

## Changing Visions...

# The Canadian Landscape

Arts Editorial  
by Beno John

Viewers at the Edmonton Art Gallery might drastically change their view of art if made aware of the carnage committed by Reed Paper Ltd.; the sponsor of *Changing Visions - The Canadian Landscape*.

The exhibition is funded by a \$30,000 grant from Reed Paper Ltd., parent company of Dryden Paper and Dryden Chemical Companies, which have discharged 20,000 pounds of mercury wastes into the English-Wabigoon River systems in northwestern Ontario from 1962 to 1975, destroying the livelihood and endangering the lives of native Indians in the communities of Grassy Narrows and White Dog.

Reed's slick PR motives are baldly stated in the art show catalogue when it considers itself

"...among the growing ranks of people who care deeply about the future of this country and about the invaluable heritage of our land." It is a feeble attempt on the company's part to cover up their refusal to accept responsibility for polluting the English-Wabigoon river system, and their refusal to provide compensation for victims affected with Minimata disease (methyl mercury poisoning).

## Early death for poisoned natives

Minimata disease destroys the regenerative facility of nerve cells, resulting in a slow, lingering disability and early death. Pregnant women who eat the poisoned fish, may produce offspring with cerebral palsy or

with severe retardation. There is no cure for percury poisoning.

The mercury put into the environment by the Reed companies has permeated all the food chains and, although Reed Paper stopped discharging mercury in Nov. 1975, it has already contaminated fish downstream from Dryden to levels which even the Ontario government considers "dangerous to health."

In addition to this, Reed Paper Ltd., with the full co-operation of the Ontario government, is considering plans for a massive pulp mill in the Red Lake Ear Falls district of the province. The mill is to be supplied with timber from 26,000 sq. mi. of forest, an area equivalent to that of New Brunswick. Reed's proposal could have serious environmental and social consequences, as the area in question happens to be the home of self supporting Ojibway and Cree peoples numbering 12,000.

## "Scorched earth" campaign

Most of the trees logged will be black spruce, which has not yet been successfully reforested in the boreal forests of Northern Ontario (where the growing season is shorter than any in the province.) Additionally, the soils in the area are either sandy or shallow, or clay like.

Logging in the clay soil area will result in a rise of the water table, turning the area into a swamp in which the seedlings will drown. Once the sandy soil is stripped of trees, erosion will

reduce the earth to bare rock. Above all this, the changes in animal behavior and population will permanently affect the lifestyle of the natives who depend entirely on hunting, trapping and fishing for their income.

The demise of the native communities of White Dog Reserve and Grassy Narrows as a result of mercury poisoning should be seen as an instance of things to come when the economic base of such communities are obliterated by companies like Reed. Welfare payments in the two villages went up from \$86,000 to about \$270,000 since the fish in the rivers had been declared unhealthy. Unemployment in the communities is 80%.

Reed Paper Ltd.'s disregard for the environment and for the people who depend on it is corporate arrogance at its worst. Even worse is the Ontario government's support of the company's proposal, a flagrant violation of Treaty Nine signed by the federal government and the native people in 1905, under which the land was guaranteed to the Cree and Ojibway nations.

## Ontario gov't fakes appeasement

The Ontario government has attempted to appease the rising tide of resentment by extending their negotiations with Reed over a period of two years during which time "...detailed inventories, investigations and studies are to be undertaken to determine whether the pulp mill

should be built." This should be viewed with a certain amount of cynicism, and the studies, if ever completed, should be shrewdly appraised, as all previous studies have indicated that Reed's proposal will result in the destruction of the land and the people that live in that land.

Reed Paper Ltd., is not only guilty of exploitation in Canada; it is a subsidiary of Reed International Ltd., a multinational which has control of over four hundred subsidiaries in about fifty countries, including South Africa and Rhodesia.

The Chairman of Reed Corp., Don Ryder has been quoted assaying in defence of the company's violation of the U.N. economic sanctions imposed against South Africa, "...what South Africa needs for better overseas understanding of its problems is for more and more companies to have plants here." This absurd statement is reflective of Reed's profit-squeezing mentality and lurks behind the facade of "caring deeply about this country," by sponsoring the exhibit - *Changing Visions*.

## Art lovers beware

This point should not be missed by those viewing this exhibition, especially when the facts behind Reed's operations are not well publicized. The artists who withdrew their works from the exhibitions should be commended for their good sense - the others condemned for their lack of it. It might be too much to ask for socially responsible art but an exhibition which depicts landscapes that may be destroyed by the very company funding the show is just a bad joke, and lacks any sort of discretion on the artist's part. It is true that private financial support is sometimes essential for Canadian artists, and it is difficult to discern the motives and policies of all corporations. But in the case of a company that is guilty of environmental damage, the support should not have been accepted.

The Edmonton Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Ontario show the same lack of discretion by considering the art they are exhibiting separate from the company that helps to fund it.

The artists in this exhibition are being manipulated by Reed Paper Ltd., in a grandiose sales pitch directed to the Canadian Public - a hasty attempt to polish Reed's tarnished image caused by the unjustifiable destruction they have committed, are committing and will commit, if allowed.



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