



Native & Environmental Grassroots Movements

*Linking the Native movement for sovereignty
and the environmental movement*

By Zoltan Grossman

The Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) held its 6th annual Protecting Mother Earth Conference in June, at the Chickaloon Athabascan Village, near Palmer, Alaska. With the snow-capped Talkeetna and Chugach ranges towering overhead, 700 delegates spoke far into the sun-lit night about numerous environmental crises facing Native peoples throughout the Americas. In their stories of grassroots activism, confrontation, and community organizing, the IEN members were staking out a new position in the histories of both the Native movement for sovereignty, and the environmental movement for a cleaner earth.

The gathering was combined with a conference of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC). Founded in 1974, the IITC has non-governmental organization (NGO) status at the United Nations, and regularly brings Native representatives to testify at UN hearings on Indigenous peoples in Geneva. IITC co-sponsorship drew Indigenous delegates from Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, New Zealand, Panama, Argentina, and other countries, to add their voices to North American Native representatives.

History of IEN

IEN was founded in 1990 at the village of Dilkon, on the Dine (Navajo) Nation in Arizona. It was hosted by Dine Citizens Against Ruining our Environment (CARE), a reservation group opposed to toxic waste storage, incineration, and clearcutting. The Network's initial goals were simple:

- Educate and empower Indigenous grassroots people to address and develop strategies for the protection of our environment;
- Reaffirm our traditional and natural laws as Indigenous peoples;
- Recognize, support, promote, environmentally sound lifestyles and economic livelihoods;
- Commit to influence all politics that affect our people on a local, regional, national, and international level;
- Include youth and elders in all levels of activities;
- Protect our rights to practice our spiritual beliefs.

The following year, the gathering was held at Bear Butte, a Black Hills volcano which is sacred to the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne. At Bear Butte, IEN established an Environmental Code of Ethics, reflecting its uncompromising positions both as an Indigenous and environmentalist alliance: "As Indigenous peoples, we speak for ourselves; no one is authorized to speak on our behalf. Environmental groups have no rights to represent Indigenous Peoples. We will not make accommodations for or deals with polluters...."

Subsequent IEN conferences have been held in a different Native nation, usually with a particular issue focus important to the region. The 1992 conference



was at Celilo Falls, Oregon—formerly a major salmon-fishing site until dams were constructed on the Columbia River, downstream from the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. The 1993 conference was at Sac and Fox Reservation in Oklahoma—which shortly thereafter defeated a nuclear waste proposal. Last year, the conference (co-sponsored by the Midwest Treaty Network) was held on the Mole Lake Reservation in Wisconsin, where Exxon plans to open a huge zinc-copper mine upstream from the Mole Lake Chippewa's wild rice beds.

Part of IEN's success lies in its base among traditional tribal members, and its stress on leadership from elders and youth. IEN is governed partly by an Elders Council. IEN's Youth Council not only tries to solicit youth involvement, but tries to make environmental issues relevant to the urban-based culture of many Native youth. The participation of both youth and elders gives an IEN conference the feel of an extended family gathering, which is encouraged by IEN organizers.

Some IEN leaders emerged from the activism of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1970s. Many of AIM's former grassroots members and leadership have since joined community members in local rural and urban organizing, in effect diversifying the idea of AIM into many local groups. The IEN, IITC, Indigenous Women's Network, and other interrelated networks could be seen as outgrowths of AIM activism, but can more accurately be seen as the consolidation of grassroots traditionalist groups that have begun to build what eluded Native leaders such as Tecumseh and Red Cloud—intertribal unity against the most powerful forces running the United States.

