NEW SOCIALIST offers radical analysis of politics, social movements and culture in the Canadian state and internationally. Our magazine is a forum for people who want to strengthen today's activism and for those who wish to replace global capitalism with a genuinely democratic socialism. We believe that the liberation of the working class and oppressed peoples can be won only through their own struggles. For more information about the publisher of this magazine, the New Socialist Group, please see the inside back cover.

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★ THEORY AND PRACTICE ★
What are warrior societies? Taiaiake Alfred and Lana Lowe 4
Final communiqué of the West Coast Warrior Society 8
Indigenous peoples and the politics of recognition Glen Coulthard 9
Socialism from below and Indigenous peoples Deborah Simmons 13
Indigenous feminism without apology Andrea Smith 16
Canadian capitalism and dispossession of Indigenous peoples Todd Gordon 18

★ THE WASÂŒ MOVEMENT: RETHINKING STRUGGLE ★
Wasase statement of principles 20
Voices From the Indigenous leadership forum 21

★ HOMEFRONT ★
A young warrior’s perspective on the conflict at Six Nations Taiaiake Alfred 23
Anarchist-Indigenous solidarity at Six Nations Richard Day & Sean Haberle 26
Labour-Indigenous solidarity at Six Nations Rolf Gerstenberger 28
Nuu-chah-nulth struggles against sexual violence Interview with Na’cha’uaht & Chiiunuks 29
Indigenous labour organizing in Saskatchewan Brock Pitawanakwat 32
Nunavut: the party’s over Jackie Price 34

★ INTERNATIONAL ★
To be ungovernable Jeff Corporal 35
Why are Indigenous soldiers serving in Iraq Michael Yellow Bird 38
Barred From the “socialist” paradise Teiowï’sonte Thomas Deer 39

★ CULTURE AND REVIEWS ★
Howard Adam’s OTAPAWY Deborah Simmons 40
Alan Cairn’s First Nations and the Canadian state Adam Barker & Taiaiake Alfred 41
Basics of Wasase Essentials List 42

★ TIME TO ORGANIZE ★
To be ungovernable

BY JEFF CORNTASSEL

In 1998, Ecuador’s president, Abdalá Bucaram, was overthrown by a movement led by the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), which represents 80 percent of the indigenous peoples in Ecuador. To his detriment, Ecuador’s subsequent president, Jamil Mahuad, ignored CONAIE’s demands for political reform and the return of indigenous homelands. Within two years, CONAIE mobilized again to topple Mahuad’s government, which was widely viewed as corrupt.

After the second CONAIE presidential ouster, policy experts and government officials proclaimed Ecuador to be ungovernable. After all, Ecuador had had seven presidents in ten years. This rapid leadership turnover signals instability to some. But in fact, this form of "ungovernability" is what indigenous peoples should be striving to achieve. Instability and ungovernability on this level is a result of indigenous responses to the illegitimate occupation and encroachment of the state on indigenous homelands.

After demonstrating their incompatibility with the state system in 1998 and again in 2000, CONAIE changed tactics, but soon learned a harsh lesson. In 2002, they formed a political party named Pachakutik, in alliance with the Sociedad Patriótica (SP) party, and helped elect former army colonel Lucio Gutiérrez as president. Once elected, President Gutiérrez made it his mission to dismantle and co-opt CONAIE.

While CONAIE had withdrawn their support from the Gutiérrez government by July 2003, the damage to their political movement had already been done. By entrenching themselves in Ecuador’s political system, CONAIE’s power as a movement had been substantially weakened. They were now governable. One CONAIE leader responded to their co-optation with a question: “Why bite into a rotten apple?”

INDIGENOUS-SETTLER INCOMPATIBILITIES

Invoking our indigenous languages exposes some of the incompatibilities between settler and indigenous cultures and values. Most indigenous peoples around the world have words in their languages that refer to themselves as the real, original or principal people of their homelands, such as Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawai’ian) or Onkwehonwe (Mohawk). Cherokees use the term Ani-yun-wiya, which means real or principal people. Ungovernability means embracing the principles of Ani-yun-wiya and discarding state offerings of rotten apples.

Co-optation via participation in state governmental institutions offers indigenous peoples the illusion of inclusion. What is needed today is a de-occupation of settler institutions and values from indigenous homelands. According to Kanien’kehaka (Mohawk) scholar Taiaiake Alfred, “Delegitimizing the regime is the most fundamentally radical act one can perform.”

As Ani-yun-wiya, our values and responsibilities, not settler institutions, govern us. Gadugi is one of these core principles, and serves as a process for indigenous resurgence. At the heart of this principle is a built-in spirit of community comradery. This means that whatever issues/concerns arising in collective living have to be addressed in a unitary way and that no one is left alone to climb out of a life endeavor; it reflects a collective community base.

