

[Page 26 - On the Trail of Elizabeth May](#)ISSUE : [Issue 53](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1990/1/1

So these poor people come out, they burn out the rain forest, then they start growing a crop. They may get a fairly rotten crop the first year. The second year it's worse. By the third year they can't grow anything. So they move on and burn more rain forest. The same thing with the cattle ranchers. They burn huge areas, graze cattle on them. And then it doesn't support the cattle any more so they have to burn more areas. At the same time that you've got attacks from the landless and the cattle ranchers, you've got gold miners--and they invade Indian lands. (Gold miners) pollute rivers with mercury. And when the Indians get in their way, they shoot them. So it's like sort of a wild-west thing.... Up until Altimira. there'd been no focus at all that the indigenous people of the country were really people. They were just there like the forests and the monkeys and things that you're going to burn off and get rid of so that you can bring progress to the area. And then the other big threat to the Amazon is the threat of the dams. And that's tied into this whole economic picture that's global, that's affected all of the countries in the Third World. The U. N. report a year ago came out and said that more children were starving than at any time in our history. And they put the blame on the Third World debt. And I think there's more environmental devastation happen? ing because of the Third World debt. The poorest countries in the world now pay more money to rich countries in their interest pay? ments than they ever received in aid. Brazil (for instance) pays one billion dollars a month in interest on their debt.... The result of that is that poor people in those countries have less buying power with the little money they have. They can't afford food any more. Land that used to produce food gets turned over to producing cash crops for export, so they can reduce their balance of payments. And Brazil figured that they needed an industrial strategy. They needed really, really cheap electricity that they could vir? tually give away, to lure energy-intensive in? dustries like aluminum smelting into the area. And then they could export really valuable products. Because Brazil is not--in many ways, it's not a poor country. Right after Japan and Germany, it's the world's biggest exporter of products. It's a successful country In certain economic indicators. Which goes to show how completely insane economic indicators are, as a mechanism for figuring out whether the world is doing well or not. I mean, you know, successful gross national product or whatever, and still have millions of people starving, and still be destroying your environment. In many of these countries, the quality of life can be abso? lutely abominable. That doesn't show up on any economic indicator. I think we need to completely re-think--and for Canada, too--what is a successful society. And do it in ways other than what is the eco? nomic production rate. Things like childhood mortality, infant mortality. Things like the level of literacy. Things like the level of pollution control. Those things should be part of economic indicators to figure out whether a country's a successful country or not. Anyway, Brazil has a tremendously complicated series of pressures to destroy the rain for? est. The major culprit in the whole thing, as far as I'm concerned, is their debt load. There has to be a way to address their debt load while convincing them not to destroy



their rain forest. In the meantime, to get back to the kinds of things I'm involved with now. I'm involved with a group called Cultural Survival, which up till now has only really existed in the States. I'm going to be executive director for Cultural Survival in Canada, when I get back up to Ottawa. And what Cultural Survival has done over the years: it works with indigenous people in Africa and South America and Central America. It ELIZABETH MAY CONTINUES ON PAGE 45 WE KEEP TABS ON CAPE BRETON, TOO! Local histories, genealogical tools, area newspaper backfiles. Serving Inverness, Richmond, and Guysborough Counties EASTERN COUNTIES REGIONAL LIBRARY 390 Murray Street, P. O. Bag 2500 MULGRAVE, N. S. BOE 2G0 Tel. (902) 747-2597 ENVOY: ILL.NSME ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK No Admission Charge Winter Schedule: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Beautiful, Intelligent and Peaceful BADDECK, N. S. 75 km. west of Sydney on Route 105 3 MAJOR EXHIBIT AREAS: Bell the Man Bell the Experimenter Hydrofoil Hall GUIDE SERVICE AVAILABLE CanadS 26