

## Danns Awarded Alternative Nobel Prize

Michelle Syverson

Mary and Carrie Dann of the Western Shoshone Nation received the 1993 Right Livelihood Award in Sweden on December 9th, for "their courage and perseverance in asserting the rights of indigenous people to their land." The \$200,000 award was shared by five women, or women-led movements, who have "made outstanding positive contributions in situations of crisis or conflict." The Awards were presented in the Swedish Parliament on December 9th, the day before the Nobel Prize presentations. (The Awards are often referred to as the "Alternative Nobel Prize".)

Although Mary was unable to attend the event, Carrie and her niece flew to Sweden on a Western Shoshone passport. They were forced to fly and return via Canada because the U.S. does not recognize Native American Passports. (All other countries in the world accept the Western Shoshone passport.) After the Award ceremony in Stockholm, Carrie spoke at a number of events in Germany, and addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Many of us are aware of the Dann sisters' struggle to protect their land because we were fortunate enough to have Carrie Dann visit Cannon Beach on two separate occasions in 1993. In March she spoke at a fund raiser for the Western Shoshone Nation, and in September she was a guest speaker at a major cultural event celebrating the year of indigenous peoples. Both events were held at the Chamber of Commerce in Cannon Beach and attended by hundreds of residents and tourists.

For more than twenty years, the Dann sisters have been at the forefront of their peoples' struggle against the attempted expropriation of their land by the U.S. Government and its degradation of the land by mining and nuclear testing. Mary and Carrie Dan, age 70 and 60 respectively, are traditional Western Shoshone women and the major leaders in their peoples' political and legal battle to retain their ancestral lands. Since 1972, the Dann sisters have been waging a battle with the U.S. Government through litigation and civil disobedience.

To understand the significance of their struggle, the following is a brief history of the Western Shoshone Nation:

The Western Shoshone Nation's territory, as defined in the Treaty of Ruby Valley in 1868, includes two-thirds of the State of Nevada and small portions of California, Idaho, and Utah. This treaty was not a treaty of cession, but of peace and friendship, granting the citizens of the United States safe passage through Shoshone Territory and permitting a small amount of mining and ranching in specific areas.

The Treaty of Ruby Valley, like other treaties between the United States Government and Indian Nations, has been abrogated and undermined by U.S. domestic law. For example, the General Allotment Act of 1887 was designed to break up Indian territories that were used in common, by allotting between 80 and 160 acres to individual ownership; all remaining land automatically became U.S. property.

In the 19th century, the U.S. Supreme Court successfully developed the theory of trusteeship, giving the trustee, (U.S.A.), unlimited power over Indian land and property. The Indian Nations became wards of the U.S. Government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The new administering body was implemented to "take care" of Indian Nations and their property.

Through different legislative acts, almost 90% of Western Shoshone land and resources gradually came under control of the U.S. Department of Interior and its branches, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Department of Energy. In 1951, the Nevada Test Site was established, where the U.S. and Great Britain conducted more than 100 atmospheric tests - more than have been conducted anywhere else in the world. In all, 950 nuclear bombs have been detonated on Shoshone land since 1951, the most recent in April, 1990.

In 1946, the Indians Claims Act was ratified in order to resolve Indian claims to lands taken by the U.S. The Indian Claims Commission (ICC) was founded to handle these claims. The Western Shoshone were compensated, against their will, for land they allegedly lost in 1872. Their efforts to stop the proceedings and fire their Washington attorney were denied. Prior to 1968, Indian Nations had no free choice of legal representation; all contracts were arranged and controlled by the BIA.

In 1979, the Court of Claims awarded \$26 million dollars in compensation for taking 24 million acres of Western Shoshone land. But more than 80% of the Western Shoshone people, despite their poverty, voted against accepting the money. Instead, the award was placed in an interest-bearing account at the Department of Interior, and now totals well over \$60 million. Since the Western Shoshone did not sell or cede their land, they simply requested that the United States observe the Treaty of Ruby Valley.

In December 1991, the 9th Circuit Court ruled that the claims award, which the Shosone never accepted, extinguished subsistence rights guaranteed in the Treaty of Ruby Valley. These subsistence rights are the right to hunt, fish, and gather and are separate rights to their own natural resources.

Mary and Carrie Dann's ranch is in Crescent Valley, in the heart of Western Shoshone territory. In 1973, they were approached by a BLM ranger who demanded to see their grazing permit. They argued that their cattle were grazing on Western Shoshone territory, but they were nonetheless sued for trespassing in 1974.