Threats To Native Lands

Commercial nuclear waste. Electric utilities and the nuclear weapons industry have historically targeted Native lands for both the front and back ends of the nuclear fuel cycle. Since much of North America's uranium lies under Native lands, uranium mining has caused radioactive contamination—particularly among Indigenous people and miners in New Mexico and Saskatchewan. Amazingly, those two areas are now the linchpins in a commercial nuclear industry strategy to dump high-level nuclear waste. The tribal governments of the Mescalero Apache in New Mexico and the Meadow Lake Cree in Saskatchewan, have volunteered their lands for Multiple Retrievable Storage (MRS) of radioactive waste, over the objections of many tribal members. Approximately 19 other tribes approached by the Department of Energy rejected the MRS offer after receiving information from IEN and its affiliates. The

Mescalero proposal was defeated in one tribal vote, only to be supported in a second vote cast after many tribal members reportedly had their access to housing threatened, and others were bribed with offers of \$2,000 if they voted "yes." The vote caused such an outcry that tribal chairperson Wendell Chino—the main proponent of the plan—briefly resigned.

One of the nuclear plants that planned to send waste to Mescalero was Minnesota's Prairie Island, in the middle of the Mississippi River, next to a Mde-wakanton Dakota (Sioux) reservation of the same name. Northern States Power managed to secure the storage of waste in aboveground casks, over the objections of the tribal government and non-Native environmentalists. Along the Colorado River, five tribal governments have protested the planned Ward Valley low-level waste dump in California. President Clinton and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt promised repeatedly that the federal land needed for the project would not be released without a review. On May 31, Babbitt reneged on the promise, and sold 1,000 acres to the state after a request by Governor Pete Wilson.

Military pollution. The end of the Cold War has brought into the open the dirty little secret of the NATO nuclear weapons establishment. The peoples poisoned by nuclear weapons tests alone were Aborigines in Australia, Marshallese and Polynesians in the Pacific, and Western Shoshone in Nevada. Radioactive leaks from the Hanford Nuclear Reservation contaminated the Columbia River, as well as the Yakama and other nearby nations in Washington and Oregon. In Nevada and Montana, Native peoples joined with long-time rivals in the ranching community to stop the M-X and other missile projects in the 1970s, even forming a group called the Cowboy and Indian Alliance (CIA).

Perhaps the most horrific legacy of military nuclear waste is little known outside Alaska. In the Inupiat Eskimo region of northwestern Alaska, nuclear scientists such as Dr. Edward Teller launched Project Chariot, hoping to use nuclear explosions to build a large port near the Soviet Union. As documented in the book *Firecracker Boys*, large amounts of radioactive waste were experimentally released in the area of Point Hope, to test the effects of nuclear fallout. Point Hope residents today suffer from abnormally high rates of cancer.

Another type of military pollution is being practiced over the hills of eastern Quebec and Labrador, the mainland region of Newfoundland. Fighter jets from many NATO countries are using the region for low-level flight training. Too controversial in European countries, the flights have been moved to the homeland of the Innu (Montagnais-Naskapi). The traditional hunting and gathering practices of the Innu are interrupted at least 30 times a day by supersonic

jets screaming low overhead, frightening animals and children. The Innu and peace activists have occupied some of the runways, and traveled to Europe to publicize their distress. At the same time, the Western Shoshone are battling a new round of low-level flights in Nevada, and the Wisconsin Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) are opposing National Guard plans to start low-level flight's and expand a bombing.

Oil. The legacy of the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill provided the backdrop to the IEN conferences in both Alaska and Wisconsin. At the 1994 conference, Eyak fisherman Dune Lankard testified to a Wisconsin Review Commission panel reviewing Exxon's track record, "What Exxon said when the spill happened was 'we will make you whole again.' No one has made us whole....No amount of money can compensate me for the loss of my way of life..." The spill disproportionately affected Native communities and fisheries, and galvanized opposition far to the north against oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The Gwich'in Athabascans revere the lands of ANWR as the calving grounds for the Porcupine River caribou herd, which has sustained them for millennia. The Gwich'in, who have received substantial help from environmental groups, say that the pressure to drill in ANWR has increased substantially since the Gulf War focused attention on domestic oil reserves.

