

Bits of the World in Brief

Fifth Estate Collective

1984

So-called “national-liberation” struggles (read: establish an indigenous bureaucracy in power with its police rather than that of the colonial power) have pretty much been discredited in recent years except among dismal leftists. High on the list of leftist boosterism has been the Polisario Liberation Front which according to Western intelligence sources appears to be all but defeated in their 8-year war with Morocco for control of the Western Sahara in North Africa.

Their impending military defeat has been strongly denied by the guerrilla forces who point to recent offensives on their part, but their problems have been heightened in no small way by the duplicity of Libya. The madcap Libyan president Moamar Khadaffi, who funded and armed the Polisarios for years, suddenly signed a treaty with Morocco's reactionary King Hassan II in September which would include the termination of all such aid.

But even without the loss of external support, the Saharan guerrillas have been hamstrung in their military ventures by a Moroccan strategy of cordoning off huge areas of Polisario territory with a network of bulldozed sand walls. The barriers, complete with fortifications, now enclose almost all of the population of the contested region and half its territory.

While Morocco is busy receiving the congratulations on its impending victory from the imperial powers it so ably serves as a hedge against Arab radicalism in northwest Africa, one small footnote has been ignored. The military genius who conceived of the desert-wall strategy cared not a whit that this has virtually ended the traditional way of life for the tribal Bedouins who inhabit the area.

Between the war and the walls the Bedouin camel caravans and their nomadic patterns have been effectively stopped and instead the colorfully robed tribal people have been herded into boomtown cities complete with schools, industry, permanent housing, and wage work—the stuff of civilization which will obliterate their millennia-old culture in a matter of years.

Marie and Noel Murray are a married couple who are both serving long prison sentences in Ireland's Limerick Prison. The two were sentenced to hang for robbery and murder resulting from a bank expropriation in 1975 in which a cop was shot to death. Confessions were tortured from them, but through an international campaign for leniency (see October 1976 FE), their sentences were commuted to life in prison.

The Murrays were legally wed in 1974 but have been kept from visiting one another in prison with the exception of once a week for a strictly supervised hour. They have spent a total of about 92 hours in each other's company during their stay in prison. The Ireland-based Committee for Prisoners' Conjugal Rights, 15 St. Aidans Park Rd., Fairview, Dublin 3, Ireland, have been assisting the Murrays in a law suit begun in 1981 to obtain conjugal visits. The denial to the Murrays and other married prisoners is entirely arbitrary and if the visits were allowed it would be consistent with practices of many prisons in the U.S. and Europe.

This suit is important to all married prisoners and funds are desperately needed. Donations may be sent to the Committee directly at the Bank of Ireland, Baggot St., Dublin 2; acct. no. 4803487.

The Unconvention, sponsored by the Spooner Collective of Willimantic, Connecticut, took place as planned the weekend of September 8–9 with 200 or so people attending the activities whose center of attraction turned out to

be the music. All the bands donated their time and energy, and much enthusiasm was generated by the gathering for future plans. The collective can be reached at: Box 433, Willimantic, CT 06226 or call their bookshop at (203) 423-5836.

A West Virginia woman gave her all for the electoral process. "She made the supreme sacrifice in the true spirit of the American patriot" by going to vote despite a heart condition," said secretary of state A. James Manchin after Josephine Morris, 79 years old, collapsed in a voting booth and apparently died of a heart attack-in November. After paramedics tried unsuccessfully to revive her, voting officials said that the woman's partly completed ballot could be counted.

"I don't think it's an invasion of privacy," says Emanuel Donchin, head of the University of Illinois psychology department, of a potential brain-wave monitoring system which would be used to determine whether individuals are concentrating on their jobs and functioning at appropriate mental levels. Claiming application for such brain wave analysis to be in high-risk work places such as nuclear power plants and air traffic control towers, companies such as Westinghouse are designing computers which would read our brains through electrodes in headgear worn on the job. Those of us who manage to daydream or think our own thoughts while at work may be in big trouble when the boss begins reading and watching our brain waves. "It's not any different than having your supervisor wake you up when you fall asleep on the job," says shrink Donchin.

Calling themselves "Elfbusters," a group of activists slogged through cold bogs and woodland of Michigan's Upper Peninsula to remove the remaining 14 miles of the Navy's Project ELF antenna easement route. The Elfbusters claimed hundreds of survey stakes, ribbons and benchmarks as "anti-war booty" and vowed that they would continue obstructing construction of ELF.

The U.S. Navy is attempting to build 56-mile ELF antenna in Northern Michigan which would be used as a first-strike signal to its missile-equipped submarines. A majority of area residents have voted against the deadly project, but the judges and politicians have ignored the popular will in their zeal to build ELF.

One Elfbuster, a student from Wisconsin said, "Once construction is finished, it may be too late to stop ELF. It will be a foot in the door for a much larger antenna, and the communications system would then be in place for a nuclear war launched from the sea. It must be stopped through direct action before it begins to operate."

The Elf busters say that they began slowly dismantling the survey line last fall and summer, with over 40 people of all ages participating from Michigan and other states, with the aid from 100 others. One current project of the movement is to send pulled stakes to public officials who support ELF, and ask UP residents who stop ELF construction to "contact the Elfbusters" c/o Citizens Against Trident/ELF, Box 6, Caspian MI 49915.

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Fifth Estate #318, Fall, 1984

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