, although, because Canada's Head of State is a queen from England, a country apparently famous for its queens, Canada can't sit right up at the G-7 table.

In Canada, the question of who owns the land, and who exercises sovereignty over that land, is no small matter. The illegally appropriated land and resource acquired by the Canadian state are essential to its membership in the trillion dollar club. The problem, for Canada, is that Indigenous Peoples with claims to the land stand in the way of the continued massive accumulation of wealth. For Canada, the solution has been what Ward Churchill called "a little matter of genocide".

In Canada, genocide does not follow the pattern set in Nazi Germany, where Fordism met Taylorism, in places like Auschwitz. "Work will make you free" said the sign over the gates at Nazi death camps. As Dean Nue, Professor of Public Accounting, at the Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary has argued, in his Accounting For Genocide, Canada's bureaucrats have been hard at work.

Professor Nue goes so far as to call these bureaucrats "desk killers", whose policy decisions, taken in far-off Ottawa, have a lethal effect when they hit the Rez. When Sir John A MacDonald ordered a ten year cessation of rations to reserve-bound Indigenous Peoples in 1885 as collective punishment for what Canadians call "the Frog Lake Massacre", western reserves experienced death tolls of up to 56%. Article II, subsection c, of the UN's Convention on Genocide says: "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

What if your conditions of life make suicide appear to be an attractive option? Suicide is epidemic on reserves across Canada. Last week, on my "Rez", a twenty-something man hung himself in his bathroom; he was the third in his family to commit suicide. Was that the third or was that the fourth suicide at Saddle Lake Cree Nation this year? Ah, but who's counting, anyway? Just one more "good Indian"; you know, the dead ones.

As far as solutions go, I hate to sound like a broken record, reiterating what my great-great grandfather, and on down through the generations to me, have been saying all along, but as long as Canada deals in broken promises, I'll have to be a broken record.

As one "bad Indian" (not dead yet) I say to Canada, and to the Canadians who–actively or passively–give the Canadian state its legitimacy: Adhere to international law, recognize Indigenous title to land, recognize Indigenous sovereignty over the land, and cease and desist with the social engineering project known as "Indian Policy". I've been studying the situation for over half a century now, and the only other option I can see is for Canada to continue with its little matter of genocide.

Nicknamed 'Apisicikakakis' (the Magpie) because of his irksome behaviour, Stewart Steinhauer enjoys dragging out the garbage, and scattering it around in public for all to see.

Copper vs. Ecology, continued from page 2 »

lost friendship. On April 11, a mob of unruly pro-miners led by Ascendant's general manager stormed into the municipality's meeting hall, breaking windows and demanding an audience with the mayor.

Auki Tituaña, the mayor of Cotacachi County where Junín and Ascendant's mining concession lie, has come out publicly against the project. He said that Ascendant "is implementing policies designed to divide communities, through questionable promises [housing, roads, jobs, bridges, classrooms, etc.] intended to break the spirit of the courageous residents of Intag."

He also promised to "exhaust all avenues, regardless of the consequences, in the defense of our rights, which take precedence over the private interests of others [whose activities would lead] to the destruction of our natural wealth."

Residents of Garcia Moreno, who support such private interests, have also threatened to forcefully occupy Junín's community ecological reserve so that the company can do preliminary exploration and testing. Many anti-mining activists have also received death threats.

In addition, Ascendant hired Cesar Villacís Rueda, a former army general with deep ties to Ecuador's military intelligence who studied at the School of the Americas. The ex-general, who travels with an intimidating entourage of armed bodyguards, is handling "public relations" for the company.

While advocating development, Ascendant Copper's actions have left painful divisions between communities, friends, and even families. This is a far cry from the company's most esteemed corporate value: to "maintain the human factor as the most important issue in the development of any mining project."

Examples of divisive and destructive mining projects by transnational companies can be found all over Latin America. More can be expected. Due to all the metal needed to support China's rapid industrial expansion, in addition to the ravenous consumption needs of the United States and Europe, the value of resources such as copper has climbed rapidly. As the history of mining in Latin America suggests, companies like Ascendant will go to great lengths to capitalize on such an opportunity, even if it means tearing apart communities, contaminating the environment with poisonous chemicals and violating human rights.

But the presence of various mining companies hasn't been completely negative. It has spurred an organized and motivated resistance to mining, which is committed to finding alternative and sustainable economic development models for the area.

"If these companies had not come to take away our peace and tranquility, we'd never have organized ourselves," said Rosario Piedra.

