

PARTING COMPANY

newsletter of People against Rio Tinto-Zinc and subsidiaries (Partizans)

Rio Tinto hits!

Bullets have been fired through the windows of the Aboriginal Mining Information Centre in Melbourne...workers have been bugged and chased around...the cutting-edge of apartheid has come with a vengeance to Australia. And at the centre of it all is Rio Tinto-Zinc.

The stakes are diamonds - a potential 10% or more of world output of industrial and 'near-gem' stones. They will come from the Lake Argyle deposits in the Kimberleys of Western Australia. They'll be mined by a consortium which is nearly 60% owned by Conzinc Rio Tinto (CRA), RT-Z's Australian subsidiary. They are all on aboriginal land.

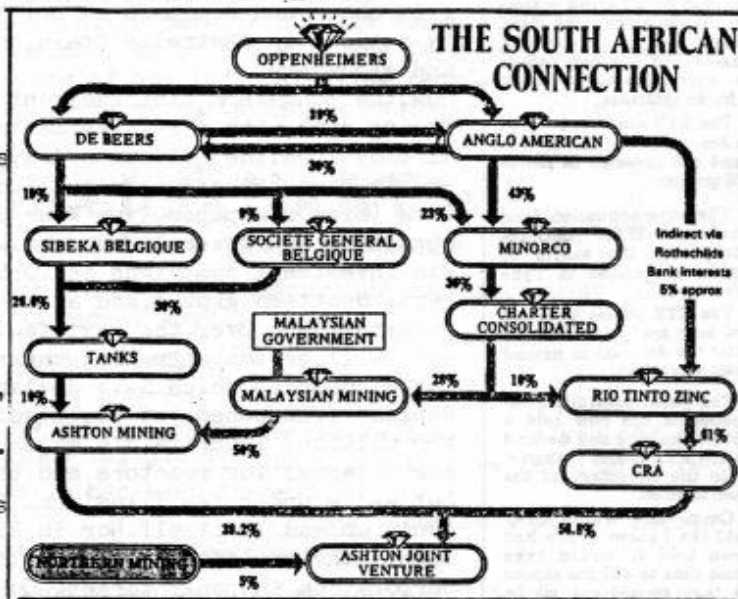
Already the consortium's intrigues have led to condemnation both in the Australian and British press - specifically for launching a public relations programme which seeks to undermine aboriginal land rights. (see Parting Company no.7)

Now - while the land rights' controversy continues - a new battle has started over whether the Central Selling Organisation (CSO) which markets about 80% of rough diamond production worldwide, should also sell the Ashton production from Lake Argyle.

The CSO is controlled by De Beers, who are owned by the Oppenheims. (see chart) And they have interests in both RT-Z and the Ashton Joint Venture.

It was our colleagues, notably Jan Roberts, at the Aboriginal Mining Information Centre, who researched and exposed these links.

In the process they became targets for some pretty nasty latter-day Bonds.



Though terms for the Ashton Joint Venture have already been decided, the CSO's participation is still an open question. It would be difficult for that noted 'anti-apartheid' campaigner Malcom Fraser (Australia's Prime Minister) to let CSO in - commercially difficult to keep them out.

Meanwhile, anti-apartheid and pro-Aboriginal campaigners get shot at, and the finger points to the mining companies, including RT-Z.

South African shares to go

TYNE WEAR Council's superannuation fund is expected to sell its shares in Rio Tinto Zinc - to comply with a political decision.

The councillor who first urged the fund break with RTZ because of its interests in South Africa, Coun. Mrs. Tessa Gray, said today she was happy with what was happening.

The 72-strong Labour group on the council decided by a narrow majority in July that the fund should sell its 318,000 RTZ shares and not buy others in companies with South African interests.

The RTZ shares are worth £1.5m. from the £130m. the fund has invested in 180 to 200 groups.

The superannuation fund has about 32,000 contributors from the staffs of public authorities in Tyne Wear.

The RTZ shares have not yet been sold - four months after the decision to unload them was taken.

The panel controlling investments has now held a special meeting and decided to sell RTZ shares "when it is to the advantage of the fund to do so."

Coun. Mrs. Tessa Gray said the Labour group had been told it would take some time to sell the shares as they should not all be unloaded on the market at once.

It would be a matter of months rather than weeks, said Coun. Mrs. Gray.

A GOOD START - & NOW?