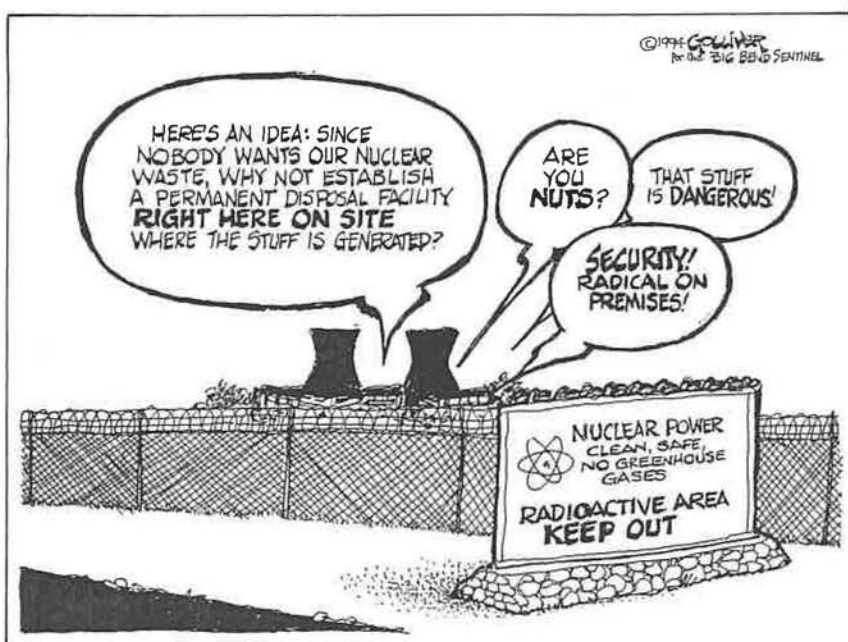
The environmental effects of oil drilling have been felt throughout Indian Country—from Oklahoma to the Dine Nation to the forests of Chiapas and Guatemala. Nowhere is this more evident than in Ecuador—an OPEC member that has opened its eastern Amazon lowlands to Texaco, Arco, and other oil companies. The Huarani and Quichua peoples have survived an oil spill in their rivers even larger than the Valdez disaster, and retaliated by picking up spears and occupying oil drilling sites. Encouraged by an upsurge in Native activism throughout the country, they won increased land rights and have expelled all the companies except Arco, which secured its permits before the Native victory. According to Quichua leader Wilfredo Aragon, Arco is now being forced to sit down with Indigenous negotiators and agree to stringent terms that would be unthinkable in North America. A network in Washington, DC works in support of the struggle in Ecuador, and has secured sub-

stantial help from even mainstream U.S. environmental groups.

Logging. The clearcutting of timber is probably the number one concern of Indigenous environmentalists in the Rocky Mountains and Pacific coastal ranges. The logging destroys sacred spots—such as California's Mount Shasta—and destroys fisheries through erosion and silting.

In northern Arizona, Dine CARE organizers have braved death threats to take a stand against tribally sponsored clearcutting in the Chuska Mountains. One of the group's leaders, Leroy Jackson, was found dead in his van at a New Mexico rest stop in October 1993, in circumstances that his family and friends find suspicious. The severity of clearcutting, and the often violent reaction to environmental protests, has led to a new determination among activists. The Environmental Rangers consists of Montana Native and non-Native veterans who videotape illegal logging practices, while carrying legal firearms in self-defense.

The province of British Columbia, since it was initially a colony separate from Canada, did not make treaties with local Indigenous nations. This historical anomaly has enabled the Lil'Wat, Gitksan, Wet'suwet'en, Haida, and other nations to assert their sovereignty against the timber industry, actually issuing their own injunctions against clearcutting. As the 1990 Oka Crisis pitted Mohawks against federal troops near Montreal, the Lil'Wat (Interior Salish) blockaded logging roads in their area. The blockade led to 63 arrests, including Loretta Pascal, a grandmother active in IEN. Logging blockades throughout the province were resumed this Summer.



Organizers are responding in other legal ways. In Alaska, Dune Lankard's Eyak Rainforest Protection Fund has initiated a lawsuit against a Native corporation involved in clearcutting. In Minnesota, the White Earth Land Recovery Project is purchasing allotted (white-owned) reservation lands that otherwise might be logged. In Wisconsin, the Menominee sustainable forestry program has left so many healthy trees on their reservation that its outline can be clearly seen in satellite photographs. This ecological timber management is becoming a model for Native and non-native foresters throughout the Americas.

