

INDIGENOUS STRUGGLES



Generations of Innus and other indigenous people are threatened by corporate capitalism

Picture: www.survival-international.org

Why these people are angry with Blair

by CHARLIE KIMBER

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE from Canada and the Arctic travelled to London last week to campaign against Tony Blair's government for its refusal to recognise collective human rights.

Collective rights to land would give tribal and indigenous people some democratic control over it, and on what terms, companies were allowed to take over mining rights. They would also limit the ability of armed forces to use areas for military exercises.

The United Nations has been drawing up a declaration of the rights of indigenous peoples. But Britain is one of a handful of governments blocking its progress because it mentions collective rights.

Inuit woman Dalee Sambo Dorough says, "The British position that our collective rights are not human rights is nonsense. Is this Tony Blair's idea of spreading what he calls the values of freedom, democracy,



Diom Romeo Saganash (left) was the elected deputy grand chief of the James Bay Crees of Northern Quebec from 1990 to 93. He is now director of governmental relations and international affairs for the Grand Council of the Crees.

Armand MacKenzie (right) is from the Innu, an Indian group living in the north eastern peninsula of Quebec-Labrador in Canada.

the rule of law, and justice for the oppressed?"

Blair is standing with the multinationals and George Bush against the rights of 300 million people across the globe. They want to exercise their rights as a group, not as individuals who can be bought off or harassed one by one.

Armand MacKenzie, of the Innu people of Quebec-Labrador, says, "There is a clash of philosophical worldviews here, in addition to questions of mining rights and military power.

"Our society depends on sharing and on collective land ownership. The hunter must share his food today because tomorrow he may rely on someone else. The notion of the competitive individual winning out at the expense of all else is very foreign to us."

Diom Romeo Saganash from the Crees of Northern Quebec adds, "Collective rights are important for everyone. It does not make sense to talk of an individual right to a safe environment, or to see peace and security as an individual right."

The battles of indigenous people are rooted in processes that are recognisable to all.

"Wherever you go in the world—whether it is the Cree and the Innu in Canada, the Inuit in the Arctic, the African bushmen, the Maori in New Zealand or the Aboriginal people of Australia—you always find the same problems," says Diom Romeo Saganash.

"We are defending our ways of life, our culture and our livelihood against the giant corporations, the states we live in and the influence of the US."

Armand MacKenzie says, "For the Innu one of the biggest problems is the low-flying training exercises carried out by NATO, especially the British and the German air forces. These are very disruptive for the caribou herds which are central to our culture and our economic support.

"Then for more than half a century Rio Tinto have carried out iron ore exploration and mining in Innu areas. This has transformed life for the worse.

"Is British foreign policy simply to follow the US? They are safeguarding the profits of the multinationals, not human rights."

Dalee Dorough adds, "For us the crucial question is oil. All the major players have been working in Alaska for nearly 50 years.

"They have tried to seize land and to control the Inuit people's rights. Development cannot be separated from social rights and control by people themselves.

"We should control the process ourselves—that's true whether you are an Inuit or living in London. The only 'progress' we threaten is such developments as multinationals exploiting non-renewable resources."

"We came to London to raise awareness of what the British government is doing and to call for support. We hope that people will join us."

For more go to www.survival-international.org or phone 020 7687 8700

IN BRIEF

Police use DNA swabs on boys

TWO CHILDREN from my school, both aged 11, were picked up by the police during their lunch break recently.

They were accused of stealing chewing gum from a Morrisons supermarket.

Rather than bringing them back to school, the police locked up the boys for four and a half hours in a cell.

They were fingerprinted and had DNA swabs taken from the inside of their mouths.

Staff at the school were utterly shocked at the police's behaviour.

The children were treated in this way without the presence of a teacher or anyone else into whose care they had been entrusted.

The two boys were very shaken, and were made to report back to the police station on bail one week later.

Newcastle teacher

PFI school finds it can't junk food

ONE Nottinghamshire school has discovered the perils of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) after it decided to do something to improve its pupils' diets.

Harry Carlton School in the village of East Leake moved to get rid of its crisp and chocolate vending machines in an effort to shift towards healthy eating.

But it found it was locked into keeping the machines by the PFI contract it had signed.

The school was taken over by Alfred McAlpine Business Services under a PFI deal signed last year.

Some local community groups were so taken by McAlpine's promises that they wrote:

"They are responsible for the impressive development taking shape before our eyes at the end of Lantern Lane, and will then provide fabric maintenance and service management of the new schools till the year 2033 or thereabouts."

Now the chair of governors, Marion Shaw, has had to explain in a letter to parents that the presence of the vending machines "is not the fault of the current management, who are vehemently opposed to them".

She says the school has a contract with Nestlé, under McAlpine's management of the catering facilities, and that the machines make a significant profit—none of which goes to the school.

"In fact the school pays for the electricity that powers the machines, with no return," she adds.

McAlpine has told the governors that the school will have to fork out a "considerable" sum if it breaks the contract on the vending machines.

Socialist Worker appeal ...£97,109 and rising

Returning the favour STEEL ERECTORS at the Wembley Stadium site in north west London took up a collection for the Socialist Worker appeal last week and raised £48.

"When we were on strike Socialist Worker helped organise collections which were important to us winning our dispute," said Jon Wood, a GMB rep at the site.

"So it is only right that we did a collection for your appeal. The lads were happy to help out, and we hope the fundraising goes well everywhere else."

Socialist Worker sellers on the regular weekly sale at the site had planned to do a collection at the gate. But the workers took the collection sheet inside to organise the collection themselves.

The steel erectors won their victory in September, defeating an attempt by construction contractors to break national terms and conditions.

Socialist Worker covered the dispute in detail—and was the only paper to report it from the perspective of the strikers.

But it's not just workers who have recently been involved in industrial action who understand the value of Socialist Worker and are keen to help raise funds for the paper.

Moirá Nolan, a teacher at Forest Hill School in south east London, received donations and pledges for over £90 last week in a workplace collection.

"I gave money to the appeal because the paper has an alternative viewpoint to what we're presented with by the mainstream media—it has a

different perspective," says Shelly, one of the teachers who donated.

Why not organise a collection in your workplace or community?

Collection sheets can be obtained by phoning the appeal on the number below.

You can donate by
Web www.socialistworker.co.uk
Phone 020 7538 2707
Post Make cheques payable to "SW Moving Fund" and send to PO Box 82, London E3 3LH

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