

Isaac Saney's *Cuba* reviewed ¶ Janna Graham helps out with a micro radio barnraising ¶ Pierre Loiseau looks at WWI mustard gas dumped off the Atlantic coast ¶ Lynda Ng on drama and fascism >>>

# The Dominion

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

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## Cost of Climate Change to Exceed Global GDP by 2065: Study

Insurance companies in the US and UK are increasingly questioning their ability to insure against weather-related catastrophes. According to the Reinsurance Association of America, insurers paid \$57 billion for weather-related losses in the first half of the 1990s. In the whole of the 1980s, they paid \$17 billion.

With weather-related damages growing by 10 per cent per year over the last decade, insurance companies are increasingly refusing to insure vulnerable areas like Florida and the Caribbean. A report released by the Chartered Insurance Institute of the UK estimated that economic losses from extreme weather will exceed the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2065.

In recent years, climate scientists have increasingly concluded that human-created greenhouse gas emissions cause global warming, leading to increased occurrence of "extreme weather events." (*Engineers Australia*)

## Unions Banned in Iraq

As many as 7 million Iraqi workers—70 per cent of the country's workforce—do not have jobs. Those workers who have hoped to find security or improved situations by forming unions have been disappointed in recent weeks by the US-controlled Coalition Provisional



Uruguayans at a rally opposing an IMF-backed plan to privatize the nationally-owned oil company. *Indymedia Uruguay*

Authority (CPA) enforcement of a Hussein-era law banning the formation of unions in state-owned enterprises. Currently, most working Iraqis are employed in such enterprises.

The CPA has also passed a measure to hold anyone who "incites civil disorder" as a prisoner of war, a charge that many Iraqis say could be interpreted in order to target union organizers. According to an Iraqi organizer interviewed by phone, one union office experienced a raid by 10 personnel carriers and Humvees. Files and equipment were seized from the office of the Transport and Communications Workers union, and organizers were arrested and held without explanation overnight.

US Congress recently appropriated \$87 billion for the

reconstruction of Iraq. None of the money was set aside for unemployment relief. Most Iraqis employed by CPA earn \$60 per month, which many say is not enough to provide the bare essentials for a family. Many of the firms with reconstruction contracts shy away from hiring Iraqis, preferring to bring in subcontractors from Pakistan and India.

Many Iraqis have expressed alarm over the US policy of rapid privatization aimed at attracting international investment. The manager of one oil refinery claimed that if his firm were privatized, he would have to lay off 1500 of his 3000 workers. "In America, when a company lays people off, there's unemployment insurance and they won't die from hunger. If

I dismiss employees now, I'm killing them and their families." (*The Progressive, Pacific News Service*)

## Uruguay Votes Against Privatization

In a referendum on the privatization of Ancap, the Uruguayan national oil company, Uruguayans voted decisively to keep the company's monopoly on oil import and export. In a plan backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—a body that grants loans to countries when certain conditions are met—the government had decided to terminate Ancap's control over oil in Uruguay in order to make it more efficient.

The opposition campaign noted that Ancap provides the government with a substantial part of the income used to fund pension plans, health care, and education. The IMF has considerable clout in Uruguay due to the country's massive foreign debt, most of which is left over from the rule of US-backed military dictators in previous decades.

## Indian Court Orders Coke to Stop Depleting Water Supplies

The top court in the Indian state of Kerala has ordered Coca Cola to stop drawing groundwater. The court said that the Coca Cola bottling plant, which used 400,000 gallons of water daily, was depleting groundwater in the area, leading to a regional water shortage. (*ENN*) •••

## Farms Produce More, Earn Less: Farmers' Union

A report released last week by the Farmer's Union of Canada says that while revenues have increased on a per farm basis, actual income is quickly approaching zero.

The report, entitled "The Farm Crisis, Bigger Farms, and the Myths of 'Competition' and 'Efficiency'" says that farmers find themselves in a double bind. They must constantly invest in technology and expansion to deliver more produce for less money, but must also make do with falling prices.

Most farmers, the report says, "are struggling with the worst farm income crisis since the 1930s."

Prices paid to farms have held steady since the 1960s, while all other prices have gone up. The price of a loaf of bread, for example, has more than tripled since 1975. By contrast, wheat prices have hardly changed during the same period.

The report finds similar trends in corn and cornflakes, barley and beer, and hogs and porkchops/pork chops. In each case, the price of the processed product has more than tripled, while the commodity itself has stayed at a constant low price.

The Farmer's Union pins these trends on elementary principles of economics. While economies of scale result in greater efficiencies, the resulting large entities hold a greater concentration of power.

This, according to the studies cited by the report, can result in higher prices despite lower costs of production. "Given the opportunity to charge less, but also the power to charge more, corporations will act predictably."

Under "free trade" deals like NAFTA, Canadian family farms must compete with each other and with farmers worldwide for a very small number of powerful buyers.