Toxics. The storage and disposal of toxic chemical wastes has been the major impetus behind the new movement against "environmental racism." Since many of these wastes have been stored in Native, African American, or Latino communities across the U.S., groups for environmental justice are starting to bridge the gap between the civil rights and environmental movements. President Clinton's Executive Order 12898 directs federal departments such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Interior, and Department of Energy to develop a policy on environmental justice, especially in dealing with communities of color. But the outcome of the directive in Indian Country has been mixed at best. At the Mohawk reservation of Akwesasne (St. Regis) on the St. Lawrence River industrial corridor, General Motors has been involved in a clean-up of PCB-contaminated wastes since 1990. The EPA recently proposed that the company be permitted to dump 171,000 yards of the waste, rather than treat it.

Toxic wastes may not grab the headlines on a national scale as nuclear waste or oil drilling does. In most cases, the dumping has been done by small companies, sometimes (as in the case of Wisconsin's Bad River Reservation), targeting Indian lands to bypass state environmental rules. Yet the waste industry has become increasingly centralized in recent years, in a few large firms such as Waste Management Inc. These companies have traveled far and wide—even to Africa—in order to find cheaper dumping sites.

Two of the affiliate groups behind IEN are the Good Road Coalition and Natural Resource Coalition, both Lakota groups from South Dakota. They successfully mobilized Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservation residents to stop toxic dumping plans. In 1994, IEN assisted a local occupation of a toxic dump on the Torres Martinez Cahuilla Reservation, near the Salton Sea in southern California. The toxic sludge had been trucked in from Los Angeles, rendering the area practically uninhabitable. Amazingly, some of the sludge later turned up as fertilizer for organic produce. The occupation drew national attention when dump opponents became the victims of death threats and shootings.

Dams. The construction of huge hydroelectric dams has flooded Indigenous lands from Arizona to Papua New Guinea. In the U.S. and Canada, the dams have also destroyed the subsistence livelihood of thousands of Natives—through blocking migrating fish, and through the evaporation or mercury leaching inherent in sluggish reservoirs. Dams along the Columbia River system in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho have been a major cause of the decline of the salmon fishery along area rivers. The proposed dam in Washington has brought the Snoqualmie and Yakama tribes together in opposition with environmentalists, just as the Salish Kootenai have fought a proposed dam in Montana, and the Piegan have used a bulldozer in a direct action against the Oldman River dam project in Alberta.

The best-known fights have been in Canada, where Hydro Quebec has already dammed the Great Whale and LaGrande river systems, and where further dam megaprojects are on the drawing board for Ontario, Manitoba, and Labrador. Cree opposition played a major part in Hydro Quebec's decision to postpone a second Great Whale hydroelectric project. Native and environmental groups convinced citizens and government officials in Vermont and New York state not to purchase the electricity that would come from the project. The victory was doubled by the fact that the separatist provincial government of the Parti Quebecois sees the export of hydroelectric power as the primary basis of a future economy of an independent Quebec.

Since the 1990 Oka Crisis, the dam conflict further to the north has grown into a potential flashpoint for the future of the entire country. Cree Grad Chief Matthew Coon-Come vows secession from the province if it achieves independence, since Quebec annexed the northern region in 1912 without their approval or even full federal recognition. While most Native leaders say they want to remain part of Canada, some others—angered by the dam projects—talk about home rule or independence themselves. Recent armed confrontation in Ontario and British Columbia—where the army deployed armored personnel carriers and land mines—further alienated "First Nations" from the federal government. With the Northwest Territories scheduled to be partitioned in 1999 into the home-rule regions of 'Nunavut' (Inuit) and 'Denendeh' (Athabaskan), the complete break-up of Canada could conceivably lead to a new Indigenous country in the far north. The IEN National Task Force has seated a representative of the First Nations Environmental Network (FNEN) from Canada, with a view toward linking with Indigenous struggles north (or east) of the colonial border.