Piedra helps administer the community eco-tourism project created to provide a sustainable and equitable alternative to mining. The eco-tourism program has been successful and benefits the entire community. Many people are involved with the regional ecological organization Defense and Conservation of Intag (DECOIN). DECOIN has been very active in its resistance to this unpopular and possibly illegal mining project and has been successful in fostering some international awareness and support. A program of international human rights observers has also been created to document events when things get hostile.

While Ascendant Copper benefits from a divide-and-conquer strategy, most in Junín understand that community is the real wealth in life. Rosario put it this way: "my friendships come first, so I'll never sell out."

New Orleans and Climate Change, continued from page 3 »

storms. "Every two miles of wetland between the Crescent City and the Gulf reduces a surge by half a foot," wrote Blumenthal.

What continues to be the defining feature of the scientific and political debate, however, is that for the majority of the viewers and readers in Canada, there is no debate.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, "raising people's concern and understanding of climate change would help to mobilize public support for climate protection."

As of this writing, some Canadian media outlets–a few CanWest Global papers and CBC online–have reprinted an Associated Press article entitled "Katrina also whipped up warming debate," and subtitled "conclusive link to stronger hurricanes is still missing". Taking its cue from the New York Times, the story limits its scope to the question of whether climate change caused the hurricane, ignoring the concerns raised by scientists in recent months and years.

After the Collapse, continued from page 7 »

racy, such as contemporary Argentina, and others to turn to fear, repression and exploitation, such as 1930s Germany? What would happen if such an economic catastrophe were to strike North America, something which no longer seems that unfeasible. How would we respond? Would people work together to tackle such problems as poverty, unemployment and inequality, or would they turn to xenophobia, immigrant-bashing, leader worship, and the neo-liberal orthodoxy of "greed is good?"

What is most unfortunate is that the recent story of Argentina has largely been ignored by the mainstream media (just imagine the news coverage if this kind of economic crisis and eventual revolt of the masses were to take place in Cuba or Venezuela). Hope in Hard Times should be required viewing for economics professors and government leaders who still have faith in the neo-liberal policies of the IMF and the World Bank. Shown recently at several film festivals throughout North America, it paints a very hopeful picture and reveals the huge potential for billions of people throughout the Global South to overcome even the most spectacular failures of free market capitalism.

Sean Cain is a freelance writer from Oakville, Ontario. He can be reached at seancain@hotmail.com.

Blockade Between Hope and Destruction, continued from page 9 »

jobs and little income.

A fourth option defies orthodoxy, but is becoming more appealing as the situation deteriorates with little recourse for those stuck in a colonial system of governance. The people could take control of their lands back from the Canadian state and assert their right to self-determination in accordance with prior treaties and international law on the preservation of National culture. This fourth option involves nothing short of decolonizing the Nation of Anishinabe.

For anyone who visits, it is clear that the process is already underway.

One of the most remarkable changes to come from the last few years of blockades has been the increased self-confidence of the Anishinabe people. By taking matters into their own hands, they have taken back a modicum of control over their own destiny.

The area near where the main blockade was originally established is now a common gathering place for many purposes, whether praying at the sacred fire in the wigwam or to roast wieners on the large open firepit a few feet from the site of the first blockade.

I was sitting by that firepit one night with an eight-year old girl from the Nation, and I asked her a few questions.

"How do you feel about the blockade?"

"I feel good," she answered.

"What do you want Abitibi and the government to do?"

"I want them to stop logging."

"What do you think will happen if they don't stop logging?"

"Then my mommy will have to keep on warring," she said.

Then abruptly, she got out of the chair and ran off to play with other kids and her puppy. As the sun set near the blockade, the roar of the machines of Abitibi remained absent from the Anishinabe Whiskey Jack forest for another day. And the sun always rises again.

Génocide rwandais, de page 11 »

travers l'ethnie. Cela arrangeait le gouvernement français et l'Église. Il ne s'agissait que d'une histoire de Tutsi et de Hutu. (...) Mon texte est passé pendant que j'étais absente. Le responsable du service religieux a censuré mon papier d'environ deux tiers. »

Tous les journalistes n'ont hélas pas eu la même probité.

Jean-Paul gouteux est entomologiste à l'Institut français de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD). Il est l'auteur de trois ouvrages majeurs et de nombreux articles sur le génocide rwandais.

Bolivia, continued from page 12 »

In a translation from Narcosphere, Oscar Olivera, the leader of the Coordinating Committee for the Defense of Water and Gas, noted the key to the struggle is to reclaim the resources: "Any kind of solution will have to include hydrocarbon nationalization and the constitutional assembly. ... The people have practically lost confidence in the government, the congress, the politicians, and that is very serious, because there is a kind of power vacuum, which could lead to a solution that includes the use of force. Meanwhile, we are going to continue the mobilizations, in fact the mobilizations have radicalized, and they will continue until these same forces can't take it anymore."

