

Clayoquot Sound ("klak-wat") is one of the last intact temperate rainforests remaining in the world. Its intrinsic value, its value to the Nuuchah-nulth Nations, and the value of its as-yet-undocumented biological attributes, are threatened by the British Columbia government's decision to allow logging in two-thirds of its area.

BC's Commission on Resources and Development (CORE), was established last year as an independent body to resolve land use conflicts by consensus. But the province excluded Clayoquot from the CORE process, bought \$50 million worth of shares in Macmillan Bloedel, the company that does most of the logging there (thereby becoming its largest single shareholder, with four per cent of the shares), and set aside only about one-third of the Sound — a portion which is largely already protected or not viable for forestry.



## In contempt of clearcutting

story and photos by Hugh Benevides

Standing in the predawn half-light on a logging road, you can feel the Earth breathe. On August 9 I felt just that. Before me was a bridge over the Kennedy River and beyond it, the mouth of Clayoquot Sound.

That morning, as the light slowly grew and shadows became trees and mountainsides, over two hundred and fifty people sat and spoke silently for the Sound. They put their liberty at risk that morning because they felt that the law, the state, the "system" had not served, and something else needed to be done to save the forest. Five hundred more stood by and watched, not risking arrest but lending their support.

The Clayoquot peace camp was set up by the Friends of Clayoquot Sound to house their fellow activists throughout the summer. Donations of food and money poured in from around the world, and so did the protestors. On August 9, three friends and I joined the hundreds at the peace camp and on the blockade. What I saw there took me beyond a land-use conflict, to a reminder of how powerful group action can be.

The first reminder came when we arrived at the Black Hole, a high roadside clearcut that serves as a convenient site for the peace camp. It lies on the north side of Highway 4 west of Port Alberni, inland of the coast and Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.

Just inside the gates, a banner announces the code of conduct for the camp: "We will strive for an atmosphere of calm dignity. We will greet people whom we meet with the respect we would expect of them. We will not run or shout ... We will carry no weapons, drugs or alcohol." (Everything I ever needed to know about kindergarten, I could have learned at the Clayoquot peace camp.) As we walked toward the council area, I was overwhelmed with a feeling of community and welcoming, of common purpose and determined satisfaction, that I had not felt since summer camp. I remembered how genuine that can be — the kind of immediate acceptance that flows, unspoken, from people's eyes.

Beyond the council ring — a campfire area with seats in a circle and a parachute erected above for protection from the daily rains — was the makeshift kitchen, where a dozen people were preparing lunch. Others were coming down the path from their tents, which were set up along both sides of the trails that wind up the hill from the kitchen. They smiled, said hello. You could feel that you were going to be involved in something special. Just being in this camp was somehow affirming. Michelle said she had goosebumps.

Perhaps this feeling could be explained partly by the fact that you couldn't explain it. The

conspiracy that was happening there was more genuine and more rare than most everyday events for which we have words.

That afternoon, we participated in a workshop on civil disobedience (c.d.). The session provided another indication of the levels of sophistication with which the campaign for Clayoquot is managed. There is a pull between things which I know to be honourable beliefs or causes — for example, environmentalism — and

**In Canada, one acre of forest is clear-cut every 12 seconds, making us nearly as bad as Brazil where an acre is clear-cut every 9 seconds. (Valhalla Society, *Brazil of the North*, 1993)**

remarks that are sometimes made by others which are intended to devalue or discredit such causes. The pull is such that I sometimes find myself critically evaluating the people with whom I share my convictions. Maybe when I do this, I am searching for a chink in my own moral armour. The c.d.

workshop at Kennedy Lake reminded me that environmentalists are (and indeed, have to be) just as sophisticated and skilful with today's tools of communication as those with whom we do battle. And it reminded me that dissenting voices are no less valid than others.

