

# Say to Uranium Mining

By Bonnie Urfer

On June 28, 2007, members of the Ardoch Algonquin and Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nations in Canada began a protest blockade to prevent uranium exploration on their 30,000 acres near Ardoch, Ontario southwest of Ottawa. The Royal Proclamation Act of 1763 and the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982 enshrine sovereign Aboriginal title to the territory. The indigenous people are demanding an end to outdated 1870's mining laws that give any prospector the right to lay claim to any subsurface. Four hundred claims have already been staked in northern and central Frontenac by Frontenac Ventures Corporation (FVC). The prospecting company surreptitiously cut trees and blazed roads using subsurface "mineral rights" to justify the above-ground destruction.

The Algonquins and their supporters aim to protect traditional native lands and area drinking water from radioactive contamination. The price of uranium has climbed rapidly over the past three years and today hovers at \$90 per pound, compared to \$20 in 2004. The price increase lured Frontenac Ventures to commandeer the "mineral rights" for uranium extraction and subsequent profit. The matter has not been settled.

The First Nations oppose uranium exploration and mining based on past experience. One Canadian example is the Elliott Lake and Bancroft areas where 200 million tons of radioactive tailings remain. In the east, Frontenac divulged plans to use a lake near Ardoch to dispose of future tailings.

Aboriginal people have no legal recourse to forbid mining on their land. Beside the site blockade a canoe flotilla was launched Sept. 22 and journeyed for six days to the Parliament buildings in Ottawa demonstrating that the water systems are connected. Letters opposing uranium mining were sent to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Minister of Indian Affairs, and to Ontario's Premier and Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Activists set up road barriers to slow traffic for outreach and educational purposes. Protests were bolstered by drumming circles, teach-ins, discussion groups, highway marches and speakers' panels.

Supporters of a mining moratorium founded the Community Coalition Against Mining Uranium which launched a website with an events calendar at [www.ccamu.ca](http://www.ccamu.ca). Haudenosaunee Mohawks of the Six Nations communities in Southern Ontario and the northern United States, Mining Watch Canada, Greenpeace, Christian Peacemaker Teams volunteers and Raging Grannies joined in the struggle. Donations of food and cash rolled in to support the blockade.

Donna Dillman, a Grandmother and Canadian Green Party member, began a hunger strike Oct. 8 in protest of uranium mining. She has camped at the protest site and intends to stay until a mining moratorium is declared. Temple of the Dog recorded "Hunger Strike," a song honoring Dillman that is being heard around the world.

Frontenac Corporation filed a \$77 million suit against the First Nations and the Ontario Supreme Court issued an Aug. 27 order for removal of protesters which local police

## Nuclear Dump Operators Girding For Waste Explosions

You may have thought that the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico had partially solved the military's problems with plutonium-tainted waste from its nuclear weapons complex. But you'd be wrong. The Department of Energy and the Pentagon have sent thousands of shipments to the desert site and they began loading tens of thousands of barrels into the deep underground caverns, or what it calls "panels," in 1999.

Now, proposed changes to the facility's permit tell an alarming story. On Nov. 21 the DOE requested permission to "monitor for hydrogen and methane in filled panels." The build-up of methane and hydrogen gas must be worrying the operators of the dump, considering the planned changes that follow:

"Establish actions levels of methane and hydrogen gas that would trigger various activities that may include the installation of the explosion isolation wall.

"... add a substantial barrier and steel bulkhead, in the intake and exhaust drifts of the panel as part of the monitoring.

"Initiate an inspection schedule and inspection criteria for the explosion isolation walls...."

Readers may recall that during the 1979 Three Mile Island accident in Pennsylvania, a hydrogen gas explosion within the reactor containment building caused a rapid pressure surge. And at the Point Beach reactor on Lake Michigan May 28, 1996, a potentially catastrophic explosion of hydrogen gas up-ended a 6,390-pound lid while it was atop a cask filled with high-level waste. You might say they don't call it the hydrogen bomb for nothing.

— DOE, WIPP Fact Sheet, "Changes to WIPP Hazardous Waste Facility Permit," Nov. 21, 2007; Daniel Ford, *TMI: 30 Minutes to Meltdown*, 1981

refused to enforce. When officials arrived to read the injunction, mining protesters made so much noise that the order couldn't be heard. Two Algonquin communities filed a counter-suit against Frontenac and the Ontario government seeking \$1 billion from the federal government for breach of trust and breach of the duty to consult. The two First Nations learned of Frontenac's plans to mine from a landowner who approached the Tribes for help after Frontenac encroached on her land to drill test wells.

