January 1987
The Newsletter of People Against Rio Tinto Zinc and Subsidiaries

CONTENTS

NEWS
New CRA uranium mine 2
Crisis at Rio Tinto Minera 3
RTZ increase stake in Anglesey Aluminium 3
Geothermal Energy study 4
New Citric acid plant 4
Rod Carnegie Resigns 4
Rio Algom gives up on tin mine 4
Disinvestments; more people sell RTZ shares 4
CEGB aquires Australian uranium 5
US Borax win safety award 5

Trivia or what Frame says 15
PARTIZANS News/Subscribe to PC 16

FEATURES
Namibia Montage - a round up of news 6
Socially Responsible Investment in the US 8
What future for Broken Hill 10
A Huelva Mess; pollution from a Spanish mine 13

REVIEWS
A Contract to Kill - the latest from CANCU on Rossing and uranium 9
Unilever and Macdonalds: two leaflets from London Greenpeace 10
The Other GEC Report 12
CRApping Again: Uranium horror lurks in Western Australia

CRA, now 49% owned by RTZ is test drilling for uranium in Western Australia's biggest National Park at Rudall River in the Great Sandy Desert - a very important Aboriginal area.

According to the Australian press the company has already poured millions of dollars into its Kintyre prospect, sparking off rumors of another Roxby Downs (the huge Western Mining/BP joint project in South Australia), which could develop into the biggest mine in the world and is due to come on stream in the next two years. Although companies are only technically allowed to 'explore' under present Federal government policy, as an Australian correspondent pointed out, "The Western Australian Minister for Mineral and Environment, Mr D Parker's interpretation of exploration allows tests, trial mines and yellow cake production and export to occur."

Although a large number of uranium prospects are located in this part of Western Australia, it is probably significant that CRA is showing off its activities at Kintyre. Since the Mary Kathleen mine in Queensland closed three years ago and it ostensibly abandoned uranium exploration in Victoria, CRA will have been tempted to pull out of uranium altogether. However the Australian Labour about turn on its anti-uranium policies of the late 1970s, combined with a more buoyant market in yellowcake over the medium and long-term, might have given the company new heart. (Chain Reaction, FoE Australa).

* See also article on new supply of uranium for CEBG. *

Geevor tin mine for nuclear dump?

As a last-ditch desperate measure to save his mine in the face of the global tin crisis, the chairman of Cornwall’s Geevor Mines has offered his pits for the disposal of radioactive waste.

Although Nirex, the British government body responsible for nuclear waste disposal, has turned down Geevor’s offer it has also opened the door for further negotiations: "the final decision always rests with the government" said a Nirex spokeswoman in October.

When the world price of tin plummeted in 1985 Geevor scaled down its mining operations, then closed. A week after Nirex announced its rejection of the company's offer, Geevor stated that it would never re-open. It has backed its proposal with the extraordinary claim that "the existing radioactivity from the uranium in the granite where tin is mined exceeds that of atomic waste". This will confirm the fears of many local people that one of their most promising industries has always been a great deal more hazardous than the experts are willing to concede. Some two hundred years ago ochre from tin deposits, used in the decoration of ceramics, caused skin cancer - though it was not identified as such at the time. (Independent 24/10/86)
Crisis at Rio Tinto Minera

Rio Tinto Minera, the Spanish copper concern partly owned by the British Rio Tinto Zinc, is applying for authorisation to lay off 750 of its workforce of about 2,500 for a period of 18 months in order to reduce losses and to allow time to negotiate the streamlining plan with unions. This compares with 1,300 lay-offs announced in the summer but blocked by the authorities, which obliged the company to restart production at its copper-mining centres in Huelva, southwest Spain, and La Coruna, in the northwest.

The company has told bank creditors it cannot meet its debt payments for the time being until it has won agreement on a viability plan. The company estimates its 1986 losses at more than Pta 5 bn (dollars 38 m), compared with Pta 1.2 bn the year before. It has outstanding debts of about Pta 20 bn, mainly with Spanish banks.

The situation with the Spanish mine has similarities with Carnon Consolidated which wanted to close the Cornish tin mines last year and was bailed out by the government (surely RTZ doesn't need government help?). Partizans has a copy of a report of pollution from the mines, which has been kept secret.