In June 1991, as a result of the denial of Western Shoshone landrights, the Federal District Court of Nevada authorized the BLM to reduce the Dann livestock because they were "overgrazing." According to Citizen Alert, the major environmental organization in Nevada, the Danns do not overgraze.

On March 26, 1992, in response to the first round-up conducted by the BLM, the Western Shoshone National Council nationalized the livestock of the Danns. The BLM ignored the change of ownership and attempted another "livestock reduction" on April 9th which failed because of the non-violent resistance of Western Shoshone and non-Indian supporters.

In November, 1992, the BLM conducted another round-up of 269 "unauthorized horses grazing on public land" with helicopters, armed sheriffs and federal agents. Mary and Carrie's brother, Clifford Dann, tried to prevent the confiscation. When he was unsuccessful, he threatened to ignite himself, but federal officers wrestled him to the ground. After treatment in a hospital he was arrested. On March 3rd, 1993, he was convicted of assaulting federal officers and incarcerated at the federal prison in Lompoc, California. Last month he was released and is back home helping at the ranch. The Dann sisters have requested that President Clinton pardon him of his "crime."

The Dann sisters have recently discovered that Kennecott, a subsidiary of British Rio Tinto Zinc, plan to start another major mining operation on the Shoshone land. The Western Shoshone have never received compensation for damage by mining, or royalties for their resources. Kennecott's new mine "Placer Dome" will cover 1,700 acres, plus tailings covering 650 acres, directly affecting the health of the Dann family and the environment of the land and all its inhabitants. This open pit mine operation will affect springs and poison the main fresh water source of Crescent Valley.



### OREGON COAST SUPPORT GROUP

P.O. BOX 50  
CANNON BEACH  
OREGON 97110  
503-436-2420  
503-436-0527

Leadership is action, not position.  
D. H. McGannon

The other Right Livelihood recipients, all women of courage, are:

**Arna Mer-Khamis** (Israel) and the organization **Care and Learning** which she founded in Jenin (Occupied Palestine) for "passionate commitment to the defense and education of the children of Palestine victimized by military occupation." Recent events offer hope that her work may serve as a model contribution to a real reconciliation between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

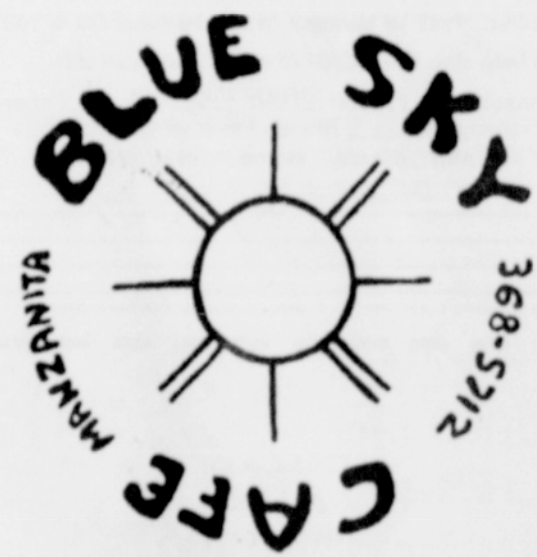
**Vandana Shiva** (India), environmental activist, advocate and researcher, for "her pioneering insights into the social and environmental cost of dominant development process, and her ability to work with and for local people and communities in the articulation and implementation of alternatives." Shiva has done much to place women and ecology at the heart of modern development discourse.

**The Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP)** in Zimbabwe, co-founded by Sithembiso Nyoni, "for motivating its million members to choose their own development path according to their culture and traditions, and for its effective response to the most lengthy drought in Southern Africa."

The Right Livelihood Awards were started in 1980 by Jakob von Uexkull, a Swedish-German philatelic expert, who sold his valuable postage stamps to provide the original endowment. Von Uexkull felt that the Nobel Prizes had become too narrow and specialized and ignored much work and knowledge vital for the survival of humankind. Recipients of the Right Livelihood Award are chosen annually by an international jury in such fields as environmental protection, peace and disarmament, and economic and human development. The Right Livelihood Award cash prizes are designated for the support of ongoing projects that address crucial problems facing humanity today.

(Michelle Syverson is Executive Director of Environmental News Network and represents the Right Livelihood Awards in North America. For more information contact her at P.O. Box 680, Manzanita, Or 97130.)

(We at the Edge are pleased to announce that this is the first of an ongoing series of articles Michelle will be writing for the Edge.)



Because Fascism is a lie, it is condemned to literary sterility. And when it is past, it will have no history, except the bloody history of murder.  
Ernest Hemingway



**American Indian  
Association of Portland**  
1827 NE 44th Suite 226  
Portland, OR 97213