FVC President George White quoted in the Toronto-based *Globe and Mail* said, "What message this brings [for] any investor looking to invest in Ontario [is that] it's similar now to Niger, where you have to hire armed guards to protect your rights. That's the message that the Ontario Provincial Police is sending." Nigerians face continuing contamination and impoverishment caused by the French uranium mining company Areva and have been embroiled in armed conflict for a decade. White said he's frustrated that the Ontario Provincial Police have told him he will be arrested if he attempts to go back to the prospecting site in which his company has already invested millions obtaining permits for its operations.

On Oct. 12, the First Nations, Frontenac Venture, and the Canadian and Ontario governments agreed to a 12-week mediation process and the First Nations ended their occupation.

## UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples Opposed by Uranium Mining States

On Sept. 13, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 144 to 4. The United States was among the four to vote no, joining Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There were 11 abstentions.

The U.S., Australia and Canada hold the world's largest known reserves of uranium ore. In all three nations, the ore is found primarily in indigenous territories and its extraction has devastated the environment and health of indigenous peoples. Millions of tons of uranium tailings have been left behind at the mine and mill sites, permanently scarring First Nation reservations around the world.

Andrea Carmen, Yagui Nation member and Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), who was on hand to witness the historic vote, noted that the same three naysayers (U.S., Canada and Australia) historically signed the greatest number of nation-to-nation treaties with indigenous peoples — treaties that the countries continue to violate.

Oglala Lakota Bill Means, a board member of the IITC who participated in drafting the Declaration in the early 1980s, said, "The principles of self-determination, treaty rights, and the protection of our cultures and languages contained in the Declaration are basic human rights to build on. The U.S. has finally realized that 400 million Indigenous Peoples around the world can no longer be ignored or excluded from the family of nations."

The Declaration marks the first time that the UN has officially recognized that the rights affirmed in treaty law are "matters of international concern, interest, responsibility and character" and that states are obligated to uphold and honor them.

While not legally binding upon member states, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People has political and moral clout and it delineates the UN's member nations' obligations to uphold the rights.

— *The Circle*, Minneapolis, Oct. 2007

## Pine Ridge Reservation Poisoned, Ignored

In the 1970s, water pollution from uranium mining near the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota was confirmed by Lorelei Decora and Madonna Thunder Hawk who tested samples themselves. They found in 1979 high levels of radioactive contamination along with high percentages of miscarriages, pregnancies complicated by excessive bleeding and large numbers of children with birth abnormalities.

The story appears in a new book *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex*, edited by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence and reviewed by Jeanine Plant.

Decora and Thunder Hawk founded Women of All Red Nations to help see their research acted upon, but their study was discredited by the Centers for Disease Control and Indian Health Services. And while it was vindicated that same year by the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, the NRC refused to act and merely raised the level of "acceptable" or allowable contamination. Indian Health Services began providing bottled water in one area. Congress authorized a new water pipeline to Pine Ridge in 2002 — but the funding was "diverted by the financial demands of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan." — *In These Times*, July 2007



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## Nukewatch Staffer Wins Achievement Award

The Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice gave its 2007 Lifetime Achievement Award to Nukewatch staffer John LaForge. The WNPJ, based in Madison, connects 159 peace, environmental and human rights organizations.

In accepting the pat-on-the-back, John mentioned several achievements: shutdown of the Navy's Project ELF, cancellation of Marine Corps "mock landings" in Duluth, removal from the Great Plains of half the 1,000 Minuteman missiles mapped by Nukewatch in *Nuclear Heartland*, not-guilty verdicts for John and three other Anathoth Community members in a 2004 depleted uranium protest trial and the acquittal of Donna Howard and Tom Hastings on sabotage charges after their 1996 ELF disarmament action. Nukewatch played a part in all these successful projects.

The late Sam Day, a Nukewatch founder and its legendary mastermind, was the 2000 recipient of the lifetime achievement award. WNPJ's Peacemaker of the Year honors went to Nukewatch's senior staffer Bonnie Urfer in 2001, and fellow Anathoth Community Farm member Mike Miles in 2002.



Nukewatch staffer John LaForge (L) with Peacemakers of the Year Jim Murphy, Sarah Quinn and Sue Ruggles.

## NUKEWATCH QUARTERLY



Nukewatch is a project of  
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in 1979 by Samuel H. Day, Jr.

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**Nukewatch Quarterly** submission deadlines:

Nov. 1, Feb. 1, May 1 & Aug. 1

Suggested subscription donation: \$25/yr.

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