

# The People's Summit: where truth stings APEC

Stephen Hume

AT LARGE

While Asian-Pacific leaders push a crude propaganda of growth, others in Vancouver will focus on rights.



The haze from burning forests is back in Malaysia - and people who write about it can be prosecuted for discouraging some potential tourist.

Here in British Columbia, labour unions and environmentalists square off as though they were enemies, debating clearcuts and timber supply, arguing eco-tourism versus "real" resource jobs.

In Malaysia, the loggers had a free hand.

American writer Peter Matthiessen calls what happened "the gluttonous resource extraction by foreign corporations in the forests of Sarawak that is emblematic of multinational looting operations in rainforests all around the world - the new form of colonialism that destroys the life and hope of traditional peoples and diminishes the wonder of the earth."

Is there a connection between B.C. and Malaysia?

Aboriginals in Australia have recently won some stunning court decisions declaring that their traditional rights were neither absent nor extinguished at the time of European colonization.

However, deaths of aboriginals in police custody increased sharply. Since 1991, 64 aboriginal people have died in police custody and 40 more in what are called custody-related police operations, "some of them in circumstances Amnesty International believes amounted to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."

Is there a connection between the legal empowerment of a marginalized, previously disenfranchised minority and violence toward it from agents of the state?

Here in B.C., a superior court has just ruled that aboriginal people have an unextinguished interest in resources on Crown land, which raises serious questions about the moral and legal right of companies to continue logging in areas subject to land claims negotiations - even with sanc-

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tion from the provincial government.

At the same time, self-styled "citizen's groups" are leading a campaign to discredit treaty agreements.

Is there a connection between this backlash and the growing awareness that aboriginal rights are real and sharing of power is not an act of largesse, it's a legal obligation?

Here in B.C., the provincial government is now red hot on "clean" high-tech industries of the information age to replace

"dirty" resource industries.

Let's see. The personal computer on which I'm writing this column weighs about 25 kilograms. But during its manufacture it generated 63 kilograms of waste, required 27,700 litres of water and 2,300 kilowatt hours of energy.

And in two years it will be obsolete. By 2005, 150 million computers just like it will have gone into landfills - think of them as a pile at B.C. Place around two kilometres high.

Many of the components for my computer were made by workers in Asia - where labour organizers like Dita Indah Sari, Mughtar Pakpahan, Li Wen Ming and Guo Baosheng are routinely murdered, raped, tortured and imprisoned.

Is there a moral connection between me and Asian workers through this piece of equipment? What about sustainability?

These are issues that you won't find on the agenda at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation schmooze-up next week, where Vancouver's tuxedo-clad elite will fork over \$1,000-a-plate to rub elbows with the kind of chaps whose secret police intimidate dissi-

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dent nuns by raping them with electric cattle prods.

But issues like these will certainly be on the agenda at the People's Summit on APEC, a non-government conference organized by labour unions, human rights, research and environmental groups to discuss the impact of Asian trade liberalization on women, indigenous people, worker's rights, education, the arms trade and the environment.

The People's Summit starts Monday with the Second International Women's Conference Against APEC - an appropriate kickoff considering how often women and children are the primary victims of repressive labour codes and environmental degradation.

Wednesday, a forum sponsored by Article 19 and a number of other distinguished human rights organizations will explore the conditions necessary for a free press and how to advance them.

Thursday an important forum on sustainability will examine issues surrounding fisheries and aquaculture, forestry, mining, sustainable agriculture and sustainable cities.

All these are issues are both timely and highly relevant to B.C. and Vancouver. Thank heavens somebody will be talking about them outside the smarmy propaganda of governments. ◊