Without nationalization, Olivera said the Bolivian masses are "doomed ... [to] continue to live as slaves."

Olivera criticized governments like Mesa's, which he described as "totally sold out and surrendered to the interests of the multinationals, the U.S. Embassy, and the international lending institutions." Olivera submitted, "I think a country on the edge of changing its economic and political model needs a handful of politicians who, like in the case of Venezuela and other Latin American countries, can act with dignity, in the service of the people and not of the multinationals."

Evo Morales, as a leader of the coca farmers in their struggle against the banning of coca was once at the head of the social movements. A major political figure, his compromise position of increased taxes on the natural gas producers has driven away many of the more radical elements of social movements who seek the nationalization of gas production. As a result his chances in the upcoming December presidential elections are significantly reduced. To further complicate the political situation, the calls for the re-incorporation of the state oil company from the Indigenous peoples of the highland region stand in stark opposition to a growing autonomist movement from the lowland Santa Cruz region that finds itself situated on top of gas reserves.

The marchers are in abeyance now; but they remain prepared for the long haul in the struggle for rights. Until the rights of Bolivia's majority are respected, the seeds for revolution remain planted in fertile ground.

New Orleans, continued from page 14 »

in Angola Prison, a former slave plantation where inmates still do manual farm labor, and over 90% of inmates eventually die in the prison. It is a city where industry has left, and most remaining jobs are are low-paying, transient, insecure jobs in the service economy.

Racism: On What Scale?

Contemporary racism can usually only be imputed from facts like those cited above, due to the sensitivity of most public figures to the political cost of making overtly racist statements. However, this was not always the case.

New York Times columnist David Brooks recently wrote that the great Mississippi flood of 1927 "ripped the veil off the genteel, feudal relations between whites and blacks, and revealed the festering iniquities."

"Blacks were rounded up into work camps and held by armed guards. They were prevented from leaving as the waters rose. A steamer, the Capitol, played 'Bye Bye Blackbird' as it sailed away. The racist violence that followed the floods helped persuade many blacks to move north."

While there were no reports of "Bye Bye Blackbird" playing on the stereos in SUVs of wealthy New Orleans residents who fled the city, racial politics continue to permeate the social fabric of the southern United States.

For example, New Orleans–home to "some of the most polluted areas in the country"–is facing a "worst case" scenario, according to Hugh Kaufman, a senior analyst with the Environmental Protection Agency. "There's not enough money in the gross national product of the US to dispose of the amount of hazardous material in the area," Kaufman told reporters.

"Even when there's no natural disaster, Blacks have lived the closest" to polluted sites, Robert Bullard told BET News. "These issues have been exacerbated by the hurricane. So now you have a combination of things coming together, flooding and the mix of pollutants. A hurricane releases all that stuff."

"Then when you talk about a group of people who lack health insurance and homeowner's insurance, when something like this happens, you know just who is going to be the most vulnerable," Bullard added, calling the sites a product of "environmental racism".

"Let's see who gets the levees put back in first. It's downtown, the French Quarter. It's sure not going to be the neighborhoods," said Bullard.

While the exact impact of racism is difficult to determine, the status of funding to flood-prevention efforts and wetland restoration suggest, for many commentators, that the predominantly black and disproporionately poor New Orleans is the victim of a broader systemic racism. Though it is rarely discussed, few argue that the poor and oppressed have the political capital necessary to compete for the federal funding and social programs that often go to wealthier cities and neighbourhoods.

A Political Problem?

As news of the grave situation in New Orleans spreads and the scene becomes the international disgrace of a superpower in addition its status as an ongoing humanitarian tragedy, a political battle is being fought over the meaning of the event. While criticisms of the lack of response at all levels of government increase, counter-accusations of "politicization" are flying.

"This is a time when the whole country needs to come together to help those in the region, and that's where our focus is," White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan said at a press conference. "This is not a time to get into any finger-pointing or politics or anything of that nature."

Mayor Nagin took the opposite approach. Asked what people could do to help those stuck in New Orleans, Nagin responded: "Organize people to write letters and make calls to their congressmen, to the president, to the governor. Flood their doggone offices with requests to do something."

"This is ridiculous," the Mayor added.

Addendum

Since the originally publishing of this article on September 3, 2005, numerous developments have taken place. The selective forced removal of New Orleans residents from their homes, and FEMA's denial of shipments of food, fuel and medical supplies to those remaining residents has prompted charges of "ethnic cleansing" and murder.

"Now the developers have their big chance to disperse the obstacle to gentrification–poor people," labour organizer Jordan Flaherty told journalist Naomi Klein. These developments point to a coming pitched battle between white business interests and an overwhelmingly poor black majority.