In Canada, for example,



**Farmers say they are constantly attaining greater efficiency, but all possible profits are taken by powerful agriculture technology corporations and declining prices from nearly-monopolized buyers.**

two multinationals pack the vast majority of Canadian beef. Similar concentrations exist in almost all sectors.

While multinationals consolidate control over distribution through mergers, the report argues, farmers are constantly forced to compete with more of the world.

Shortly after the report was released, Maple Leaf Foods began a takeover of Schneider's, a move that would give the corporation control over 80% of slaughter capacity in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Independent hog farmers say the deal will take away "even the pretext of competition".

—Dru Oja Jay

## Martin Axes Housing Minister, Creates Privatization Czar

Upon taking office as Prime Minister, Paul Martin has undertaken a radical cabinet shuffle. One of his most radical changes has been the elimination of the secretary responsible for housing. Mississauga MP Steve Mahoney, previously in charge of housing, was dropped from cabinet along with his job. Responsibility for the housing portfolio will fall to Environment Minister David Anderson, a move the *Toronto Star* called an "odd fit" ..

Housing activists say that the change indicates a de-emphasis on affordable housing. Murray Dobbin, author of *CEO for Canada*, called it a cynical move,

since "Martin eliminated all federal funding for social housing" while Finance Minister. The Prime Minister has said that he intends to "build a society based on equality, not privilege."

Meanwhile, Martin has created a new position: "Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance with special emphasis on Public Private Partnerships (P3s)." Covered by almost no major media outlets, the new position will be filled by John McKay, an MP from Scarborough East. Little information is available about the position, but in a news release the new "P3 Czar" named "affordable housing" and "electric power" as being among several areas that could benefit from P3 deals.

P3s involve offloading government services onto private-sector firms. P3 advocates say that the deals are necessary when governments don't have enough money to fund important projects. Opponents claim that P3s are significantly more expensive in the long term, move government funds to the private sector, and provide a short-term excuse to cut social programs. (*Toronto Star*, John McKay, MP)

## BC Great-Grandmother Chooses Jail Over Promise not to Protest

Betty Krawczyk will spend Christmas in jail, declining an offer of parole in exchange for

a promise not to protest anymore. The 75-year-old great grandmother was arrested while protesting the logging of numerous forests in British Columbia.

Krawczyk has previously spent a total of two years in jail for various other protests, and will likely not be released until mid-February. She is launching a Charter of Rights challenge to the fact that she was charged with criminal contempt of court, as opposed to civil contempt, which carries lighter sentences.

Increasingly, those arrested en masse at demonstrations in Canada are finding they cannot get out of jail without signing away their right to protest. Some activists have been denied the right to associate with certain people in order to get out of jail; others have travel restrictions. (*Canadian Press*)

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# Barn-Raising on Air: the Prometheus Radio Project

by Janna Graham

A recent trip with The Prometheus Radio Project to 'barn raise' a community radio station in Immokalee, Florida has me thinking about low-power radio regulations in North America. I am mostly thinking about pirates. Radio pirates in the United States actually prefer the term 'micro broadcaster', and consider their transmissions an act of civil disobedience. There are many pirate / micro-broadcasters in the US, forced to seize a frequency because their country's media regulations won't grant low-power radio licenses. I don't know as many radio pirates in Canada. Some would-be Canuck pirates have campus/community radio stations in their towns. Others are trying to finish up their CRTC license application. As I learn more about current low-power policies in the States, it's obvious who the real pirates are and it isn't the kid next door with the 2 watt transmitter.

I was working for CHMA Radio in Sackville, NB when I first heard about the Prometheus Radio Project in West Philadelphia. Apparently a radio pirate named Pete TriDish had mobilized low-power radio supporters in an attempt to challenge the Federal Communication Commission's ban on new low power stations. Hiding out in an attic for 2 years, clandestine Radio Mutiny beamed through West Philly neighborhoods shaking a modulated fist at the FCC, the media regulatory body in the United States. Community radio advocates claim preferential treatment is given to multi-million dollar Big Media owners while low power, community-based FM hopefuls are forced to broadcast illegally or not at all. In 1998, the FCC literally kicked down the studio door and seized Radio Mutiny's transmitter. As the FCC dismantled what was Philadelphia's only volunteer-

run, community radio station, Prometheus Radio Project emerged from the cinders.

At the same time corporations like Clear Channel—which owns nearly 1,200 radio stations and effectively controls the rock radio market—were pressuring the FCC to loosen media ownership rules. As Big Media began to gobble up small stations at an alarming rate, Prometheus Radio lobbied the FCC to change policies protecting the airwaves from homogeneous commercial monopolies and began an aggressive campaign for low power, community-based frequencies in the United States.

