

Innu People Resist NATO

Fifth Estate Collective

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Canada is illegally renting out the territory of the Innu people to the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) countries so that their bombers can practice bombing and surprise attacks. The establishment of a permanent NATO base could be announced soon. [see FE note at end of article]

The Innu people (sometimes called the Montagnais or the Naskapi) refer to their ancestral territories as the Nitassinan, literally our land, in their native language. The area was never ceded by treaty or otherwise by the original inhabitants. The presence of the Innu in this remote part of the world goes back at least 9,000 years. This area extends from Sept-Iles, to Lac St. Jean, Quebec, to the west; to Fort Cains, Quebec, to the north; and down to St. Augustine, Quebec, and Goose Bay, Labradore, to the east.

The Innu, 10,000 of whom live in the Nitassinan today, form one of the rare North American native peoples who escaped extensive European encroachment until the middle of the twentieth century. But during the last forty years, "civilizing" power, profit, and racism have been conquering Nitassinan. Rivers are being damned, the forests razed, and the depths of the earth gutted.

The traditional operations of colonization had already gained a stranglehold on the Innu when the conquest suddenly developed the speed of a supersonic, modern militarism.

The military base at Goose Bay was constructed by Canada in 1941 to serve as a stopping-over point for Europe. In 1952, the United States Air Force signed a twenty-year lease with Canada. The Innu were never consulted. The base served as a re-supplying point for American interceptor squadrons. Gradually, first the British and then the Germans began exporting their low-altitude flights to Innu territory. Civilian opposition to such military exercises developed in these countries

From 1981 to 1988; the number of training flights increased from a couple hundred to more than seven thousand a year. They continue to increase. Today Canada permits the British, German and Dutch air forces to perform their exercises over more than 100,000 square kilometers of Nitassinan, an area over three times as large as Belgium. Soon, other bilateral contracts will permit Italian and Belgian war planes to exploit Innu air space.

Two areas are currently used for bombing practice. Tons of "white bombs" (shells filled with cement, weighing up to 500 kilograms), smoke-producing capsules and laser-guided dummy warheads have been found there. Models of tanks, factories and landing strips are used as targets.

With these low-level flights that barely clear the tree tops, war pilots learn how to skim geographical contours and avoid "enemy" radar. The NATO attack strategies (PFOPA, adapted from the American "first-strike" doctrine, presupposing the destruction of all military-industrial installations even before the enemy realizes it has been attacked), is based on this expertise. The real as well as the potential application of these techniques during military intervention in the Third World place Nitassinan in the center of a strategic chessboard in which the rich countries of the world try to forcibly maintain the global injustice from which they profit. The American bombing of Tripoli was carried out by the type of aircraft, F-111 jets, that have already been sighted at Goose Bay.

Ecologically, the war exercises have disturbed the migratory habits of the caribou. According to biologists, naturalists and the Innu, the herds' health is deteriorating in an alarming way. Dead fish have appeared on the shores of lakes contaminated by the fuel from the aircraft, and changes in beavers' eating habits have been observed.

Children in particular are susceptible to the "shuddering effect," an uncontrollable reaction to the panic that accompanies the jets' terrifying, unannounced noise. In addition to the harmful effects all people in the process of losing their identity experience (alcoholism, spouse abuse, etc.), miscarriages have been documented as being caused by the flights. And, on July 9, 1988, a young Innu woman was raped by a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. She attempted suicide five months later.

It is all too evident that the present number of military tests have greatly endangered the Innu people's territorial integrity, the environment, and their right to survive. Genocide is in progress and Canada bears a primary responsibility for the crime,

Since the fall of 1988, the Innu have shown a unique determination and integrity in their efforts to free their traditional territory from the Canadian and NATO military invasion. By the hundreds, the old as well as mothers with babies in their arms have often passively resisted by occupying the runways used by the fighter bombers, and they have had some success.

At a time when many Innu will spend several weeks or months in jail for attempting to stop the activities that our society is guilty of, their only hope is that we respond in great numbers to their appeal, and that we demonstrate a solidarity with them, a solidarity that may involve risk.

From a pamphlet distributed by La Coalition Contre L'OTAN au Nitassinan, translated by Sandy Beach.
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FE Note: Because of recent events in Eastern Europe, NATO has decided not to establish a permanent base at Goose Bay at this time. However, low level training flights in the Nitassinan are expected to increase significantly in the next year.

According to La Coalition Contre L'OTAN au Nitassinan, a permanent NATO base would increase flights to more than 40,000 per year (more than 200 per day). At least nine more bombing areas would be established, along with an entire gamut of simulated "enemy" static targets. Experiments with a range of electromagnetic waves, short waves, radiation, infra-reds, and lasers would take place. The base would bring over 67,300 strangers from sixteen countries to the area each year. The area and its people would be victim to huge military exercises involving up to ninety planes at a time with supersonic chases, producing extremely dangerous sonic booms.

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