Adherence to the principles and actions of Gadugi makes indigenous peoples ungovernable in the eyes of Settlers. Ani-yun-wiya are governed by a continuous renewal of our shared responsibilities and relationships.

Indigenous values clash with those of settlers in terms of the way authority is exercised. What are the specific values that settlers hold? The answers are in our indigenous languages and the stories indigenous peoples tell of first contact with settlers. For example, the word Canada is derived from a Mohawk term, Kanatiens, which means “they sit in our village.” A contemporary translation of this term would be “squatter.” Other examples below provide further insights into settler values as seen through the eyes of our ancestors:

Yonega is a Tsalagi (Cherokee) term for white settlers, which connotes “foam of
the water; moved by wind and without its own direction; clings to everything that’s solid.”

Moniyawk is a Cree term for settlers, which literally means “worship of money,” soniyas or soniyay.

Wasicu is a Dakota term for settlers, which means “taker of fat.” The first Wasicus encountered were French trappers who came into a Dakota camp during winter and helped themselves to the fatty parts of a soup boiling on the fire — hence, “fat takers.”

Vē’ho’e is a Cheyenne term for settlers, and it means “spider,” which is a trickster figure. Settlers are viewed this way because they have hair like a spider, divide the land like the web of a spider, communicate through power lines like strands of a spider, and wrap their prey to devour it, such as the indigenous peoples who were wrapped in blankets during the small pox and cholera epidemics.

Based on over 500 years of experience with settlers, our ancestors provide us with valuable insights into a different value system: directionless, money-worshipping, fat-taking squatters that divide the land, devour their prey and cling to everything that’s solid. Perhaps as much as skin pigment, terms like white or settler describe a mindset or belief system. Clearly these are not principles for Ani-yun-wiya to emulate or mimic. How would our ancestors recognize us today? As Ani-yun-wiya or Yonega?

Indigenous governance is an ongoing process of honouring and renewing our individual and collective relationships and responsibilities. And settlers are not off the hook either — they will have to decide how they can relate to indigenous struggles. Will they make the necessary sacrifices to decolonize and make amends now?

Additionally, some of our would-be settler allies suffer from a debilitating “Free Tibet Syndrome,” which causes them to cast their decolonizing gaze to faraway places while ignoring local indigenous struggles. The further away the exotic overseas “Other” is from their present geographic location, the greater the intensity of their fundraising and self-determination proselytizing activities. Yet when it comes to promoting freedom and justice for indigenous peoples closer to “home,” the response of those suffering from Free Tibet Syndrome is simple and predictable: not in my backyard.

**CONFRONTING COLONIAL SHAPE-SHIFTERS**

Through indigenous eyes, globalization reflects a deepening, hastening and stretching of an already-existing empire; it is merely the latest permutation of imperialism. Shape-shifting colonial powers continue to invent new methods of domination in order to erase indigenous histories and senses of place.

Amidst an era of interconnected imperialisms, indigenous peoples exhibit their ungovernability by withdrawing their support and involvement from the global political economy. A conversation held in 1887 between U.S. Cavalry Captain E. L. Huggins, and Smohalla or Yú’yunipit-qána, the Shouting Mountain (Wanapum Nation) demonstrates that we are not the first generation of indigenous peoples to confront the dilemmas of participating in the political economy.

Q: Why don’t you follow the example of other Indians who have practiced the white man’s ways?
S: No one has any respect for these book Indians. Even the white men like me better and treat me better than they do the book Indians. My young men shall never work. Men who work cannot dream, and wisdom comes to us in dreams.

Q: But white people work and know more than Indians...
S: Each one must learn for himself the highest wisdom. It cannot be taught. You have the wisdom of your race. Be content.

Q: Don’t Indians have to work hard during the fishing season to get food for winter?
S: This work lasts only for a few weeks. Besides it is natural work and does them no harm. But the work of the white man hardens soul and body. Nor is it right to tear up and mutilate the earth as white men do.

Q: But Indians also dig into the earth for kamas roots — isn’t that harmful to the earth?
S: We simply take the gifts that are freely offered. We no more harm the earth than would an infant’s fingers harm its mother’s breast. But the white man tears up large tracts of land, runs deep ditches, cuts down forests, and changes the whole face of the earth. You know very well this is not right. Every honest man knows in his heart that this is all wrong. But the white men are so greedy they do not consider these things.

Fortunately, the spirit of Smohalla is alive in other indigenous movements today. A brief survey of active indigenous movements around the world illustrates
that indigenous communities remain ungovernable:

Between 1997-2002, U’wa peoples blockaded highways in Colombia to protest the building of an oil pipeline on their homelands. They ultimately forced Occidental Petroleum to vacate their territory but their struggle for homeland security is ongoing as the Colombian corporation, ECOPETROL, seeks to continue development of the oil pipeline project.

Newly elected President Evo Morales (Aymara-Quechua) of Bolivia launched an "Agrarian Revolution" in 2006 by outlining a process to return approximately 9,600 square miles of state-owned territory to indigenous peoples.

