

Tales from the planet

Fifth Estate Collective

1990

SAVE MUMIA

Mumia Abu-Jamal's battle to keep from being legally lynched by the state of Pennsylvania has reached a critical point. On October 1, the U.S. Supreme Court denied his petition for a review of his conviction and death sentence. In January 1990, Mumia exhausted his last avenue of appeal in the state (in)justice system. All that remains is for Governor Robert Casey to sign the warrant of execution.

Mumia is a former Black Panther, radio journalist, and outspoken critic of racist police terror who was framed on charges of killing a Philadelphia cop in 1981 (see "FBI War on the Black Panthers," FE #334, Summer, 1990). He has been targeted for death because of his political views and associations.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist has been trying to "streamline" the Supreme Court's processing of executions by limiting death-row prisoners to one federal habeas corpus challenge to state convictions and sentences. Under these rules, many innocent people who were sentenced to death and later had their convictions overturned would have died.

Unless something extraordinary occurs, Mumia soon will have his date set for violent death at the hands of government. Mumia must be saved. Write letters of protest to Governor Casey with copies to Mumia. Addresses are in this issue's letter section (in letter also titled "Save Mumia").

The fight against the low level military training flights by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the Lower North Shore of Quebec and Labrador continues. The Toronto Star reported on June 1, 1990 that "low level military flights in Labrador could more than double from existing levels despite cancellation of a proposed NATO flight training center [and] could even be increased to a maximum of 16,000 to 18,000 flights a year."

The Innu people (who have inhabited this part of the world for over 9,000 years) continue to respond to the presence of the military base with demonstrations and occupations. In September 1990 two hundred people demonstrated outside the Goose Bay base while 14 to 21 people occupied the runway, preventing American planes from taking off for the Middle East after refueling. Twelve were arrested.

Earlier, on August 30, in a show of solidarity with the Mohawks of Oka, about sixty Innu protested at the fences of the Goose Bay base. Many Innu feel that the way in which police and military have been used to threaten other native peoples, like the Mohawks, has much in common with the military theft of Innu lands.

Some good news is that Innu who were arrested last spring for similar base occupations were all finally acquitted. They had demanded that the trial be translated into their language and no translator could be found—or bought—since the pay was supposedly \$2,000 a day. The judge dismissed the charges saying that a trial must be translated into the defendant's own language.

Exxon has now auctioned off much of its oil spill equipment in Alaska (the equipment that follows up on spills, that is, not the equipment that causes them—plenty of that remains in use). The Exxon Valdez has been repaired and has left San Diego harbor for a glorious new career. (A tip of the hat to Greenpeace who chained themselves to the propeller of the ship to spoil Exxon's happy moment and warn the world that the ship is back in action.)

If any aspect of the industrial megamachine graphically illustrates the idea that the only scandal is that there is no scandal, it is the ongoing, unstaunchable and inevitable nature of oil and chemical spills. It's hard to pick up a newspaper without reading of one of the more dramatic ones. Just as we went to press with the Winter 1990 FE and its long essay on the Exxon spill as representative of civilization, another major oil spill was reported in the Mediterranean, and since that time, we've seen huge spills and fires, in the Gulf of Mexico and leaks on the U.S. east coast.

Even as we were picketing Marathon Oil on Detroit's southwest side last September to protest petrochemical civilization's oil jihad in the Persian Gulf, a gas tanker burned out of control on the Saginaw River, which flows into Lake Huron. (Citizens were advised, of course, not to worry; a gas fire, it would leave no slicks and "no environmental damage.")

In Alaska, Exxon and the oil consortium that underwrites 85% of the state budget have done a better cleanup in the ideological realm than they did on the beaches. By a year after the spill, all attempts by reform environmentalists to institutionalize and legalize protective measures against such disasters and to hold oil companies accountable were failing. An enormous propaganda blitz had been unleashed to remind Alaskans how much they owe their oil lords, and legislative reforms pushed by environmentalists and local citizen groups were languishing. One series of "warm, soft-focus" television ads "imploping Alaskans to 'Share the Dream,' " reported the Knight-Ridder news agency, "had such a catchy tune that many viewers wrote in to ask for the sheet music."