Mining. It is one of history's ironies that the "wastelands" to which Native peoples were exiled are

now coveted for their rich mineral resources. In the 1970s, the Dine and Pueblo tribes protested against the planned mining of sacred sites such as Mount Taylor in New Mexico. By the 1980s, this resistance, combined with lower uranium prices, had canceled some mining projects. However, the mining of metals and coal has continued to ravage Native lands. The forced relocation of traditional Dine from Big Mountain, Arizona—ostensibly due to the redrawing of borders with the Hopi—gained the Peabody Corporation increased access to the rich Black Mesa coal deposit. In some cases, tribal governments have leased tracts to mining companies.

Perhaps the most widely known Indigenous anti-mining fight today is in north-central Montana, where the Canadian company Pegasus Gold operates the Zortman mine complex near the Fort Belknap Reservation. The reservation group Red Thunder has fought the project for years. One mine has literally lopped off the top of one of the most sacred mountains for tribes in the region, and a new mine project threatens the nearby Sweet Grass Hills. Red Thunder has joined with Montana environmentalists against the projects, and has dialogued with local ranchers who oppose the company's most damaging practices. A similar Native-environmental-rancher coalition known as the Black Hills Alliance successfully kept uranium mining out of the mountains of western South Dakota in the early 1980s, and a similar effort is starting at Washington's Colville Reservation.

In Wisconsin, the tribal governments of the Mole Lake Ojibwa (Chippewa), Potawatomi, Menominee, Stockbridge-Munsee, and Oneida have come together in opposition to Exxon's proposed Crandon zinc-copper mine. They have joined forces not only with environmental groups, but with sport fishing groups concerned about the future of the trout-rich Wolf River. Only a few years ago, many white sport fishermen were locked in a conflict with the Ojibwa over treaty spearfishing rights. Anti-treaty groups such as Protect Americans' Rights and Resources (PARR) and Stop Treaty Abuse (STA) tried to wrap their white supremacist agenda in an environmental package, arguing "Spear an Indian—Save a Walleye." As Witness for Nonviolence monitors tried to lessen anti-Indian violence, police in riot gear regularly patrolled Northern lakes. Republican Governor Tommy Thompson employed a former Exxon lobbyist to try and

buy the treaty rights, since they can be used to protect off-reservation natural resources such as fish and wild rice from environmental damage—possibly frustrating plans for a Northern mining district. As Thompson and PARR/STA lost to the Ojibwa, many Northern whites realized they had been arguing over fish that are actually endangered by companies from outside the state. While Kennecott/Rio Tinto Zinc has opened one copper mine, Exxon's mining application now faces fierce opposition from a multiracial alliance.

Harvesting rights. Indigenous movements for treaty rights and for the environment have intersected throughout Indian Country. In certain cases, though, the linkage has been made when Native people win their treaty rights, only to find that the natural resources are either poisoned or disappearing. Native Californian basketweavers, for example, are able to gather reeds off their reservations, but increasingly risk poisoning by pesticides. Wisconsin Ojibwa spearfisher Walter Bresette points to acid rain-linked mercury in walleye when he says "We've been fighting over poisoned fish." But the ultimate nightmare scenario has been played out along the Columbia River, where violent clashes over treaties took place in the 1960s. The tribes not only won their rights to harvest salmon from their traditional scaffolds, but obtained co-management over off-reservation resources in Washington state. If a logging operation endangered a salmon habitat, for example, the tribes had powers to stop or modify the operations. Yet the salmon rapidly started disappearing.

Part of the reason for the decline, according to Suzanna Santos of the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon, are the dams on the river that frustrate the



salmon migration. Other reasons include—the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and the huge corporate trawlers that scoop up (and waste) millions of tons of fish. Santos, the youngest of a line of women fishers in her family, reports that the catch is only ten percent of what it was a decade ago. The Yakama Nation's annual feast this year was forced to use dried fish. Santos sees the situation worsening with the advent of Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs), which would allow large companies to force small commercial fishermen out of business, and in effect "privatize the oceans." She sees the main threat of monopolization coming from Tyson Foods, an Arkansas-based company with close ties to President Clinton. The Alaska Eyak are challenging corporate trawlers from catching scallops in their traditional fishing areas, as part of an effort to curtail corporate fishing in the North Pacific.