Mining is the world's second most important economic activity, says the Financial Times - food comes first. Yet, while we can all name half a dozen important food-producing countries, and a dozen food corporations - can you think of more than 3 or 4 mining companies? You may know where the contents of your food cans come from - down to the very plantation - but have you the faintest idea who made the tins?

The realities of "resource extraction" are concealed from the consumers of its final products for various reasons. We in PARTIZANS accept the greater difficulty involved in targetting a mining company than boycotting (say) Nestlé or Brooke Bond. But the problems aren't insuperable. Already, in the first full year of PARTIZAN s campaigning, we've held the first international tribunal on a multi-national corporation to be addressed solely by its "victims" (an unfortunate term, but we couldn't think of a better.) During the WEEK OF ACTION in May, demonstrations, film-shows and seminars in Britain were joined by actions in Australia, Spain, northern Ireland and elsewhere.

Now, the long-term disinvestment campaign is taking root, with dis-investments of RTZ shares already from: the Salvation Army, National Children's Homes, Baha'i spiritual assembly, a major Cork (Eire) newspaper, Tyne Wear council (see opposite) and several Churches. We also know of dis-investment campaigns in Durham, among several Scottish groups, and at York and Cambridge universities. Over the next few months, supporters will be concentrating their energies on those councils which have declared themselves nuclear-free zones, yet still hold shares (about £15 million) in Britain's major supplier of the raw material for reactors and bombs.

But we're under few illusions. Dis-investment isn't an end in itself. Nor is Rio Tinto-Zinc, albeit the world's most diversified mining corporation, the only target. Our immediate, "issue oriented" campaigning surely only makes sense in the context of working for a worldwide shift in economic power, from the few to the many. That's a lifetime's work. Let's live it! PARTIZANS badly needs funds for its work in '82

All gifts gratefully received, however small.

OXFAM GOES SOUTH

In October, a delegation from OXFAM were invited to meet representatives of RT-Z to discuss grievances. This followed OXFAM'S refusal to continue accepting £20,000 of free computer services from a company which RT-Z has taken over. The more radical 'caucus' inside OXFAM would have made it impossible to carry on this association, even had OXFAM's director Brian Walker wanted it.

An OXFAM worker spent a day with PARTIZANS genning-up on the company and it looked like the representations would be pretty strong. The next we knew however, Brian Walker was thinking of proposing to RT-Z that the company become a sort of moral 'leader' in the mining world, by implementing a mining code of conduct which (presumably) OXFAM would offer to help police. Of course, nothing would suit RT-Z better than that Britain's largest overseas charity should join, rather than continue to beat, 'em.

Fortunately some good sense seems to have prevailed and the meeting was inevitably conclusive. Yet again, however, a "responsible" group was invited to go and look for itself at RT-Z's mines. We sincerely hope that OXFAM will leave this empty gesture where it belongs. After all, RT-Z could build palaces for its southern African workers, turn its Weipa bauxite desert into a wildlife park, or build a dozen hospitals on its uranium gains. That wouldn't alter one whit the fact that it's bene-fitting from the horrors of apartheid, stealing peoples' land and endangering the whole of planet earth by its radioactive pollutions.

'It's disgraceful'- HART

QUOTES OF THE MONTH (WELL, THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS)

"It's disgraceful that we have been supporting such a company (RTZ) that behaves in such an amoral way" Tony Hart, chairperson of the GLC Finance Committee in London Student.

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"Partizans has been of enormous help to people like ourselves and other indigenous groups around the world. Without groups like Partizans, greed would run riot. (Its) help has been tremendous"

Les Russell, chairman of the Aboriginal Mining Information Centre, Melbourne.

"Canuc (Campaign against Namibian uranium contracts) organised with Partizans, a disruption and stoppage of the RTZ agm in May"

Canuc leaflet

(NB. We'd just like to gently point out to our friends in Canuc that we agreed not to disrupt last May's agm but to pursue our legitimate questioning until we got valid answers. It was Tuke who "disrupted!")

PANAMA: LONG ARM OF THE OUTLAW

We (and others) have long been predicting that RT-Z will take up its option on the huge Cerro Colorado copper project in Panama - a mine that will set at risk the lives and livelihood of several thousand Guaymi "indians! For 9 months, we've been waiting for 6 St. James' Square to announce the go-ahead. It now seems virtually certain that RT-Z will agree to go-ahead with the 2 year feasibility study (as distinct from its so-called "pre-feasibility" studies) in December. This will commit the corporation to building a mine, roads, encampments, and (whatever the final outcome) the invasion will have truly begun.