In 2000, pressure from community radio advocates forced the FCC to open a window for low-power FM radio license applications in late 2000. This was a one-time only window, and the FCC was flooded by hundreds of thousands of applications, which, in 2003, they are still processing. Under the act, new LPFM stations could not be placed on frequencies that were three channels removed from an existing station, eliminating about 75% of opportunities of the frequencies available for new LPFM stations. However, hundreds of applicants in rural areas were granted low-power licenses as they posed little threat of signal interference.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a community-based farmworker organization in southwest Florida, was a successful low-power radio applicant. From December 5-7, Prometheus Radio Project barn raised its fifth low-power/community radio station. Like an old fashioned gathering where neighbors pitch in to construct a building, CIW's *Radio Conciencia* in Immokalee, Florida was assembled by volunteers, from the antennae mast to the microphones. The station will be an



**Prometheus Radio Project volunteers working with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to build *Radio Conciencia*.** JJ Tziou

integral tool in CIW's struggle to organize migrant farmworkers. Their members are largely Latino, Haitian, and Mayan Indian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida. They fight for fair wages and the right to organize.

When Pete TriDish, Sue and I pulled into Immokalee a couple days before the barn raising was to begin,

Everything seemed incredibly unresolved. About 100 or so volunteers from across the country were about to arrive in Immokalee for the barn raising and CIW hadn't yet decided where the new studio was to be. But who can blame them? CIW had just returned from a 34 mile march from Fort Lauderdale to Miami to protest FTAA meetings. Just months before, they had organized a 10 day hunger strike in front of Taco Bell headquarters, protesting the franchise's refusal to pay an extra penny per pound for tomatoes.

"An organization just like Prometheus," Pete said "They're too busy to do anything but fly by the seat of their pants!" As I headed out to scour pawn shops for decent cassette decks for the new station, I had an internal freakout. How would we be on

the air in 3 days?

In the end, we all became honorary midwives by pitching in and sharing whatever skills we've picked up along the way, birthing a radio station in the process. Communication was a two-way rush of Spanish and English as the mast was raised, the board was wired and cables were soldered. Workshops about interviewing, radio production and governance happened in behind construction scenes. Experienced radio gurus worked with keen beginners to teach skills and pass on information. The Prometheus barn raising philosophy puts emphasis on skill sharing and teaching rather than simply having engineers build the whole station.

On Sunday at 7:15pm, members of CIW sat behind the microphone and began the inaugural broadcast of *Radio Conciencia*. First words spoken were a mixture of disbelief and celebration.

In the past 2 days, we had experienced the magic of community collaboration. In a time when the airwaves are becoming increasingly monopolized, *Radio Conciencia* represents an accessible space and a powerful local resource, as well as a viable model for other communities.

# Understanding Cuba

## Revolution and misinformation

*Cuba: A revolution in motion*

by Isaac Saney

Fernwood Books, 2003

Reviewed by Dru Oja Jay

**C**uba. A small island nation. Cigars that Americans have to smuggle into their own country; sublime music played by old men; Caribbean vacations; quaint old buildings. They had a revolution, years ago. Some guys named Che Guevara and Fidel Castro were involved. There were others, but what were their names again? They overthrew Batista, the guy with the solid gold telephone in *The Godfather: part II*. They seemed to have good ideals at the beginning, but eventually turned into yet another corrupt communist dictatorship. Castro the despot rules with an iron fist, jailing those who dare to defy him. The country remains poor due to outdated, inefficient socialist policies. The US and others are biding their time, waiting for Castro to die so that democracy can be restored, and the Cuban people freed from his authoritarian grip.

Aside from the cigars and music, these are a few of the well-worn images of Cuba that Isaac Saney, a history professor at Dalhousie, would like you to reconsider.

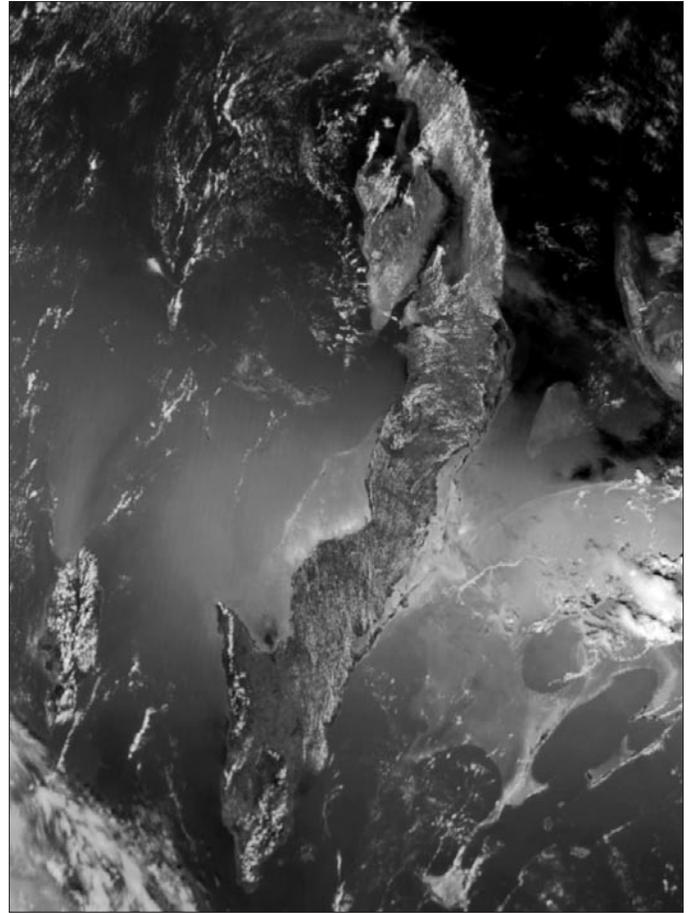
In *Cuba: A revolution in motion* Saney sets out not only to take apart popular disinformation about Cuba, but to put forward a very different image altogether. Cuba, he argues in the face of almost everything we know about the country, is in many ways an inspiration, and represents an alternative model of development for most of the nations of the world. If this wasn't outlandish enough, Saney manages to argue—convincingly—that Cuba is more democratic than most developed western countries.