The decline of the salmon and introduction of ITQs has created new common ground between Native fishing tribes and non-Indian commercial fishermen as in Alaska and Wisconsin.

Blending Ideas

The Indigenous Environmental Network is not simply a combination of the Native American movement with environmental activism. IEN has popularized a new angle on Native sovereignty that includes appropriate technology and the defense of natural resources. It has also introduced a new angle on environmentalism that includes supporting the survival of endangered cultures, and putting the protection of nature in a larger social, cultural, and economic context.

IEN conferences are not a typical environmental gathering. First, there is a complete absence of the concept of "wilderness"—or the idea of nature devoid of human beings. Instead, humans are presented as an integral part of different natural regions, acting within them to gather their sustenance. Second, the human race is not seen as the inherent collective enemy of ecosystems. Instead, the corporate and governmental forces that destroy the environment are clearly identified. Third, animals are never presented as cute or fuzzy, but as sacred parts of Native cultures, economic subsistence, and clan systems. Indeed, if any single-issue animal rights activists accidentally wandered into the Hunting, Fishing, and Gathering workshop, it would have sent chills up their spines. The right to gather the bounties of nature is put on the same level as the protection of the resources from corporate polluters.

While Greenpeace USA initially aided IEN's development, its effort was born out of serious conflict with some Native peoples over subsistence harvesting

practices—particularly whaling by the Inuit and fur harvesting by some Canadian natives. Similarly, the Sierra Club opposed the Havasupai's successful efforts to gain a reservation in the Grand Canyon. It took Greenpeace and other environmental groups years to understand that subsistence gathering is an integral part of traditional customs and economies, and that opposing them not only legitimizes the hysterical claims of anti-Indian groups, but distracts attention from the real threat—corporate devastation of the land and oceans. Some environmental groups have also been awakened by the movements against environmental racism and for environmental justice.

Other environmental groups still lag far behind. The Makah—who live on the northwest tip of Washington state—recently filed suit to resurrect their historic tradition of whaling for ceremonial and subsistence purposes. Their goal is to take 5 gray whales out of a migrating group of 20,000. While Greenpeace has not opposed the move, the Sea Shepherd Wilderness Society has vowed strong opposition both to the Makah and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth nation that also wants to resume its whaling tradition in British Columbia. Sea Shepherd has carried out direct actions against commercial whaling ships in Iceland, and maintains that the Makah move is simply a foot-in-the door for commercial whaling. As in all cases when tribes have been at odds with white-led environmental groups, the U.S. and Canadian media have sensationalized the dispute, choosing to downplay the more numerous cases of Native-environmental cooperation. In many other instances (such as the Mescalero nuclear waste conflict), the media has also equated the actions of tribal governments with the positions of all tribal members.

Tribal Governments and Sovereignty

The romantic image of the Indian as inherently close to nature is typified in the 1970s TV spot of a Native man shedding a tear over pollution. Yet in late 20th century North America, Indigenous peoples are under just as much pressure as others to trade a clean environment for short-term profit. The desperate economic situation on many reservations—even those that have new gaming establishments—increases this pressure.

Some tribal governments have sold off their resources out of this desperation, sometimes with and sometimes without majority backing from tribal members. Other tribal governments, on the other hand, have become or were even established as corporate fronts. Mining, timber, or oil corporations take a hostile view toward Native sovereignty when it blocks their projects, but in other instances use sovereignty

as a loophole to get around state or federal regulations. In other instances—such as in the Wisconsin mining fight and the California nuclear dump struggle—tribal governments have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with environmentalists.