The indigenous-run Forum for Cultural and Biological Diversity continues to host annual seed exchanges in Honduras where indigenous and non-indigenous farmers trade for non-genetically modified corn and other seeds.

Since rising up against NAFTA and Mexico’s ejido reforms in 1994, the indigenous people who comprise Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) have established five autonomous zones in Chiapas and recently initiated “La otra campaña,” a large-scale movement challenging neoliberal policies.

In 2006, Six Nations clan mothers and warriors reclaimed 40 hectares of their traditional territory in Ontario, Canada. Indigenous peoples took back their territory along the Grand River in order to prevent housing developer, Henco Industries Ltd, from constructing a new sub-division on their homelands.

Kanaka Maoli (native Hawai’ian) activists continue to challenge the patenting of three varieties of taro, Palehua, Paakala and Paaukea, by the University of Hawaii. Kalo (taro) is a sacred plant for Kanaka Maoli people and is integral to their oral histories and ceremonial cycles.

The above-mentioned examples illustrate indigenous alternatives to neoliberalism. The approximately 5,000 indigenous nations trapped in 70 settler states around the world offer us 5,000 different versions of ungovernability. In the words of Aniyun-wiya War Chief Ts’iyu-gunsini or Dragging Canoe, "You have bought a fair land, but you will find its settlement dark and bloody." Aniyun-wiya are patient people and will live to see our homelands de-occupied by settler values. Until that time comes, settlers are illegally occupying indigenous homelands.

Our pipe carriers and clan mothers represent us.

Aniyun-wiya are spiritual beings, as embodied by our clan systems, languages, ceremonies, sacred histories and relationships to the land. Our powers reside in our languages, cultures and communities — not in political/legal authority structures. An indigenous spiritual regeneration is necessary to facilitate the de-occupation of settler values from our homelands. In these times of spiritual and physical warfare, our pipe carriers and clan mothers (not band councillors or lawyers) are the true voices of our struggles.

Traveling to other indigenous and settler communities to seek out allies can be a useful antidote to colonialism. Along these lines, global forums can be useful for exposing the contradictions of neoliberalism and artificiality of state sovereignty. However, there are serious limits to what state-centric forums, such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, can do to promote indigenous resurgences. With a cadre of professionalized indigenous delegates in place who demonstrate more allegiance to the UN system than to their own communities, the Permanent Forum today more closely resembles an internationalized band council system.

It is time to again represent ourselves on our own terms. One way to promote indigenous unity and strength is to encourage renewed treaty making between indigenous communities. Such a revitalized treaty process would follow the protocols of pipe ceremonies, not the paper diplomacy of settlers. Since host states have not honoured indigenous treaties for the most part, it is time for indigenous peoples to lead by example and demonstrate once again their communities’ approaches to principles of respect and diplomacy.

Treaties of peace and friendship entail making sacred compacts that should be renewed ceremonially on an annual basis with all participating indigenous peoples. New inter-indigenous treaties might include those that affirm alliances, and promote trade arrangements and protection for crossing borders. This further illustrates the wide spectrum of indigenous powers of Gadugi.

Future indigenous mobilization efforts should be directed towards engagement and activism in indigenous forums – not UN or regional settler institutional structures. The World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) formed in 1975 in Port Alberni, British Columbia (Canada), provides a possible model for the creation of a new indigenous organization that functions according to indigenous values. The WCIP requires states and NGOs to apply for observer status. Under the leadership of Shushwap Chief George Manuel, a declaration of WCIP principles was adopted at the first meeting – the selected passages outline some of the original goals of the WCIP for unity and mobilization and express the need to represent ourselves on our own terms:

…Rising up after centuries of oppression, evoking the greatness of our ancestors, in the memory of our indigenous martyrs, and in homage to the counsel of our wise elders: We vow to control again our own destiny and recover our complete humanity and pride in being Indigenous People.

When recovering "our complete humanity," Aniyun-wiya warriors must ready themselves for physical and spiritual warfare. Let us remember that a process of regeneration takes time. The Zapatistas trained for over ten years in the Lacandon Jungle prior to their 1994 uprising in Chiapas. Also, we should not forget that indigenous women won the first Zapatista uprising in 1993 with the EZLN’s adoption of the Revolutionary Law for Women.

Fortunately, there are cures for Free Tibet Syndrome – settler populations can begin by decolonizing their thinking, engaging in insurgent education, making amends to local indigenous peoples and seeking out indigenous-led alliances. In the words of George Manuel, "We will steer our own canoe, but we will invite others to help with the paddling."

As ancient nations, we have proven to be persistent and "ungovernable" – we are nations that predate the state and will outlast it. Aniyun-wiya power arises from Gadugi, and responsibilities to our territories and families. Ultimately, only indigenous laws can flourish on indigenous homelands.