



LEONARD RIFAS, FROM "ENERGY COMICS"

THE NEW GENOCIDE

FROM PAGE 17

The "Gunnery Range" is an area within the northwest quadrant of the reservation "borrowed" from the Oglalas in 1942 to train U.S. Army Air Corps gunners. It was to be returned after the Second World War, but never was. In "secret negotiations" during 1975, when Tribal President Richard Wilson assigned legal title to the federal government (after thirty-three years of boldfaced expropriation), ostensibly so that it might become part of the Badlands National Monument. Area residents have felt all along that the Range was being used as a convenient dumping ground for virulently toxic nuclear waste, away from large concentrations of mainstream population.

Meanwhile, the same governmental/corporate entities which proclaimed that uranium mining and milling near Edgemont, circa 1955, constituted "no public health hazard," are now announcing that the area is so heavily contaminated that it should become a national nuclear waste dump. The cancer rate among longterm Edgemont residents is spiraling, as are birth defects at nearby Pine Ridge, yet both federal and business spokespersons have taken to stating that putting such a facility in the Black Hills presents "no danger" to the population or environment. South Dakota Governor William Janklow, who campaigned on a platform of not allowing further nuclear development but who now plans to run for the U.S. Senate, has apparently reversed his field and begun to advocate the dump siting.

Water, however, may be the most immediately crucial issue. The plans for just one coal mine, the Burdock, stripping the huge Fort Union deposit underlying much of the region, entails the pumping of six hundred and seventy-five gallons per minute from the area's quite limited groundwater resources. As Henry Wasserman noted in 1980: "Overall, the plans for industrializing the Black Hills are staggering. They include a gigantic energy park featuring more than a score of ten thousand megawatt coal-fired plants, a dozen nuclear reactors, huge coal slurry pipelines designed to use millions of gallons of water to move crushed coal thousands of miles, and at least fourteen major uranium mines."

At each of these enterprises — not to mention the dozens of other industrial undertakings projected for the area — are all intended to draw down on the Oglala Aquifer, it is easy to see how the Black Hills is slated to follow the Four Corners Region into environmental oblivion by some point early in the next century. Equally easy to understand is the depth and nature of Native American resistance to such plans, perhaps best described by Russell Means in his statement that "We are resisting being turned into a national sacrifice area. We're resisting being turned into a national sacrifice people. The costs of this industrial process are not acceptable to us. It is genocide to dig the uranium here and drain the water table, no more, no more less."

No matter where one turns in contemporary Native America, the same sort of portrait can be drawn. From the expropriation of copper-rich Papago land and water rights on the Mexican border earlier in this century to the Alaskan North Slope where today, under provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, indigenous people stand to lose forty-four million acres of their ancestral homelands, the final integrity and continuity of Indian nations is being usurped in the name of industrial "progress." The environmental

consequences of this are as readily apparent in the Reynolds Aluminum Corporation's fluoride contamination of the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation in upstate New York, or in the government's plan to situate a high-level nuclear waste dump at the Hanford site adjoining Washington State's Yakima reservation, as they are in the Four Corners Region or the Black Hills. In Canada, as the submersion of the James Bay Cree homeland by the James Bay Hydroelectric Project (generating additional power for the New York megapolis) amply demonstrates, things are not particularly different.

In a very real rather than romantic sense, then, American Indians hold a key to the survival of the North American continent. They cannot, of course, turn this key alone. What is needed, and immediately so, is an increasing awareness among members of mainstream society of the realities, not fantasies of Indian existence, both historical and contemporary. Only from the basis of such awareness can we hope, together, to prevent impending environmental catastrophe(s) from occurring throughout Indian Country. Only from a generalized support for Indian sovereignty and Indian traditionalism can we hope, together, to thus reverse the progression of environmental holocaust which has marked the history of the United States since its inception.



Ward Churchill is Creek and Cherokee Metis. He is director of the Education Development Program at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The author of numerous articles and essays, he is editor of "Marxism and Native Americans" (South End Press, 1983) and co-author with Elisabeth Lloyd of "Culture versus Economism" (Indigena Press, 1984). He is codirector with Glenn Morris of Colorado AIM (American Indian Movement), and with Winona LaDuke, of the Institute for Natural Progress. He served as a delegate of the International Indian Treaty Council. His article, "The New Genocide" is reprinted from "Akwasasne Notes," which is published by the Mohawk Nation.

RX
CANNON
BEACH
PHARMACY
downtown 436-2261

COLUMBIAN
CAFE
CREPES • PASTA • SOUPS • SALADS
—ESPRESSO—
1114 MARINE DRIVE, ASTORIA

CANNON BEACH BOOK COMPANY
132 North Hemlock, Cannon Beach 436-1301