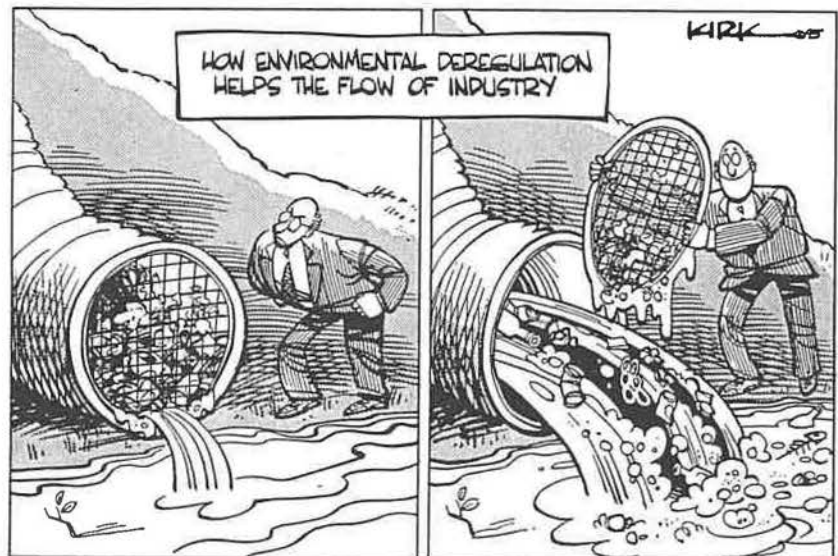
Modern tribal governments got their start when the Standard Oil Co. signed an oil lease with five Dine (Navajo) men in 1923. The men later found out that the paper which they had signed was a lease, and that the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) had recognized them as the first “tribal council” in the U.S. The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) established so-called “progressive” tribal council governments on most other reservations, in some cases over objections and boycotts by traditionalists who continued to maintain their hereditary (yet often more democratic) forms of government.

Today, many traditionalists participate in tribal government, while some still see IRA councils as a colonial imposition. The IRA governments range from those that defend the lands of their people, to those that openly serve to facilitate corporate leases as Reservation Business Committees. In some cases, traditionalists are put in the embarrassing position of having to use U.S. environmental laws to stop their own ‘nations within a nation’ from selling off their lands. As Dine CARE states in its newsletter, “Sovereignty is a confusing issue, partly because politicians and bureaucrats have the wrong idea about sovereignty. There are two kinds of sovereignty. One is the so-called ‘political sovereignty.’ True sovereignty can only come from within....The Navajo Tribe tries to make convenient use of political sovereignty by shirking their responsibility to take care of the land as U.S. environmental laws say they should.” IEN Alaska regional chair David Harrison said, “It doesn’t do you any good to be sovereign over land if you can’t live off it.”

Some other traditionalists at the conference were even more insistent that Native peoples need to establish their sovereignty independently of outside approval. Danny Billie, of the Traditional Seminole Nation of Florida, drove five days with his family to reach Alaska. The Billie family refuses to live on a federally-recognized reservation, having seen the effects of federal policies on Seminole traditions, language, and health. He says, “We don’t look at the money, we look at the future...If you take the money, you become a puppet; you can’t slap the hand that feeds you.”

Terry Nelson, of the Roseau River Anishinabe (Ojibwa) in Manitoba, echoed a sentiment growing among Native peoples in Canada since 1990, when the Oka crisis combined with the blocking of a federal unity accord by Elijah Harper, a Cree member of his provincial parliament. Nelson maintains that, “real power is assumed, not given. We have to rescue ourselves....Don’t ever beg, or you’ll be treated that way...No one can give you self-government. We are not seeking special American or Canadian rights. We want equal international rights....to enforce Anishinabe laws on Anishinabe land.”

Discussions about tribal governments inevitably include the recent growth of the gaming economy, which some Native environmentalists see as social and cultural threat, and others see as a promise (in the words of the late Menominee leader Hillary Waukau, the “new buffalo”). While gaming is a traditional practice in most Native cultures, many traditionalists such as Billie oppose it in the context of the modern cash economy. The Dine, for example, recently voted against gaming as encouraging corruption and addiction. Other Native people—including some traditionalists such as Nelson—support gaming as a non-polluting means to enhance self-sufficiency, reduce economic pressures to exploit resources, and fund environmental lawsuits. Yet all agree that it should be the choice of sovereign nations whether or not to have gaming—and how to regulate it—rather than the decision of state or provincial governments. Many also agree that gaming is not an economic panacea, given that some tribes are too far from major population centers to make a profit, or have allowed the income to line the pockets of individuals rather than improve tribal life.