Throughout *Cuba*, Saney insists that the reader consider the Cuban situation in its proper context. After the revolution of 1959, the United States (Cuba's largest trading partner at the time) severed economic ties and pulled out all of its assets, imposing a comprehensive economic blockade on the island. US firms, and compa-

nies dealing directly with the US were (and are) effectively prohibited from doing business with Cuba, effectively shutting off huge portions of the western market to Cuban industry. Ships that land in Cuban ports are not allowed to dock in the US for six months, making the transport of goods to and from Cuba quite expensive. Thanks to US dominance of the global pharmaceutical trade, many drugs are not available at any price in Cuba; others are prohibitively expensive.

"The poor and the underprivileged, stimulated by the example of Cuba, are now demanding opportunities for a decent living." Such was the appraisal of the Kennedy administration, which decided that the "threat of a good example" could threaten American dominance in the western hemisphere. Subsequent American policy towards Cuba has focused singularly and explicitly on dismantling the revolutionary government.

In addition to the economic embargo, the US funded a decades-long campaign of



Saney's *Cuba* questions accepted "facts" about the island by providing a compelling overview of its history, context, and society. NASA

terrorism and harassment against the Cuban revolutionary government. Saney offers a number of well-documented examples, including the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, a number of terrorist bombings committed by US-funded operatives, astonishing uses of biological warfare by the CIA, numerous plane hijackings, and a bizarre CIA operation involving "futuristic weather modification technology". Kennedy in particular instituted a massive program of financial aid to Latin American countries, granted on the condition that the participating countries sever economic ties with Cuba.

Under these conditions, and with a socialist program of land and wealth redistribution in place, Cuba's economy grew at a rate of six per cent annually between 1971 and 1989. At the same time, the central American regional growth rate

was 3.6 per cent. In order to keep its economy going, Cuba developed a close trading relationship with the Soviet Union and the associated Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). Due to the blockade, Cuba's international trade and economic development was heavily dependent on its relationship with CMEA countries.

When the governments of many CMEA countries—including the Soviet Union—collapsed, Cuba experienced an economic disaster of colossal proportions. In 1992, the value of trade with CMEA countries had fallen to less than 7 per cent of its 1989 value. In the same period, Cuba's Gross National Product fell by over 35 per cent, per capita income declined by 39 per cent, and import capacity fell from \$8.1 billion of goods to \$2.2 billion. Lacking fuel and basic equipment, Cuban agriculture was decimated; black-

outs were frequent, starvation and malnutrition widespread. Meanwhile, the US increased funding for anti-Castro terrorists and insurgents, while seeking to deliver the final blow to the Cuban economy by stepping up the embargo. According to US Congressman Robert Toricelli, author of the "Cuban Democracy Act", the aim of US policy was to "wreak havoc on that island." Under the Helms-Burton Act passed during the same period, foreign business-people found to associate with Cuba were denied US visas.

Faced with such an all-consuming crisis, Cuba was forced to reorganize its entire economy with a view to its lack of resources and urgent need for new trading partners. Saney argues that, in the face of a major crisis that might have plunged other countries into reactionary totalitarianism or chaos, Cuba actually became *more* democratic.

"[Cubans are creating] a democracy that really unites people and gives viability to what is most important and essential, which is public participation in fundamental issues."

Saney points to the public meetings and consultations held by the government on a scale unheard of in Canada or the US, the decentralization of power, and the cutbacks to centralized bureaucracy as evidence of this trend. In response to the "special period" following the economic collapse, Cuba has radically transformed many of its industries. Notably, agriculture has transitioned from pesticide-dependent industrial monocultures to intensive, localized organic farms run by small teams that rotate duties in an egalitarian fashion. By necessity, the country has greatly reduced its dependence on expensive imported oil by encouraging wide use of

bicycles and other low-power technologies. By adopting a variety of innovative responses and expanding the tourism industry, Cuba has managed to facilitate the beginnings of an economic recovery.

