

THREE P.M. ON A LEADEN AFTERNOON on Vancouver Island. Fat raindrops are pelting down from a sullen sky. A chilling mist is rolling in from the Pacific. I am standing in the midst of a "clear-cut"—a vast expanse of scorched earth, charred tree stumps and rubble strewn gullies in which pristine mountain streams once flowed. My hiking guidebook, which is out of date, tells me that I'm in an area of "old-growth" forest which is "currently" embroiled in a controversy between environmentalists and the logging industry. It is clear who won. A large plywood sign advises that the sea of destruction stretching out in front of me is a Western Forest Products Ltd. "tree farm" and that the scorched ground has been "treated"-with chemical herbicides-to "encourage the growth of young conifers." Judging by the surrounding stumps, most of the trees (hemlock, cedar and some Sitka spruce) were hundreds of years old when cut or "harvested" (as it is called in the industry). If this was indeed a "tree farm," who planted it in the first place hundreds of years ago? Clearly the reality of the devastation in front of me did not corroborate the language used on the corporation's sign. Soon I learn that such absurd dichotomies between physical reality and the corporate worldview have become a hallmark in the debate over Canada's forests.

THE FOREST . . . Canada's "mantle of green." To many of us, this concept still invokes memories from schoolbooks of stalwart lumber-jacks, dwarfed by the vastness of primeval wilderness. Perhaps we imagine a trapper's cabin, amidst towering pines, or perhaps the sight of a moose by a lake at sunset or the "drip-drip-drip" of sap into the buckets of a maple grove in late winter. No matter what particular image comes to mind, our concept of "forest" is clearly archetypical and one that is deeply ingrained in the Canadian psyche.

The forest has often been a defining factor in Canadian social and cultural history. To aboriginal peoples, it provided (and in many cases, continues to provide) food and shelter as well as a context for complex cosmologies and aesthetics. It shaped the patterns of the European colonization/subjugation process, aspects of which continue to this day. It was the forest which fuelled the fur trade and the shipbuilding industry—factors essential to maintaining the power base of the invading Europeans.

At present the forest is serving the needs of corporate capital. The result of these needs is wholesale forest destruction. The corporate sector, in collusion with various levels of government, has sensed the potential for public outrage over this escalating ecological catastrophe. As a result, it has launched a sophisticated propaganda campaign aimed at denying the catastrophe and attempting to reprogram our basic forest concepts. Thus, by the time the catastrophe is complete, most Canadians will no longer possess the frames of reference necessary to describe forest destruction in a meaningful way.

HEWERS OF WOOD AND SPLITTERS OF WORD

Canada's rapacious forest products industry has found it difficult to hide its visible effects from an increasingly sceptical public Canada's deforestation has been compared to that of the Amazon. The clearcuts on Vancouver Island and in Northern Ontario have become so vast as to constitute a dominant landform feature, which is clearly visible in satellite photographs. The forest industry is aware units image problem and has resorted to various propaganda techniques to order to continue its agenda. It has tried to saift basic terms of reference regarding the natural environment toward the corporate viewpoint through the skilful use of language.

One method is to invent a new language. Preferably, this language should have a limited vocabulary and employ superficially familiar terms to mean new things. Consequently, industry advertisers and public relations consultants expend a great deal of time and effort making sure that the language of the debate is completely under control. As soon as a given dispute can be stated effectively in the coded language of the corporation, it is ready for a public hearing—the corporation being secure in the knowledge that even the more radical expressions of public opposition will be constrained by the linguistic framework which it has imposed.

In our office, there is a team of experts rewriting our vocabulary.

—Frank Oberle (Federal Minister of Forests), Vancouver, November 1991.

THE VOCABULARY OF DESTRUCTION: "ForestSpeak"

A typical example of this language distortion and invention is the forest industry's use of the term "tree-farm licenses" (TFL's) for areas of virgin timber on crown (i.e., public) land over which they have been granted control. When an environmental or aboriginal group contests the right of the corporation to denude a piece of landscape and the watersheds that it may contain ("landscape" and "watershed" are terms which connote public interest), the industry simply responds that its "tree-farm" licenses are being threatened ("farms" connote areas of "private" interest, "farm" being an archetypical concept of "property" and a cornerstone of North American capitalist myth). Inevitably, this strategy arouses the sympathy and support of the legal system which is already strongly predisposed to emphasizing property rights over human rights.

Recently, a right-wing British Columbia politician (in a complete capitulation to the corporate line) decontextualized the term "treefarm" further, inventing the term "fibre-farm"³ which, thankfully, did not gain public usage. In point of fact, "tree-farm" licenses represent more that just a linguistic privatization of public space. Key information concerning corporate activities on these public lands is kept rou-

tinely secret by provincial governments on the grounds of "commercial confidentiality."