We met on the beach in a talking circle consisting of about fifty people, and we brainstormed on a number of topics. The first, not arbitrarily, was fear: what usually caused us fear, how it manifested itself, whether we were feeling fear as we considered the idea of putting our liberty in jeopardy. Fear is not only an appropriate emotion to consider before publicly defying the law (especially when c.d. is not one's normal behaviour); it is also the emotion that might cause a logger and an anti-logging activist to lash out at each other in a heated debate on a logging road. In this context, fear is a lack of consideration of the other person's needs and wants, and a hatred that results from ignorance.

The brainstorm brought these ideas of fear to our conscious minds, and helped us to begin to come to terms with them. We talked about ways of defusing anger when confronted by workers who felt threatened by our actions. We talked

about the honourable history of c.d. and group defiance of the state. We brainstormed on precedents for the disobedience planned for the following day ("Soweto"; "the suffragette movement"; "the Doukhobors"; "Gandhi"). I remember being impressed by the numbers and names of all the movements which had preceded us in the act of civil protest.

In his sentencing decision for the first forty protestors to be tried, Mr. Justice John Bouck denied the similarity between the acts of the protestors and those of Martin Luther King or Gandhi, saying that the latter had no recourse through democratic means. "But here," the judge wrote, "the representatives of the people of this province made the law allowing Macmillan Bloedel Ltd. to log the timber in Clayoquot Sound. It was not decreed by some colonial administrator. Unlike Mr. Gandhi, the defendants have the right to be involved in the political process. In Canada the people control the levers of power. *Democracy allows anyone to try and persuade others as to the rightness of their cause.*" (my emphasis)

What the judgment denies is the contribution that the Clayoquot campaign and others make to democratic discourse. I don't consider it a frivolous argument to say that the Clayoquot protestors have tried to "persuade others as to the rightness of their cause". No, they have not confined themselves to the methods which the judge has in mind. They have chosen a powerful method of opposing the law in both its substance and its form. They say that its form, an injunction which serves a corporate interest, is protective of a company whose practices cannot sustain either jobs or forests.

So blockades address both the law, which they see as being guided with a bias toward the corporate world, and the immediacy of the problem, which is the loss of jobs and irreplaceable trees.

A careful review of the Clayoquot saga so far would suggest to some that these protestors were left no legal alternative.

The comparisons made between other examples of c.d. and Clayoquot differ only insofar as the violence being resisted here is against the Earth rather than against people. To many of us, the difference is not great.

Judge Bouck's decision describes what seems to be an unfortunate breaking away by some of the protestors from the principles of the movement which they embraced. The Friends of Clayoquot took great pains to try and solidify the message given at the blockade, by urging everyone either to be silent, or to engage in reasoned debate with loggers. The intention was to retain credibility and to avoid violence.

After the arrests, the Friends did their best to co-ordinate a system whereby the arrestees could obtain counsel. Unfortunately, after that point the campaign was subject to a loss of credibility because of the behaviour of some arrestees in the courtroom.

While I recognize that the different political views of some arrestees would allow them to heckle the judge and ignore courtroom decorum, I feel that the principles of the campaign are compromised by such behaviour. It certainly didn't help the arrestees when their sentences came down (even pending an appeal).

Such developments lead me to wonder about the effectiveness of the entire campaign, well-intentioned as it is. I suppose it will be months or years before we really know.

I left the circle for a few minutes and walked up the beach. I was struck by another image: two little girls playing in the sand, and beyond them, across the lake, a slope devoid of trees. In Clayoquot Sound, you're never far from a clearcut to remind you what the fuss is about.

It's 3:30 am. "Good morning starshine, the earth says hello ...". The words pry gently into my sleep; just a couple of hours after going to bed, it's time to get up and join the exodus. I crawl from my tent to see the wake-up crew, still singing, moving along the path and stopping by each tent, gently waking the occupants.

I have chosen a tent site on a hill overlooking the highway and the rest of the peace camp. Like a string of Christmas lights laid out on the floor before being put on the tree, the hazard lights of a hundred cars blink below me. This is the signal, agreed-upon at last night's council meeting, to indicate that drivers are ready to take passengers to the blockade.

I follow the rocky path through the misty black hole to the highway. I meet my friends and join the convoy to Kennedy River Bridge.