Future Strategies

IEN's strategies have come directly from the grassroots Native groups on the frontlines. Most of IEN's workshops focus on giving these groups necessary technical skills such as testing and sampling, computer mapping, and restoring damaged lands. Yet many of the participants preferred to talk about building an ecologically appropriate economic base in their local communities, besides gaming. Some plans centered on a Native trading network that would import coffee directly from Indigenous producers in South and Central America. Others spoke about safe energy technologies, Native medicines, and crafts.

On the federal level, Indigenous environmentalists have received a mixed response. The EPA has backed enhanced environmental regulatory powers for some tribes. This is partly because of the federal trust responsibility that the federal government has with tribal governments. For example, Class I Air Redesignation under the Clean Air Act has enabled one Montana reservation to halt construction of a nearby coal plant. The EPA has also developed a draft strategy in response to the presidential directive on environmental justice, which it presented at a national Environmental Justice Summit in Atlanta in January 1995. When Dine community organizer Anna Frazier observed, "We are on our own on the front lines." Other grassroots Native activists observed that when they are in dispute with their own tribal governments, the EPA is useless at best.

The backlash to even mild EPA recognition of tribes' "delegated authority" over off-reservation environmental matters has been swift from local, county, and state governments. The successful effort by the tiny Wisconsin Potawatomi Reservation to gain Class I Air Redesignation have caused legislators and Governor Thompson to warn of impending economic doom for all of northern Wisconsin. In New Mexico, the Isleta Pueblo have adopted clean water standards that exceed state codes—based partly on cultural reverence for area waterways angering the upstream city of Albuquerque. Since the tribes have a government-to-government relationship with the U.S., their powers in these certain instances can equal or exceed those of the states. But IEN leaders fear that EPA cutbacks—combined with a growing alliance between anti-Indian groups and the Wise Use/property rights movement—threatens the gains of the past five or so years. IEN national spokesperson Tom Goldtooth says, "The tribes were already two decades behind state governments in their ability to regulate industry and protect the environment. They were just beginning to get underway, and solve some of the severe inequities in the EPA. Now, the backlash in Congress

and the counties leaves our rich natural resources vulnerable once again to corporations."

Many conference participants expressed interest in international strategies. Prompted by the IITC's successes in working at the UN, and partly to the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas.

In much the same way that the Zapatistas mobilized international support through the Internet, Indigenous activists are now better able to build networks against specific companies or projects. Native groups from around the Americas have joined in opposition to the Human Genome Diversity Project, which intends to collect human genetic material that may be used for commercial, scientific, and military purposes. The London-based People Against Rio Tinto Zinc and Subsidiaries (PARTIZANS) has linked Native peoples from Australia to Ontario in resistance to the world's largest mining firm. The time is not far off when a multinational activist network can successfully coordinate an international day or week of actions against a specific multinational corporation, such as Arco or Exxon.

International links are also being made in more traditional ways. Native runners planned a 1996 repeat of the Peace and Dignity Journeys, which started in Alaska and Argentina and ended at Mexico's Teotihuacan pyramids on the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival.

While Indigenous environmentalists gain strength from within their own societies, they also have unique perspectives on 21st century capitalist industrial society. Compared to perspectives voiced by most non-Indian environmentalists, those views tend to put less naive faith in the ability of the powers-that-be to protect earth, and more trusting in the power of local communities that are resisting in their own political, cultural, and spiritual ways. As Goldtooth says, "The grassroots Indigenous people have fought on the front lines against great odds, out of the limelight, yet they have often won by relying on their traditional teachings." In its fundamental critique of Western society, the IEN is neither a typical movement for Native rights, nor a typical environmental coalition. By putting forth grassroots, cultural resistance as a model for change, the IEN is challenging both movements to be true to their roots. Z

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