But the worst can still be stopped. Members of Survival International and the Guaymi support group have agreed to press ahead with a speaking tour, a new information pack, and - above all - dis-investment initiatives, using the Guaymi example as the most urgent illustration of the unacceptable face of RT-Z in the eighties.

Opposition is now also reported from within the cabinet of Panama's Aristides Royo to the way in which RT-Z is trying to side-step labour legislation (see Parting Company no.8) and the fact that it wants its own electricity supply, rather than depending on the government's grid. Moreover, RT-Z has threatened to stop paying the \$400,000 wages bill for Codemin (the government mining corporation) unless it agrees to these terms: hence the strong likelihood of a December dénouement.

A new Panamanian Guaymi solidarity Committee has been formed, with several well-known and respected Panamanian citizens on board. And, after sending delegates to the Russell Tribunal, the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples and a recent UN conference on indigenous rights, the Guaymi themselves have issued a clarion call for solidarity throughout the world in their opposition to the mine.

True the Royo government has promised, at last, to define the Guaymi comarca (its land rights). But the Bill it's drafted is extremely vague about which lands the Guaymi might control and gives them absolutely no veto over mining: it will also take up to a year to get through Parliament. No wonder RT-Z is now pushing extremely hard to proceed with the project on its terms.

Since the May agm, Sir Anthony Tuke has received criticisms and counter-blasts over Cerro Colorado from many people, not least some British churchpeople like Cardinal Hume and the Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool.

Point-by-point attacks on RT-Z's plans have met with virtual contempt from 6, St. James Square, while none of the key issues (the carrying-out of an independent environmental impact study; realistic compensation for the Guaymi's loss of lands; Guaymi participation in project planning and execution) have even been taken up. Instead, critics get nicely-signed letters from Sir Anthony, and the Machiavellian rejoinder: "would you rather we did it, or someone else who'd do it worse?"

The answer is, of course that we'd rather no-one did it. And, if it came to a choice - just ask the people of Namibia, Australia's Aborigines, Bougainville's Nasioi and many others - if anyone else could do it worse!

Guaymi support group is at: 7 Rectory Rd., London E 17 (01- 520 3693)

Lets help RTZ! NOW

One of the biggest problems we have, in the management of PARTIZANS, is finding openings for redundant members of the RT-Z board. (That's to say when they inevitably become redundant as a result of our operations.)

PARTIZANS executive committee has therefore set up a special unit to investigate alternative employment for out-of-work corporate executives and company directors.

We welcome suggestins from our members as to what can be done with a group of men whose expertise is highly restricted, whose expectations have been grossly distorted, and whose experience of the world as it really is, has been severely limited.

Proposals like "put Lord Shackleton in charge of Brixton parks depart or "give Alistair Frame a spade and tell him to clean up Rossing" are not exactly what we have in mind - though we did think of making Sir Anthony Tuke the PARTIZANS treasurer and see what a bit of transfer pricing could do for our parlous finances!

But seriously, if you can see any role which ex-RT-Z (and its subsidiary directors can perform, come the revolutions (lots of 'em), just let us know. All proposals will be treated in the strictest lack of confidence.

MEANWHILE, how about some more mundane support for PARTIZANS?

Pull out your cheque book and- after scribbling a few noughts on the end of the digit you'd chosen for our appeal fund - order some of our resource materials. They may not bring RTZ to its knees, but they'll get PARTIZANS moving marvellously!

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"RTZ BENEFITS THE COMMUNITY" 8-page booklet summarising the proceedings of the May Tribunal on RT-Z. price 40p per copy

"STOP RTZ" The briefing document which launched the campaign a year ago. price 20p per copy

"PARTING COMPANY" Newsletters 1 - 8 at 10p each

"THE CASE AGAINST RTZ" Chris Whitehouse's well-researched document for use in the dis-investment campaign. price 50p each

* "FROM MASSACRES TO MINING" by Jan Roberts. Classic documentation on the battle for Aboriginal land rights with special reference to RTZ price £2.25 (including postage)

"RIO TINTO STINKS" Bright, red, buttons which will bring you instant recognition and eventual ejection from RTZ agm's 15p each

Please add postage costs in all cases (except *). Deduct 10% for bulk

Name.....Address.....

.....phone.....

I enclose £ _____. Please send me the items marked.

PARTIZANS: 218 LIVERPOOL RD, LONDON N1. ENGLAND (01-609-1852)