

CUP Briefs

Foreign debt wrecks forests

VANCOUVER (CUP) — A University of British Columbia student will be one of 34 Canadians attending a conference in Altamira, Brazil — which will soon disappear from the map.

Altamira is the proposed centre for the Xingu Hydro-electric project, estimated to cost US \$10.6 billion, and which will flood an area the size of the Great Britain.

Encounter to Save the Amazon and Her Peoples is organized and hosted by the Kayapo tribe, whose members have inhabited the area for thousands of years and who will be displaced by the project. Over 35,000 Indians from 11 different nations would be forced off their lands.

"The Kayapo Indians are living off the forest as they have for thousands of years," said second-year arts student Jeff Gibbs. "You can't get to them by road. Most of them don't even speak Portuguese."

"In this century, about 80 tribes have become extinct," he said. "There used to be up to eight million Amazon Indians in the basin in the 1700s. Now there's only a few hundred thousand."

Gibbs will join other environmentalists such as David Suzuki, and B.C.'s Haida Indians at the February 21 to 16 meeting.

"The tropical rainforests are disappearing at a rate of over an acre per second," said Gibbs. "That's one-and-a-half football fields per second of rainforest that'll never grow back."

He said the Indians also take with them a wealth of knowledge about the Amazon rainforest. The rainforests "are like biological universities and the Indians are like professors. It'd take scientists centuries to figure out what the Indians already know."

The world's rainforests comprise only seven per cent of the globe's surface, but contain over 50 per cent of the world's species.

"A huge majority of those species we have not even documented," says Gibbs. "The vast majority of all the medicines used today can be traced back to the rainforest — it's still the best hope for new medicines. So when the forest is lost, so is an incredible wealth of species that could potentially be good for humanity."

And the Amazon rainforest is a vital element in regulating the greenhouse effect. The dense vegetation of the Amazon converts carbon dioxide to oxygen, regulating the temperature of the world. Depletion of the rainforest has contributed generally to global warming.

"When you burn the forest, you're not only creating more carbon dioxide, but you're also destroying the organic machine that has the potential to convert that carbon dioxide back into oxygen," said Gibbs.

He said financial considerations still outweigh environmental ones, and that much of the rainforest is cut down to pay off Brazil's massive foreign debt.

"It's a matter of poverty. A lot of these issues come down to debt. They (Brazil) can't pay off the debt. The World Bank loans them money to build big projects, and get, in return, resources like iron ore and hamburger meat, quite cheaply."

In the quest for development, Brazilian peasants are often displaced and moved to the forest regions, where, in order to farm, they carry out slash-and-burn warfare with the environment.

"There are 7,000 fires at one time in the Amazon due to forest burning," said Gibbs.

Nearly \$70,000 of private donations have been raised in Canada to help fund the event, but Gibbs adds, "It's completely the Indians' own thing. They're extremely independent." Ironically the World Bank, of which Canada is a member, may be approving a \$500 million loan to Brazil's power company to construct the first dam at Altamira.

Gibbs is collecting donations to finance the \$2,000 trip.

NEWS

What more

Racist shit ?

MONTREAL (CUP) — A group of women who visited a Lasalle disco claim a bartender told them blacks steal purses and wouldn't be served.

The three women approached a counter in Disco Bar L'Azure on Ladies' Night two weeks ago and were told the bar was closed, said Susan Perch.

"But then we saw they were serving white people at the bar we had just been turned away from, so we turned back for service," Perch said. "After the bartender dodged us for 20 minutes I asked him if he was ignoring us because we were black."

"He said, 'Yes. My boss told me not to serve black girls because they steal purses. Don't ask questions. I just can't do it.' I couldn't believe it. We were so insulted."

The bartender told Perch she could speak to the boss later, but he never appeared.

Responded manager Robert Giguere: "We are not racist here." He said the bartender refused service to Perch and her friends because the women had been impolite. Giguere said he has instructed bartenders to refuse service to rude customers.

"(Perch) said she and her friends never received a first round of drinks because they were immediately denied service at the bar.

Perch is considering filing a complaint with the Quebec Human Rights Commission.

"This was our third time at L'Azure, and we'd never had any trouble before. Suddenly after the thefts, they decided all black people are the same.

"But this is not the '60s, this is 1989 and blacks aren't going to stand for this shit anymore."



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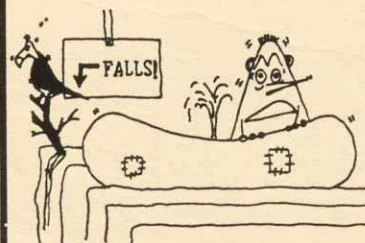
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