It continues to be more expedient financially for corporations to respond to public concern over abuse of the environment with linguistic obfuscation than to entertain any real reform. The corporate "P.R." machinery has developed a new language with which to inocu-late a compliant mass media. What emerges is a strange new Orwellian language which we might call "ForestSpeak." The federal government explicitly promotes this approach. At a recent Vancouver silvicultural conference, federal forestry minister Frank Oberle advocated "rewriting (creast) industry vocabulary" through a "public education campaign" to eliminate any terms that might "have an emotional impact on the layman," thus enabling government and industry to "assure everyone of the high standards of Canadian forest management practices." The following is a brief glossary of some "ForestSpeak" terms cross-indexed with their (at Val) more common definitions:

CONVENIONAL ENGLISH "FORESTSPEAK"

ropaganda "public education"

environmentalist "ecoterrorist"

forest "tree-farm" or "fibre-farm"

old-growth/virgin lovests "over-mature timber"

"decadent forest"

conservationist "preservationist"

clear-cut logging the working forest"

clear-cut logging with "multiple use";
camping allowed afterwards also "sharing the forest"

log shortage "mil overcapacity"

park "heritage forest"

wilderness (no equivalent)

anticipated regional "fall-down effect"

economic/ecological collapse due to industrially instigated

deforestation

Areas not wanted by forest corporations due to poor quality or

orations due to poor quality or relatively inaccessible timber

Nitrogen fixing trees (alder, etc.)
vital in the process of forest
succession but of lower
commercial value

Anyone not in full agreement with forest industry policies

pro-corporate view

"recreation-potential"

"heritage forest"

"weed trees"

"interest groups.

"balanced"

ELIMINATING POINTS OF COMPARISON

Winston: "But it did exist! It does exist!

It exists in memory. I remember it!"

"I do not remember it," said O'Brian.

-George Orwell, 1984.

While these examples of "ForestSpeak" exhibit some simple language coding techniques employed by corporate propagandists aimed at "industrializing" our forest concepts, they are just an adjunct to a much larger and more insidious arsenal of psychological warfare.

To achieve the maximum conversion of public forest resources into private capital (with a minimum of public interference), the forest industry has prioritized destruction of potential public rallying points, i.e., areas of forest wilderness which have developed special cultural significance. These forest icons or archetypes hold certain qualities which contribute towards a "forest concept" in the popular consciousness. Their very existence serves as a link to a pre-industrial, non-mediated past and can often arouse deep-seated emotions incompatible with contemporary mass-industrial paradigms. Corporations are very eager to tamper with such concepts.

Perhaps the nearest physical manifestation of the "pure" forest concept is that of the "old-growth" forest. This is a forest that has reached a state of dynamic equilibrium, spanning long periods (in Canada as far back as the last ice age and in the case of some tropical rain forests, possibly much longer). Because of a relative lack of disturbance, the plant and animal communities contained within such old-growth forest can, over time, become very complex and for the same reason, individual trees within these forests can, under certain conditions, attain great age and size. If such an ecology remains intact over a fairly large area and is relatively free from industrial effects, it approximates many people's concept of forest "wilderness." As old-growth forest ecosystems become increasingly rare, changing from environmental ground to environmental figure in only a few generations, their symbolic and cultural value becomes more significant to Canadians.

It is precisely because of their symbolic value that the last contiguous examples of old-growth forest are being systematically destroyed. The arguments put forth by industry to justify their deforestation practices ("x" number of jobs, "so and so" many millions of dollars into the local economy, etc.) have become largely unsustainable. The real short-term monetary value of the "resource," i.e., logs and jobs, is now often exceeded by the long-term expense of extracting the timber and dealing with the litigation that environmentalists and native groups initiate when these last stands of old-growth are threatened. However, massive government subsidies have been injected into the industry as face-saving measures. The Temagami wilderness of Ontario is a case in point. Here, the contro-

versial "Red Squirrel" logging road has become the most heavily subsidized logging road⁶ in Canadian history—all in order to assure the destruction of a small, yet highly symbolic, remnant of Ontario's original old-growth pine forest.

For the forest industry and David Peterson's Liberal government, the Temagami wilderness represented far too important an environmental rallying point to be left intact. It was one of the most significant stands of old-growth forest left within easy access to Canada's industrial heartland. Furthermore, it is home to the Teme-Augama Anishnabi, an aboriginal people who have long claimed title to the land. In keeping with tradition, the province's ruling capitalist elite was eager to marginalize these people further; it feared setting "altruistic" precedents that might limit profits. In addition to spending over 3.5-million in tax dollars to construct the logging road, the province footed the bill for over 370 arrests and detentions of protesters—a staggering policing cost and totally out of proportion to the potential benefits in revenue expected from the logging process itself

It has become evident that this push to open up 80 per cent of the Temagami wilderness to logging was more than just a simple entrepreneurial venture or a job creation exercise for an economically marginalized area. The "Red Squirrel" road was a concerted effort to re-write Ontario's ecological history by destroying one of the last symbols of an ecological past. As these last forest wildernesses are impinged by corporate activity, any existing reality not controlled in some way by corporate culture will be unimaginable. Public opposition to the corporate world view will become a moot point because the only paradigm of pre-corporate reality availablewilderness-will have either been eliminated as a non-mediated form, or at best, enshrined and "museumized" in public parks. The major challenge for the corporate propagandist, then, is to assuage the public's fears about corporate control over (formerly) public wilderness and downplay the land's destruction by concealing the effects or presenting them as desirable and ultimately inevitable.

Industry's fragmentation of the wilderness has already been achieved with phenomenal success throughout much of this country. Most of the areas now in dispute are at the periphery of corporate exploitation, such as the few remaining unlogged watersheds on Vancouver Island or the aspen parklands of northern Alberta. All other areas have been turned into a corporate "Kulturlandschaft" at least to some degree. For example, British Columbia's tourism ministry, eager to capitalize on its "Super-Natural" image, recently had ferry cruise ads photographically retouched to remove evidence of ubiquitous "clearcutting" on coastal mountainsides. Presumably, realistic depictions of the landscape could be detrimental to the potential tourist dollar.