To claim that Cuba is democratic is to elicit a sneer from many Americans and Canadians. It is well known, after all, that the country is a dictatorship. When prominent leftist intellectuals, the Canadian Government, Human Rights Watch, the BBC, the Globe and Mail and countless ideologically diverse sources agree that Cuba is a fundamentally undemocratic place, the task of explaining that they're all mistaken in serious ways is a difficult one at best.

Saney approaches these overwhelming assumptions deftly. While maintaining a calm, explanatory tone overall, he punctuates each chapter with challenges aimed at provoking understanding rather than partisanship. He opens his chapter on governance thus: "The central task for Cuba-watchers and specialists of all hues is to account for the resilience of the Cuban revolution in the face of the economic collapse of the early 1990s, a 'collapse which could have sunk almost any system without a trace'. In other words, if Castro is this horrible despot, then why does he still have the support of the majority of the population?"

Saney points to the last three elections—in 1993, 1998, and 2003—which were open to observation by foreign and domestic journalists. These three national elections ended up being plebiscites for the revolution. Over 90 per cent of the Cuban electorate—who cast their vote in secret and are not required to vote—turned out in each election, and each time over 90 per cent voted all 601 national candidates "up", in a gesture of solidarity with the government and revolutionary constitution (explanation of the process follows). This, while US-funded radio stations in Miami (broadcasting ille-

gally into Cuba) were exhorting Cubans round the clock to spoil their ballots or boycott the election. After each election, prominent dissidents conceded that the Cuban revolution had a renewed mandate from the people of Cuba.

Cuban governance is founded on a rejection of conventional electoral politics, on the grounds that it creates a "class of politicians" and "divorces economics from politics." Instead, the ruling Communist party plays the role of guide, "channeling the plurality" of views and interests. While influential, the Communist party does not wield direct administrative power. Each time the party holds a congress, massive nation-wide discussions are held, providing a venue for people to voice concerns and discuss a variety of issues and giving substance to the party's guiding role.

Saney writes: "The 1991 congress [immediately after the economic collapse] was preceded by discussions involving 3.5 million Cubans... more than a million people in 89,000 meetings directly raised more than 500 issues and concerns," ranging from the structure of the party to foreign policy.

The Cuban electorate is divided into 14,946 *circumscriptions*, each consisting of a few hundred people. In street meetings that typically see a high degree of participation, each *circumscription* elects a representative. These delegates, along with representatives of a variety of "mass organizations"—civil groups, student associations, and unions—form commissions which spend over a year selecting from thousands of candidates to ensure that all of Cuban society is represented in the provincial and national assemblies. The Communist party is prohibited from participating in the selection process.

These recommendations are then submitted to municipal assemblies for approval. Each Cuban citizen is presented with a list of 601 candidates which they can vote either for

or against. To be a representative in the national assembly, each candidate—including Fidel Castro—must receive at least 50 per cent of the vote in her constituency.

Critics must *at least* concede, argues Saney, that the current system is more democratic than any other in Cuba's history. Fidel Castro has said that this movement towards the "parliamentarization of society" sidesteps the divisiveness of the "dominant model" of western governance, creating "a democracy that really unites people and gives viability to what is most important and essential, which is public participation in fundamental issues." Saney, it seems, agrees. He ends the chapter with an observation that must read as truly bizarre to Canadians and Americans: "those who have the most money do not have political power, as they have no support among the masses and, thus, do not offer up candidates in the elections."

It is perhaps the "fundamental issues" that Castro speaks of that have set Cuba's critics against it. In the Cuban constitution, certain things are non-negotiable; among them are universal access to health care, wealth redistribution through socialism, and free education.

In order to preserve these fundamental values of the revolution, the Cuban government has sometimes used extreme measures against US-funded terrorists and other operatives, including capital punishment and imprisonment for decades. Some recent trials have been unusually short, lasting as little as one day.

Unsurprisingly, Saney asks the reader to consider the context of unrelenting US-funded terrorism, economic strangulation, and occasional military attacks. A context which has led Cubans, he says, into a "siege mentality". This mentality, however, is "based on a very real and constant threat;" it is

# Mustard Gas and Seismic Blasts

## The threat of chemical dumps in Atlantic waters

by Pierre Loisel

The coastal waters of Atlantic Canada have been polluted with a legacy of chemical, biological and nuclear weaponry. The primary culprits include the Canadian, American and British militaries, which have obsessed over our safety from alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, while the communities and ecosystems of the Atlantic region have been under attack from the very same weapons of mass destruction since the 1940's. Now, with corporations being given permission to do seismic testing in Atlantic waters, the impact of these dumpsites may be compounded.

