

Bits of the world in brief

Fifth Estate Collective

1985

The Innu Indians of Labrador, Canada, like all native peoples caught in the tentacles of civilization, are constantly threatened with imminent annihilation. Since 1980, West Germany has been using this flat barren land, a territory about the size of Nevada and the home of the Innu for over 10,000 years, as a training area for their pilots. West German F4 Phantom jets regularly zoom by at altitudes of less than 300 feet, spewing exhaust and totally upsetting the natural balance of things. Ducks have laid eggs a month early, the caribou have changed migration patterns, beavers and other game have vanished, and Innu families have been forced to deal with this latest blatant insult to their traditional way of life, which has already been substantially disrupted and destroyed by encroaching development.

How do the W. German Air Force and the Canadian Government respond to the claims of the native peoples? They dismiss them as unfounded, simply denying that the flights have caused any ecological damage, and assuring them that if the accusations are found to be true, the flight patterns will then be changed.

Businesses in Goose Bay, Labrador, of course, enthusiastically welcome the presence of the W. German military who are a boon to the local economy. There is little local support for the position of the Innu. The Greens in W. Germany and other ecology groups in the U.S., Canada and Britain have become concerned about the situation and have staged protests, but the jets keep flying.

Another major assault on the Inuit way of life occurred this past fall in northern Quebec when 10,000 caribou were drowned due to massive flooding caused by the James Bay dam which released too much water into the Caniapiscau and Kaksoak rivers. The Hydro-Quebec Co., which operates the dam, blamed heavy rains, but the Inuit Indians know their rivers could have easily handled the rains without the careless flooding by the utility company.

Since 1979, Nils Somby, 36, a Norwegian Sami (known as Lapps to most of the world), has battled the Norwegian government over a proposed hydroelectric dam that threatened huge herds of reindeer upon which his people depend for subsistence. In 1981, Somby set off an explosion at the dam, accidentally blowing off one arm and blinding an eye. After serving five months in a Norwegian jail but still awaiting trial, he fled to Canada, where he was given sanctuary by the Lethridge-based World Council of Indigenous Peoples. For nearly two years, Somby, joined by his wife and two daughters, lived with British Columbia Indians, avoiding immigration officials. In October 1984 he and his wife Dagny, 29, were arrested while visiting friends near the Blood Reserve in Fort McLeod. Claiming he falls outside the jurisdiction of the Canadian Immigration Department because he was adopted by the Pacific coast Nuxalk band, who declared their sovereignty in 1975, he now sits in a Lethbridge jail awaiting an immigration hearing.

Somby is a Sami, a native of Sirma, in Norway's northernmost province of Finnmark, 100 miles from the Soviet border. Many of the country's- 30,000 Sami still follow the millennia-old nomadic ways, following the reindeer herds. In 1970, the Norwegian government announced plans for -the massive Alta-Kautokeino hydroelectric development, threatening to flood the migratory routes of the reindeer, much as Quebec's huge James Bay project has disrupted northern Canadian caribou.

After several years of activism, including participating in a hunger strike on the grounds of the nation's parliament in Oslo, Somby placed a makeshift bomb consisting of two sticks of dynamite and a small bundle of industrial flares on a bridge overlooking a construction site. The bomb went off prematurely, injuring him but doing little damage to the bridge. He insists the bomb was only symbolic, since it was obviously incapable of doing any real damage to the project.

After serving five months in isolation awaiting trial on arson charges, he was released on doctor's orders. Fleeing to Canada, he went underground, living with various British Columbia bands, who adopted him in a colorful ceremony at the Sugar Cane Reserve near Williams Lake, deep in the B.C. interior, and gave him the name of Punquad (mountain goat warrior). While living on the Kluscius Reserve, home of the Carrier band about 200 miles north of Williams Lake, he was joined by his wife and two daughters. Later the family moved to Bella Coola, near the Pacific Ocean coast, and home to the Nuxalk. In October 1984, when the family went to Fort McLeod to visit a Sami friend who was traveling in Canada, he and his wife were arrested by the RCMP. His hearing had to be postponed to give immigration officials time to find an interpreter who speaks the Samegella language. The officials will decide if Somby has a right to stay in Canada despite the fact that he has not been residing in that nation state but among the Nuxalk. No one questions the immigration adjudicator's right to be in Canada (a word which comes from *kanata*, an indigenous word which means village, or community), so he is presently walking around a free man on the outside.

(The FE received this information from an article in an October issue of the *Alberta Report*, sent in by a reader. If anyone has any further information on this case, we would appreciate it.)

The medium is the message: according to a study by a sociologist at the University of California-San Diego, when a character on a nationally televised soap opera commits suicide, the suicide rate increases all over America.

Its proprietors call it the Eighth Wonder of the World, but the West Edmonton Mall, the world's largest recreational and shopping center, is in actuality the showcase of a dying world. The size and features of the mall (which have led Edmonton, Alberta residents living in its shadow to nickname it the Monster Mall) are indeed a wonder: 5.5 million square feet covering 110 acres, 700 retail stores, an 18-hole pitch-and-putt golf course, a four-acre lake with sandy beaches and machine-made waves suitable for surfing, amusement theme parks with thrill rides, wildlife preserves, saltwater aquariums and an exotic bird aviary, an Ice Palace and roller rink, massive fountains and sculpture. According to its promotional literature, the mall harbors the world's largest amusement park, the largest bookstore in Canada, the largest McDonald's restaurant in the world, and the world's largest car dealership. No less a wonder is mall president Rubin Stahl's hyperbolic description of his Monster eye-sore: "The Rockies and the Ice Fields were created by God, but we're creating Manmade wonders here. It's a work of art."

Still under construction, the West Edmonton Mall will probably be completed by 1990, the year by which, according to an estimate by the World Future Society, animal and plant species may be disappearing at the rate of 10,000 per year, with one species becoming extinct each hour. Already a holocaust of unbelievable proportions, this rate of extinction can only increase with the construction of edifices like the Monster Mall, as more and more acres of land are sacrificed to the urban cancer.

Shopping malls, these cultural sinkholes where experience is reduced to consumption, where the warmth of human contact is dissolved in the Brownian movement of human atoms wandering aimlessly in the corridors; shopping malls, these nature-crypts with their ersatz lakes, wildlife preserves, aquariums, and aviaries—are appropriate repositories for the artifacts and excrescences of civilization. Perhaps, by 1990, space will have been set aside in the West Edmonton Mall for an exhibit featuring one of the species that have been doomed to extinction by projects like the West Edmonton Mall: the human race.

And speaking of the World Future Society, the 30,000 member group of scientists and scholars offered some other cheery forecasts in their recent report. Among their predictions: by 2020, most of southern Iowa will be severely eroded and each acre will require 38 additional pounds of fertilizer and 38 percent more fuel for tilling; more people will be born worldwide in the year 2050 than were born in the 1,500 years after the birth of Christ; and there will be a population explosion among robots accompanying the human population explosion.

On November 27, Radio Libertaire, the French anarchist FM radio station, received official notice of shut-down from the High Authority for Audio-visual Communication (H.A.C.A.). Claiming that Radio Libertaire has been transmitting over the allowable limit of power and at an unauthorized frequency, the H.A.C.A. has suspended their

license. Radio Libertaire, "la voix sans maitre," (the voice without masters) is cognizant that the H.A.C.A.'s claims are a cover of their continuing efforts to repress free radio in France, and of course they intend to fight. For further information, contact: Federation Anarchiste Francaise, 145 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France.

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