

Chretien pressured to keep Clayoquot promises

Environmental controversy rages on

(CUP)

PRIME MINISTER JEAN CHRETIEN SHOULD keep his promises to end logging on Clayoquot Sound, environmentalists say.

On January 17, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the Sierra Club of Canada presented the new parliament with 105,000 signatures calling for the preservation of the endangered forest.

The petition was presented on the first day of parliament to remind Jean Chretien of his campaign promise to negotiate the preservation of the area, said Elizabeth May, executive director of the Sierra Club.

Chretien said on October 21 he would try to have the area designated as a national park, protecting it from extensive logging. Four days later, he was elected prime minister with a majority government.

Clayoquot Sound is a large area of old-growth forest on Vancouver Island that was the scene of confrontations between loggers and environmentalists last summer.

Liberal MP Charles Caccia was present at the January 17 event and said he would table the petition in the House of Commons. He expressed his concern that satellite pictures of Vancouver Island indicate the rainforest has been "badly over cut."

There is a "deficit in the reservoir of timber on the island and poor results in second growth," Caccia added. "The way the clearcuts have been carried away is an embarrassment."

Caccia said he "can't understand why the government of B.C. has not taken the steps to protect the Clayoquot sound."

Svend Robinson, an NDP MP who was active in last summer's protests in his home

province, said if "intact areas are not protected, there will be no question this protest will go on."

The efforts to save the largest remaining tract of temperate rainforest in North America began when the B.C. government approved plans for logging in the area, said Adriane Carr, executive director of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee.

Last April, forest companies MacMillan, Bloedel, and Interfor were granted permission to log in the area.

Carr said Canada made interim agreements to protect Clayoquot at the Rio de Janeiro summit on the environment in the 1992. These agreements came into effect Dec. 29, 1993. Environmental groups hope to use the agreements as part of a strategy to stop the clearcutting, said Sierra Club researcher Toki

Geuer.

She said the groups are looking at the possibility of charging the B.C. government with contravening the agreements by allowing clearcutting.

Geuer said the fact that forestry is a provincial jurisdiction has been "Chretien's excuse for back-peddalling on his campaign promises."

But since the agreements made at the convention were on behalf of the entire country, interest groups may be able to demand federal intervention, said Geuer.

The federal government should make Clayoquot Sound "a showpiece for the world" or face increasing international tension and another summer of blockades, said Carr.

Canadian prison system runs on racism

(CUP)

I ASKED ROSS STEVENS, A BLACK MAN who spent almost ten years in a variety of Canadian prisons, to what extent race is an issue in jail.

"The maximum amount," he said. "Like on the streets of South Africa."

"It's like every day a person will call you a nigger or make a joke, put a picture of a monkey on your door, or a jungle or something," he said. "But you can't really let something like that bother you, because if they see that it gets to you, there will be a monkey on your door everyday."

"Loose", who has done about twenty years in Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia prisons, had a different perspective. He argued that most of the problems facing Canadian prisoners affect all prisoners, regardless of race.

But he also had lots of troubles with racist inmates and guards. "When I first went [to Dorchester in New Brunswick], they told me, 'We don't want no niggers in here,' and I said, 'I ain't going nowhere.' They can call me all the names, as long as they don't put their hands on me, then I have to defend myself."

"If you don't stand up for your rights, they'll walk all over you," he said.

VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION

An Ontario Commission looking into systemic racism in the province's prisons released an interim report on Feb. 2, detailing many of these problems.

For instance, the report says, prison officials control what social groups black prisoners can form, what music they can listen to, what magazines they can subscribe to and even what hair products they can have. (Believe it or not,

black prisoners even have trouble getting appropriate combs.)

Policies are applied discriminatorily, so the pregnant black prisoners aren't given the same considerations that pregnant whites are, while blacks are streamed out of prison education programs and into menial jobs.

In many prisons, these policies have gone as far as outright racial segregation. In Quebec's LeClerc prison, for instance, nine of the twelve blocks are whites only. One "black" floor is known as "the Jungle".

There's only certain wings where a black man can go," Stevens remembered. "If they just took me and put me in another wing, there's no question that I would have a fight within the hour." This racial control makes it almost impossible for prisoners to organize against prison racism. A group in LeClerc formed an organization called Black Inmates Fellowship Association in order to raise awareness of racial issues in prison. For whatever reason, those who took on leadership roles in the group were quickly transferred out of the prison or stuck in solitary.

The Ontario commission concluded that such problems could not exist without the complicity of officials high up in the prison hierarchy.

Though these officials may not be as overtly racist as prison guards (many of whom have not figured out that "nigger" is an insult), they are more often just not interested in solving

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the problems of people who society has already given up on.

"The administration tries to be colour-blind, but that way they don't see the problems," said Marie Beemans, a member of the board of directors of the Church Council on Justice and Corrections and for over twenty years a prisoners' rights activist.

"They don't care,"

said Loose. "All they do is lock you up and make sure you do your time."

ISOLATION

Stevens and Loose agreed that prisons far from large cities are the worst. Often guards have no experience dealing with people of colour and immigrants, and the tiny number of black people incarcerated in these areas prevents them from effectively banding together against racists.

Because of the racism and ignorance among prison authorities, support is generally geared towards white Christians. While this falls heaviest on aboriginal prisoners, it still serves to further isolate blacks from their communities (and their lawyers).

This has been especially true at the Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, Ontario, the only facility for federally sentenced women. Kingston is not a particularly diverse city, and prisons there are looked upon as more of an industry than a social issue. Even if there were adequate support groups in Kingston, though, few of the prisoners there would ever get a

chance to see their families.

In April 1990, a federal task force recommended that the P4W be replaced with five regional centres and a facility specifically for native prisoners. This was meant to bring women closer to their families and communities, while also organizing the institutions in a way that recognized that women in prison are rarely a risk to society.

But Montreal didn't bid for the Quebec institution, and instead it's getting built in remote Joliette-- where there are no established black, immigrant or even English communities, ensuring that marginalized women will be far from support. Even worse, it's next to impossible to get to Joliette by public transit. Marie Beemans argues that because the people targeted by the justice system tend to be uneducated and insecure (a large majority were physically or sexually abused and insecure children), jamming them together in prison creates an environment ripe for racial violence.

"You've got people with less education, more insecurities, more problems. They tend not to associate on the outside, but in prison," she said. "When you've got a situation like racism, it gets worse. And the guards aren't the brightest so they tend to be racist too."

COMMUNITY RESPONSES

When the prison system is done destroying people, community groups have to pick up the pieces. While there are government-funded programs, they tend to focus on integrating people back into society by maintaining control over them.

Loose decided to spend his whole term in prison rather than live outside while still

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