Canada has played an integral role in the development and production of biological and chemical weapons. "Almost every biological agent that you hear talked about in today's news as a threat from terrorists and that kind of thing, was actually first developed (and) thought of here in Canada," says John Bryden, former journalist and editor at the Toronto Star who is currently an MP from Ontario. His 1989 book "Deadly Allies" exposed Canada's pioneering role in the development of chemical and biological weapons. Bryden also chronicled the delivery of 2800 tons of mustard gas from Stormont Chemicals in Cornwall, Ontario to where it was dumped off the Coast of Sable Island in 1946.

After the Second World War, Canada and Britain declared much of their chemical and biological stockpiles as surplus and dumped them both inland and in the ocean. There is an estimated one billion pounds of mustard gas and related chemical weapons munitions at the bottom of the world's oceans, but more insidiously, there is a large number



**Corroded barrels of mustard gas like those scattered along the Atlantic coast.**

of dumpsites that were never officially recorded. According to Cape Breton resident Myles Kehoe, who formed Myles and Associates to actively bring attention to the perils of oil and gas exploration over military dumpsites, even the Department of National Defence is unsure as to what lies on the ocean floor. "They don't have a clue where the stuff is, or even what's down there, it's terrible."

Recently, some efforts have been made to address the problem. The military has created the Warfare Agent Disposal Project "to identify and assess water and land-based sites where chemical and/or biological warfare agents may still exist as a result of past defence activities." Last year, an engineering firm contracted by the Department of National Defence, identified 1,200 munitions disposal sites along the Atlantic coast including 70 locations with unexploded weaponry and the possibility of mustard gas.

The Bras d'Or Lake region on Cape Breton Island was also used as a dumping ground for mustard gas, but to what extent is unknown. There are two locations in the lake itself that are known to have been disposal sites for mustard gas, Johnston and Kempt Head. These sites are close to two Mi'kmaq communities that have always depended on the fish in that

area for their survival.

Mustard gas and the by-products resulting from its breakdown are carcinogenic and teratogenic and many people are concerned about the impact of this toxic waste on both human health and marine eco-systems. Aboriginal communities along the Bras d'Or Lakes, and on Cape Breton Island in general, have the highest cancer rates and the lowest life expectancy in the country.

Senior DFO scientists have been baffled by the increasing death rates among young cod dying off the coast of Nova Scotia, reporting to the Chronicle Herald in December 2000 that: "it's a mystery; a unique phenomenon that I don't think has been observed anywhere else in the North Atlantic." John Bryden suspects that "there might be a connection between it [the mustard gas] and the mysterious disappearance of the cod stocks [considering] the huge amount of munitions now known to have been disposed of and the number of sites involved." The Minister of Fisheries reported in June 2002 that the "DFO has not conducted any studies on the toxicity or behavior of mustard gas in water as DFO's labs are not equipped to deal with such highly toxic substances."

This month, fishers and environmentalists have raised

grave concerns about the decision to allow oil companies to employ seismic tests off the Coast of Cape Breton in their search for oil. "Seismic guns generate sound waves strong enough to penetrate the earth's surface two to five km down and back again—these are powerful blasts. There is relatively little known information about the impact of a sound wave passing through barrels of chemicals that have been lying on the ocean floor for 50 years," explains Mark Butler from the Ecology Action Center. "When there is uncertainty or lack of knowledge, the precautionary principle tells us 'don't do it'. It would be wise for oil companies to pay heed to that."

The Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board (C-NSOPB) regulates petroleum resource exploration permits. They do not believe that seismic blasting poses a threat to human or marine health, nor have they explored the impact of seismic testing on chemical and biological contaminants in munitions dumps. They have granted licenses for Corridor Resources and Hunt Oil to engage in oil and natural gas exploration. The Department of National Defence has informed the C-NSOPB of the locations of known dumpsites with the intent that these areas be avoided. According to Hunt Oil's Environmental Impact Assessment of June 2003, the Sydney Bight is home to 16,000 tons of mustard, 7,500 tons of arsenic containing the blistering agent lewisite, and a few barge loads of nerve gas. Nevertheless, the company plans to continue exploratory activities. Hunt Oil has also announced its intentions of conducting seismic blasting over a known dumpsite north of the Magdellan Islands. "That's pretty hard to believe that they're allowed to do that and nobody is stopping them," says Kehoe. •••

# Democracy and Fascism

*Myth, Propaganda and Disaster* provokes controversy in Australia

by Lynda Ng

*Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America: A Drama in 30 Scenes* made headlines because each of the major theatres in Sydney failed to pick it up for 2004, even though it completed successful runs at both The Playbox Theatre in Melbourne and The State Theatre Company in Adelaide. Australian playwright Stephen Sewell only increased debate on the issue by claiming that he was 'being blocked from the main stages here in Sydney.' He said, 'I am being blocked, have been for some time, because I don't fit into their agendas, which is to reinforce their audience's beliefs.' *Myth* was finally brought to Sydney audiences during a three-week run at The Stables on a voluntary, co-operative basis by cast and management.