As far as oil spill "rehabilitation" goes, the day after Earth Day, the New York Times reported that rehabilitation of oil-soaked and oil-poisoned otters from Prince William Sound has been "largely futile," with as many as half later perishing. This conclusion was based on a study of 45 otters that were tagged with transmitters. (Some 900 dead otters had been collected, representing anywhere from 15 to 50 percent of actual mortalities. An additional 360 were netted alive and 200 returned to the Sound after their treatment.)

The otters tagged were among the healthiest, chosen because they were "most likely to withstand the stress of surgery to insert the cigarette-pack-size transmitter into their abdomens." Much of the scientific data gathered after the spill has been held up in litigation between Exxon and the State of Alaska, so as nature collapses like a house of cards around us, the scientists can continue to play their favorite game of agnosticism.

While the otter study had the relative value of demonstrating the obvious, that restoration and rehabilitation are a technological-scientific fraud, it also proved once again that for grant-writing scientists (as for lawyers, "clean-up" and ship repair companies), every industrial disaster has its silver lining. Nature dies, profits rise.

On the night of October 25th, all the windows of the Bound Together Bookstore Collective in San Francisco were smashed. This is the second time in six months that their windows have been broken. Replacing them costs \$1400. To secure the windows from future attacks will cost three times this amount.

As a volunteer project supporting anarchist, anti-authoritarian and independent publishing, their financial position is always precarious. Now they are asking for assistance to continue functioning for their 15th year and beyond.

Donations should be sent to: Window Fund, Bound Together Books, 1369 Haight St., San Francisco CA 94117.

Ever since the Exxon oil disaster in Prince William Sound in the spring of 1989, the issue of oil spills on the fresh water Great Lakes has been a topic of nervous conversation. Questions have been raised about oil-spill "response capability"; a congressional subcommittee investigating the matter was told by the state director of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) David Hales that no such adequate response capability (whatever that means) is in place. (Locally, Hales is known for such "earth-friendly" accomplishments as his attempt to bring the super-collider to Michigan, his back-room work in getting the Detroit incinerator re-started, and his poisoning of thousands of fish in northern Michigan rivers to count them for the power companies.)

Governor James Blanchard (another soulless opportunist—even by their standards—who would vaporize his mother and move to the moon if it furthered his political career) has also argued that an emergency response center be set up somewhere in the Great Lakes. How touching. Imagine the brave emergency team rushing from, say, Green Bay, Wisconsin, to Saginaw Bay, or upper Lake Superior, to do battle against an oil spill.

But the Gov's emergency response team won't do us much good anyway. According to figures gathered by Great Lakes International Joint Commission scientists, Pollution Probe (Toronto) and Greenpeace, three thousand "significant industrial spills" occur every year in the lakes—more than eight a day. The weight of toxic chemicals en-

tering the water, air and land of the Great Lakes Basin every day is some eight thousand pounds. Five hundred different toxic chemicals are found in Lake Michigan trout. (Reported in the Toronto weekly Now, October 19–25, 1989.)

And whether or not the reader happens to be one of the 26 million people who get their drinking water from the Great Lakes, the following information might be of interest. According to a senior scientist at Environment Canada's Centre for Inland Waters at Burlington, Ontario, one glass of Lake Ontario drinking water contains: *

- * 10 million trillion trillion chloride ions
- * 100 billion molecules of chemicals from the chlorinage of sewage
- * 10 billion molecules of cyanide from industrial plating and mining operations
- * 10 billion molecules of industrial solvents
- * 4 billion molecules of freon from refrigerator coolants and spray cans
- * 500 million molecules of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's)
- * 100 million molecules of chemicals released by burning coal
- * 10 million molecules of insecticides
- * 10,000 molecules of dioxin

Emergency response teams won't do you much good there, either, but you probably already figured that out.

This is not to imply that some dramatic disaster of major proportions won't occur somewhere in the lakes; in fact, it is inevitable. But the emergency response discussion serves as a convenient deterrence machine to take people's minds off the horrible reality, the daily operations of industrial capitalism that are already carrying out the disaster in a dispersed, slow-motion manner, and which ensure the inevitability of some larger accident down the line.

Plug your local discharge pipe with the politician, bureaucrat or corporate executive of your choice.

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