

Deadline Nears for Big Mountain

Fifth Estate Collective

As the July 8 deadline nears for forced government relocation of indigenous people—some 10,000 Navajos and 1,000 Hopis—from their homes in the Navajo-Hopi “Joint Use Area,” the people are digging in in preparation for a fight while the federal government is training U.S. Marshals and the Arizona National Guard specifically for the pending removal. (For background on this conflict see “Native Peoples Resist Forced Relocation” in the Summer 1984 FE.)

The U.S. government and the incorporated tribal bureaucracies which serve it have advertised this Trail of Tears campaign as a land dispute between the Hopis and Navajos, but it is in actuality a land grab by the American state to acquire the 22 billion ton deposit of low sulfur coal (known as the Black Mesa Coal Field). In 1974 the U.S. government passed P.L. 93-531, dividing the land between the Hopi and the Navajo incorporated tribes with a barbed wire fence which, as Native American writer Winona LaDuke writes, “literally ripped through people’s land—dividing corrals from houses, bulldozers and fencing crews tore through religious sites, graves, dragged trees—everything from the earth.” Big Mountain is the most well-known of such communities “on the wrong side of the fence,” but there are many others.

In an interview with Winona LaDuke in the Spring 1986 *Akwesasne Notes*, Dine elder Roberta Blackgoat explained the meaning of relocation: “Our ancestors have tilled and turned this land. We can’t exchange the land. We’d be giving up our ancestors. When a person dies, we shed our tears and bury the body in the land. It turns to soil. We can’t leave the land, it’s like leaving our dead, our bodies.”

LaDuke asked Roberta Blackgoat what Indian people mean when they call the earth Our Mother. “We have four sacred mountains,” she replied. “We have bundles. A hogan, it’s a room to a house. Inside of this four sacred mountains is a room, it’s a Navajo hogan. All these things: uranium, coal mines, and oil drillings is not supposed to be in our bundles. We have prayer, corn pollen, and we pray for it. We pray to hold it together.”

“The liver of the earth is coal, the lung is uranium. In this way the earth has parts to its body. Just like us. We can’t leave, we can’t let them take our bodies.

“When we are born, we have a fingerprint on the earth. But we’re sitting on Mother Earth and she’s holding us. It’s worse, if she (earth) gets in pain how can we forget just like sticking a person with a stick. It hurts. That’s what they are doing to her. She’s in pain.

“Earthquakes and tornadoes is her breath. She’s breathing heavy. She’s in pain, we need to protect our mother. Fighting for her to be free. She has to be dried up to die. When they take her oil and her organs she dies. The government needs what she has in her body. The government wants money, it doesn’t think of the people—four-legged people, people who crawl. These are our brothers and sisters, they have life. They talk, even the grass, you can hear it when the wind blows. You can talk to them...”

Roberta Blackgoat lives 28 miles from the Peabody Coal Company strip mine at Black Mesa. She told Indian activist David Seals, “There are days when the air is so foul and full of coal dust that I can’t breathe. It’s causing sickness among the livestock also. When the sheep are gone, then the people will die.”

Seals reports that 38 mines, eight uranium mills, four coal strip mines of between 12,000 and 40,000 acres and five coal-fired energy plants lie on Navajo land, contaminating the sky and water. In fact, eighty percent of uranium resources, and perhaps sixty percent of all energy sources currently available, lie on Indian reservations.

As with Wounded Knee, Big Mountain has now come to symbolize for those who love the earth the entire process of assault on the earth and the Old Ways of the people by a voracious and cadaverous Leviathan, and their resistance to such assault. Everything must be done to turn back this assault, and to extend the fight to put an end once and for all to this rape of the earth by the energy companies and megatechnic civilization.

“Maybe it all comes back around in a big circle and we’re in Arizona again, on the sacred mountain near Flagstaff, in the Grand Canyon where the world began, on the sacred Hopi mesas where the Badger and Bird and Snake and Lizard Clans emerged after the Flood and the migrations from the South Pacific,” writes David Seals, and he ends by quoting the Hopi elders: “We must realize that we do not live in a world of dead matter, but in a universe of living spirit. Let us open our eyes to the sacredness of Mother Earth, or our eyes will be opened for us.”

For information on how to fight the relocation and to support Big Mountain, contact the Big Mountain Support Group, 1412 Cypress, Berkeley, CA 94703, telephone: (415) 841-6500.

The Winona LaDuke interview appeared in *Akwesasne Notes*, Spring 1986 (\$10 sub), c/o Mohawk Nation, PO Box 196, Roosevelttown, NY 13683-0196. The article by David Seals, “The Gourd of Ashes,” appeared in *Earth First!—The Radical Environmental Journal* (Eostar edition), POB 5871, Tucson AZ 85703.

Earth First! is an extremely interesting publication, with a strongly anarchistic, luddite anti-tech and nature-loving character. It is a loose, informal kind of federated group whose call is “no compromise in the defense of mother earth,” and whose paper describes various forms of “monkey-wrenching” (sabotage) against earth-destroying companies. Some EF!ers are presently facing charges or have been jailed for engaging in direct action against developers. EF! founder Howie Wolke will be in jail in Wyoming for six months for pulling up 1-1/2 miles of survey stakes from the route of a road to be built by Chevron Oil Corporation to a drilling site.

Wolke responded to the sentencing for the act of “de-surveying” or eco-defense by stating that if the judge and the oil company “think that wilderness defenders will be deterred...they are mistaken.” We plan to print more about *Earth First!* in coming issues. Subs are \$15 a year, and well worth it.

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