

THE MINING DEBATE: WHO IS "ANTI"-WHAT?

Below, an article by Karen Spring who joined Rights Action educational seminars to Honduras and Guatemala this past summer. Currently, Karen is living and working in Guatemala.

Please re-publish and distribute this article all around. To get on/ off Rights Action's email list:

<http://www.rightsaction.org/lists/?p=subscribe&id=3>

* * *

THE MINING DEBATE: WHO IS "ANTI"-WHAT?

Karen Spring, karen.spring@utoronto.ca, September 10, 2008

On July 10th 2008, Andy Hoffman of the Globe and Mail wrote an article entitled "Goldcorp Bested By Mayan Mother" covering the community resistance to Goldcorp's Marlin mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, Guatemala.

Hoffman discussed the recent resistance conducted by a group of women that are currently facing criminal charges as a result of a direct action where they short-circuited high-tension electrical wires that transmit electricity to the Goldcorp mine. Hoffman used the term "anti-mining" to describe activists resisting mining operations internationally as well as to describe Rights Action, a non-government organization that has developed strong relationships with the communities surrounding Goldcorp's Marlin mine.

Having visited a few towns surrounding Goldcorp's Marlin Mine in July 2008 and directly hearing the affects of the mine on the communities, I want to respond to the use of "anti-mining" in describing the resistance to Goldcorp Inc.'s open-pit, cyanide leaching mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacan in Western Guatemala.

When one comes across the term "anti-mining" we must be prepared to examine its use and implications. Anti-mining is often used in conjunction with anti-development in the sense that "anti-mining" activists are often painted as individuals resisting the so-called beneficial social and economic benefits the mine company in question insists it will bring to the community, i.e. jobs, money, social projects (schools, health centres) and of course "development."

To resist the mine or to be anti-mining, as is often implied, is to be against these "benefits" and against the raising of social and economic conditions of the surrounding communities.

"Anti-mining" can also mean opposition to the actual practice of metal exploration and extraction. However in this case, the different communities and individual community members have varying opinions on whether they strictly oppose the extraction of metals because their principal opposition is not against "Goldcorp" per se, but against harmful mining on their land. What they are against is the manner at which Goldcorp is conducting itself in their communities.

Therefore to describe the resistance happening in San Miguel Ixtahuacan as "anti-mining" is to entirely misrepresent why the communities are mobilizing against the company and their actions.

What became clear to me during my visit to the surrounding communities was not an anti-mining movement but instead resistance against exploitation, against the health impacts of environmental contamination and degradation, against the health violations associated with Goldcorp's operation, and against the false claims and promises of the company.

What these organizations and local individuals are asking for is proper consultation and respect of their human rights and environment.

What is obviously a pro-human rights, pro-community development and pro-environmental sustainability movement has been misleadingly represented as an "anti-mining" movement as evidenced by Hoffman in his article.

GOLDCORP: PRO-MINING & "ANTI-DEVELOPMENT"

When I visited these communities, I saw mounds of blown-up rock, clear cut land, and experienced the tension among community and family members and women fearful of their legal fate for simply defending their human rights and water sources.

What Goldcorp is calling "development" in this region as a result of the Marlin Mine is contrary to what I saw, heard and experienced. What is happening in these communities is anything but development.

I would argue that development is better defined as the social and economic progress determined and reaped by all members of the communities surrounding the Marlin Mine. However, this progress cannot be measured by simply showing statistics at the number of short-term jobs being provided by the mine to local individuals or the amount of money that local residents were paid for their land bought by Goldcorp in their initial and expanding operations.

Instead, development needs to be defined by the individuals that live the effects, implications and reality of having to look out from their backyard and see the mining operation in land owned by generations of their people. It needs to be defined as to whether the entire community feels the company has benefited or hindered social services or improved the surrounding environment to which they have to live and farm on. The community as a whole should be the ones who inform others whether or not Goldcorp has strengthened family and community relations.

Having listened to the Mayan women being charged for tampering with mining equipment on their own property, having been told by many community members of the tensions between neighbours, families and communities as a result of the mines presence and the increased number of deaths of farm animals since the mine opened, I am convinced that Goldcorp should be seen as being against community development and against improving social relations, as well as the well-being of the surrounding communities.

What the local individuals are resisting is how Goldcorp's conduct in the community is adversely affecting people and how the company itself is hindering development.

When one speaks of "anti-mining" such as Andy Hoffman did in his article discussing the resistance in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, one cannot simply ignore the reality that anti-mining is often purposefully confused with anti-development. In the case of the resistance movement in San Miguel Ixtahuacan and surrounding villages, "anti-mining" individuals and organizations are simply asking for human rights, community development and consultation NOT the "anti-development" practices of environmental degradation, exploitation and health harms that Goldcorp is currently causing in the surrounding mining communities in Western Guatemala.

* * *

WHAT TO DO

TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS for Indigenous and community-based organizations implementing their own community development projects (schools and scholarships, health clinics, solidarity economy productive projects, etc), human rights and environment projects in Guatemala and Honduras (as well as El Salvador, Haiti and Chiapas), and resisting the harms caused by large-scaled "development" projects (mining, tourism, hydro-electric dams), make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

* UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887;

* CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8.

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: http://www.rightsaction.org/Templates/donations_index.html

EDUCATIONAL DELEGATION-SEMINARS: Form your own group and come on an educational seminar trip to learn more about community and Indigenous development, human rights and environmental issues in Guatemala and Honduras.

JOIN: Rights Action's listserv and newsletter lists (info@rightsaction.org).

CREATE YOUR OWN E-MAIL LIST: and re-distribute this and other information.

DAILY NEWS: listen to the www.democracynow.org news program and read www.dominionpaper.ca/.

READ: Eduardo Galeano's "Open Veins of Latin America"; Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States"; Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine"; Paolo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed".

SMILE: And live to make another world is possible, everyday.

RIGHTS ACTION -- Based in Guatemala, Rights Action (with tax-deductible legal status in Canada and USA) funds and works with community-based Indigenous, development, environment and human rights organizations in Guatemala and Honduras, and also in El Salvador, Oaxaca and Chiapas; and educates about and is involved in activism related to global development, environmental and Indigenous and human rights struggles.