So, why all the controversy?

The main character in *Myth* is Talbot Finch, an Australian expat living in America. As Max, a fellow Australian tells us, Talbot's life is good. He has a cushy academic job in the politics department of a prestigious American university, an American wife who married him so that he could stay in America and a beautiful apartment that offers a clear view of the site of the former World Trade Centre. It's a life that Max envies and wants.

Talbot, however, is less than satisfied. He has written a book, which lends its title to the title of the play, and seems almost unaware that his argument outlines the evolution of contemporary America into a fascist state similar to Nazi Germany. Talbot, in fact, seems unaware that he is living in a post Sept-11 world, and that words are no longer innocent—a point that is driven home to him

when a stranger enters his office, threatens him with a gun and bashes him in the head. This incident sets Talbot down a spiraling path of paranoia, conspiracy and fear.

*Myth* aims to explore both the environment within America and the relationship between America and Australia post Sept-11. The character of Max encapsulates Australia's subordinate role—easy-going, careful to say the right things, eager to learn the American way. The stranger who continues to harass Talbot is almost supernatural—he is a government agent never seen by other characters, so elusive that he could almost be a figment of Talbot's imagination. Talbot himself is an idealist whose beliefs in social justice have become a threat, to himself most of all.

Parallels are drawn early in the play between Talbot's situation and that of Joseph K. in *The Trial*. Like Joseph K, Talbot doesn't understand what his crime is. He is incapable of seeing the practical implications of his theories, nor can he see how dangerous other people find the truth.

Once he recognizes that he is being persecuted, he finds that other people have the same reluctance to believe that they live in a world that continues to resemble a fascist state. When he tries to tell his wife that somebody is trying to silence him she dismisses this notion saying, 'This is America!'. The implication being, of course, that things like that just don't happen in America.

Is it true that Sydney theatre companies were simply too scared to bring this play to Sydney audiences? Is it a reflection, perhaps, on the extreme conservatism and reluctance to



The burning of the Reichstag by terrorists allowed Hitler to seize power. *Myth* questions similar themes in contemporary America from an Australian perspective.

face up to harsh realities that this very play attacks?

The artistic directors of major Sydney theatres have denied Sewell's charges that *Myth* was deemed too contentious for the Sydney stage. And, while *Myth* does succeed in raising important issues about the willingness of the public of both Australia and America to accept that their countries are the defenders of freedom ad democracy, it is possible to see why all the major theatres declined to include it in their 2004 programs.

While the first half of *Myth* is an exciting mix of social commentary and interesting suspense, the second half descends into a series of monotonous rants that take on the one-sided and dogmatic appearance of another form of propaganda. *Myth* played to sell-out audiences at The Stables. It is hard to tell whether it would have been as successful during a longer run in a larger theatre, without the controversy surrounding its performance.

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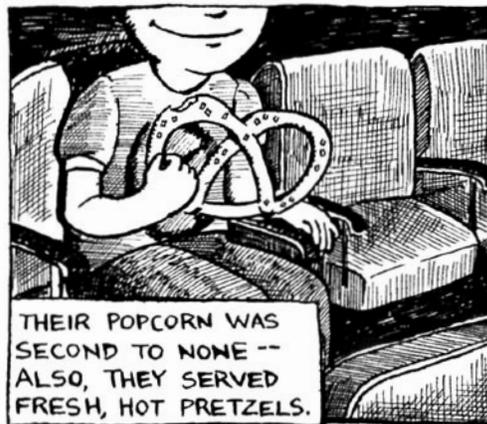
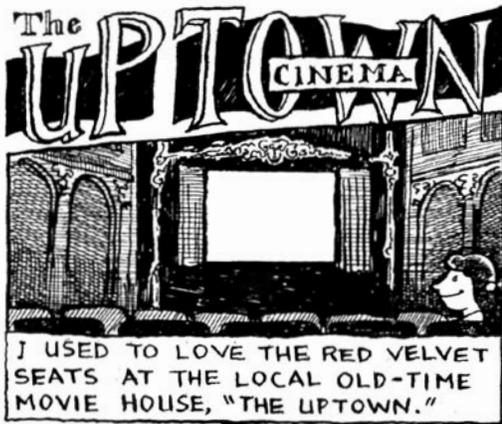
**Professor Undressor**  
*Sumi-E Experiment* (2003)  
www.kelprecords.com

Many of today's most acclaimed electronica albums are recorded in the cramped bedrooms of computer-literate music nerds. Meanwhile journalists have invented the curious genre of "laptop music" to describe the trend. As far as I can tell, the term is not actually restricted to music made exclusively on laptops but rather refers to any synth-oriented music made on a person's home processor instead of the expensive computer workstations that are now ubiquitous in professional recording studios.

