

Floods of Protest

AS POLICE IN THE DHULE DISTRICT of India step up repressive measures to protect road-building operations that would facilitate the forcible evictions of area residents and pave the way for the Narmada River's Sardar Sarovar dam, hundreds of people have demonstrated against the dam project, according to reports by Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA, or Save the Narmada Movement). The demonstrations occurred despite a May 13, 1994 strict ban on protests in the district, which included such forms of protest as "dancing," "music," "gesticulating," "images" and "slogan shouting," as well as any assembly of more than five people. Police have entered houses and schools and questioned residents regarding the whereabouts of activists.

The controversial Sardar Sarovar dam would flood the lands and homes of about 150,000 residents beneath a 200-kilometer-long reservoir [see "Fury Over a River," *Multinational Monitor*, December 1993]. The dam received a green light in 1985, when the World Bank approved a loan to the Indian government of \$450 million toward the \$6 billion project. But under intense international pressure over environmental concerns, the Bank began reconsidering its funding of the dam, ultimately leading India to forego the assistance in March 1993 and opt to build the dam without continued foreign aid.

Initial construction of the dam, which began in 1987, has already resulted in lower fish yields for fishers upstream and lower rice harvests downstream due to reduced water flows. And according to the World Bank Independent Review, those who have resettled have experienced hardships including lack of drinking water, a shortage of firewood and poor crop land.

Many of the protesters are members of the *Adivasis* (ancient people), the oldest inhabitants of India, who depend for their subsistence on the forest land taken over for a resettlement site. According to NBA spokesperson Shripad Dharmadhikary, protesters "have declared that they would rather face the waters of the dam, and drown, than leave their homes for the destructive development symbolized by this project."

Clearcut Consumer Pressure

IN A BLOW TO CANADIAN TIMBER GIANT MacMillan Bloedel, the British subsidiary of Scott Paper announced that it would no longer do business with companies logging in Canada's Clayoquot Sound. The February 28, 1994 announcement was a direct company response to public concern about Clayoquot Sound.

MacMillan Bloedel stands at the center of the Clayoquot Sound controversy. In April 1993, the provincial government of British Columbia, which held a 4 percent stake in MacMillan Bloedel, granted the company the rights to log 74 percent of the ancient forests in Clayoquot Sound. The Sound is one of the world's last old-growth temperate rain forests, and the logging has drawn almost daily demonstrations; in the summer of 1993, more than 800 people were arrested at the Sound in protest of the logging.

Scott will review the suspension on Clayoquot wood products later this year, and, according to Manager of Environmental Affairs Martin Kybert, the company still "believe[s] clearcutting, when done properly, is an acceptable forestry practice."

According to MacMillan Bloedel Media Relations Manager Scott Alexander, the move by Scott Paper "was because of the tactics of Greenpeace," who threatened the company with a boycott on their products if they did not suspend Clayoquot wood purchases. Alexander said that their logging practices are "a role model for the world in sustainable development."

But Greenpeace asserts that it has never advocated a boycott of products from Clayoquot Sound. Rather, it sought only to educate consumers about the source of paper products.

"Smart timber companies will wake up to th[e] growing international demand for ecologically sound timber," says Karen Mahon, Greenpeace Canada's forests campaigner. "If the market follows that demand, timber workers will, at long last, have access to job security in an industry looking toward sustainability."

Taken to the Cleaners

CONSUMERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM are waging an on-going battle with Hoover, a subsidiary of the U.S. appliance manufacturer Maytag Corporation, over a botched travel promotion. From August to October 1992, Hoover offered two free airline tickets to destinations in Europe or the United States for every appliance purchased for \$150 or more. But the scheme was so popular — with many customers purchasing products they did not even need — that Hoover denied flights to hundreds of thousands of people who participated in the promotion.

In spring 1993, Maytag fired three top Hoover executives and set up a task force to deal with the matter. It offered customers flights on restricted dates and times, attached a complicated set of conditions to the offer and set a deadline of June 1994 for customers to respond. One of the conditions allows the company to reject requested dates and destinations twice, and then to make a take-it-or-leave-it offer.

While more than 220,000 customers have taken Maytag up on its offer, an additional 400,000 are still waiting for their flights, including at least 100,000 who have been refused flights. More than 4,000 have joined together to form the Hoover Holiday Pressure Group (HHPG). Three members of the group flew to the United States in April 1994 hoping to meet with Maytag Chairman Leonard Hadley at the company's headquarters in Newton, Iowa. They were told by Jim Powell, Maytag's head of communications, that the company would "only communicate through lawyers." The group also attended Maytag's annual meeting, where Hadley responded to the flights fiasco by stating that Maytag "can put it behind us."

"Maytag should stop sweeping their customers under the carpet," says HHPG spokesperson Harry Cichy. "We are [Maytag's] customers, and if the customer comes first, we should have the right to redress."

— Aaron Freeman