Now meet New Brunswick-based Jay Arnold, who has created the persona of Professor Undressor in a playful attempt to challenge and poke fun at these assumptions. Outfitted with a full vest, tie, pocket protector (!), and a beard that would rival even the tweediest of male university profs, Arnold begins to come into his own on his second album, *The Sumi-Experiment*.

I like *Sumi-E* most for its surprises. When you expect a funky folktronica bounce, you're hit with a lush Tricky/Bjork-style ballad, the melody soaring over patches of Aphex Twin-esque beats. When you expect a Roland 909 drum machine, you get a soundscape of static with jazz trumpets played backwards. Most surprising of all is that these odd juxtapositions actually work.

Sounds that are surprisingly satisfying are surely a hallmark of good music, in which case the Professor's experiments have proven successful, and are certainly worth your time. —Matt Brennan



“Understanding Cuba,” continued from page 5 »

a kind of “rational paranoia”. The long list of documented US aggression includes assassination attempts (including a CIA attempt to hire Mafia hitmen to kill Castro), terrorist bombings, a major “propaganda and disinformation campaign” and the blockade.

Under Cuba’s “law 88” (passed in 1996) people who collaborate with US efforts to overthrow the Cuban revolution can be sentenced to prison. Similar US and Canadian laws are arguably more strict. Some of the most high-profile “dissidents” accused did not dispute the charges, but instead argued that it was their right to be paid by the United States government to work to overthrow the Cuban government. In 2002, the US government provided over \$8.99 billion in funding to groups working against the Cuban government.

Perhaps all 72 of the “dissidents” charged and convicted earlier this year were similar cases. And perhaps not. Saney

does not set out to portray Cuba as perfect, but rather to take a sustained look at the country’s current realities. Does the concentration of power in Cuba tend towards authoritarianism in some cases? Does Cuban society believe a set of myths that in some cases do not reflect the realities of the day? These are *possibilities*—in Cuba as in any other country facing real or perceived threats—but Saney’s work serves as a powerful injunction to those who would judge an entire country offhandedly.

Indeed, it is nearly impossible to speak of Cuba accurately without addressing the supernaturally effective campaign of disinformation about the country. The Globe and Mail’s Margaret Wente offers a typical, if exaggerated example:

The Cuban government, of course, blames the U.S. for the crackdown. It says the senior U.S. diplomat in Cuba illegally funneled money and support to the dissidents. Some commen-

tators also blame the U.S. for being deliberately provocative. (Among other illegal activities, the diplomat ran a small lending library and gave Cuban journalists access to the Internet.) Others fault the U.S. for not lifting the embargo, a move that might have encouraged El Jefe to be nicer.

Mr. Suchlicki blames Fidel. “Fidel doesn’t like opposition. He doesn’t like dissidents. He’s a tyrant,” he says. And what’s on his mind is his own mortality. At 76, the clock is running down. “He’s getting rid of all the opposition to clear the road for his brother Raoul.”

The intellectual infrastructure that has been erected in order to consistently contradict the most basic facts and distort the motivations of the Cuban government is an enormous achievement in and of itself, and certainly worthy of study.

No book can offer a rebuttal to all criticisms of Cuba, and it’s reasonable to say that no book should. What Saney has done, with his tone and deeply

researched evidence, is to furnish a book-length challenge to the reader to *understand* Cuba. To ask, each time the country is condemned, about the context of the actions taken. To consider, given the impressive precedent, the possibility that seemingly factual information about Cuba might need to be checked and re-checked.

Sections of the book not addressed by this review include appraisals of various aspects of Cuba’s social revolution, including race and gender relations in the context of the transformation of Cuban society, Cuba’s judicial system, Cuba’s involvement in fighting apartheid in South Africa, and the country’s continued principled and solitary stand against imperialism.

The book’s shortcomings are not a major focus of this review. Worth mentioning, however, is the total lack of analysis of Canadian policy towards Cuba, and Saney’s reliance on secondary sources (his Spanish is, by his own account, “idiosyncratic”).

The latter can be seen as not so much a weakness as a particular area of focus. Where other books might convey one shocking (and Saney might argue, decontextualized) instance of the authoritarian tendencies of socialism or another, *Cuba: A revolution in motion* keeps the eye on Cuba’s overall accomplishments in the face of adversity as a compelling alternative to the dominant ideology of the free market. Beyond arguing against various criticisms, Saney makes the case that Cuba is in many ways an inspiration to those from who value social justice worldwide.

In a global order where—according to the World Bank—the poor bear the most significant brunt of economic fluctuations, it seems fitting to end with the same line that Saney chose to conclude *Cuba* (uttered by Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage): “Each day in the world 200 million children sleep in the streets. Not one is Cuban.” ...