The streamlining plan puts the number of redundancies at 940. In what has become an explosive social issue in the southwest, Rio Tinto Minera has insisted that it needs to stop its uneconomical mining activities. (Financial Times 3/1/87)

CRAs Paper Tiger

After two and a half decades of desecration of the traditional lands in northern Queensland, the Weipa Aborigines have started suffering another degradation. Comalco Ltd - controlled by CRA started Kaolin clay mining on the reserve in December 1986. The Kaolin which will be exported to paper coating industries in western Europe and Japan is the largest in the Pacific. The Kaolin lies beneath the bauxite layer - which means even more soil will have to be mined to get at it than during bauxite operations. Needless to say Queensland Aborigines won't get a cent of royalties out the this new profit-spinner for CRA/RTZ. (Mining Journal 5/12/86)

RTZ to "control" poisonous plant

Remember 'Dying for a living'? This was our damning critique of the Anglesey Aluminium smelter in Dirty Bizness, last year's alternative report on RTZ. The plant was co-owned by Kaiser Aluminium of the USA and RTZ, and has been responsible for horrendous fluoride poisoning of people, animals and plants. Dirty Bizness revealed that levels of pollution from this plant are six times the world average.

In December 1986 RTZ announced that it has agreed with Kaiser to take over another 17.6% in Anglesey Aluminium Ltd thus raising its share to 51% and having control of the plant. The company stressed that the management would remain unaltered. (Mining Journal 5/12/86)
RTZ get involved with Geothermal Energy

Is this an about turn by Britain's foremost nuclear merchant? We doubt it; more probably diversification of its energy interests. (It already has a large stake in Enterprise Oil). With Taylor Woodrow, RTZ is to carry out a management study. Geothermal energy is the extraction of heat from rocks deep underground, therefore a likely area of business for a mining company. Geothermal energy will mostly likely be used for electricity generation. Estimated reserves are 10 bn tonnes of coal equivalent. (FT 28/10/86)

New Citric Acid plant at Selby

RTZ is to build a £30m citric acid plant at its subsidiary Sturge Biochemicals at Selby, North Yorkshire. The plant will use established technology to produce citric acid for the pharmaceutical and foodstuff industries. Sturge has invested more than £6m on multi-purpose plants to produce biochemicals. (FT 1/10/86)

Rod Carnegie Resigns

Much loved for his bumbling waffling manner at AGMs the chairman of CRA (Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia), Sir Roderick Carnegie, has resigned. The new non-executive chairman is Mr John Uhrig, former managing director of Simpson Holdings the white goods company. Rod resigned after rumours of a difference of opinion between him and RTZ in London over his ambitions regarding BHP and CRA. (FT 5/9/86 and others) (we will do a feature on this later)

Rio Algom gives up on Tin Mine

The North American arm of RTZ, Rio Algom, has offered control of its East Kemptville tin mine to the banks which financed the deal. The mine came on stream just four days before last years collapse of the tin price on the LME. The mine's only customer is the RTZ Capper Pass smelter on Humberside. Where this leaves Capper Pass is difficult to say (...so I'm not going to try!).

Disinvestments

Two more disinvestments from RTZ to report in the last six months;

Liverpool Health Authority has sold 3200 shares following a campaign by the local Anti-Apartheid group. The south London borough of Lewisham has sold its 10,000 shares.

If you know of any other sales of RTZ shares let us know and we'll publicise the fact. Also if your local authority, college or a group with with which you are associated still has shares in RTZ, we can help with advice and campaign materials. A List of major shareholders in Dirty Bizness - last years alternative report - still available. (£1 inc postage)
Australian Uranium for UK Electricity

The Central Electricity Generating Board is believed to have reached a tentative agreement with a large Australian mining group to supply uranium to fuel some of Britain's nuclear power stations up to the end of the century. The fuel would come from the Western Mining Corporation's Olympic Dam uranium project in the Roxby Downs area of South Australia. The CEGB is also believed to be seeking a second long-term contract with one of Australia's two other uranium producers. The Roxby Downs, which contain huge deposits of copper, gold and uranium oxide, were discovered 10 years ago and have the potential to be developed as one of the biggest mines in the world. The project is owned 51 per cent by Western Mining and 49 per cent by British Petroleum Minerals. Production is due to begin in June 1988. CEGB officials in London have refused to discuss the deal until authorised by the Australian government and the EEC. The CEGB's silence is due not merely to commercial confidentiality, but possibly to Australia's continuing sensitivity over uranium exports, which have been strongly opposed by the left wing of Prime Minister Mr Bob Hawke's ruling Labor Party.

If the Australian deal follows the pattern of the CEGB's recent deals with two mines in Texas, it will involve the supply of about 350,000 lb a year for 10 years. A second deal would bring the UK electricity industry's total orders from Australia to 700,000 lbs a year. Until the end of 1984, the UK electricity industry and British Nuclear Fuels bought much of their uranium from Rio Tinto-Zinc's Rossing mine in Namibia. At the end of 1985, the CEGB ordered 7 m lbs from two Texas mines between 1987 and 1997. The other main supplier is Rio Algom of Ontario, Canada, in which RTZ also has a controlling interest, and which has a contract to supply 20 m lbs between 1982 and 1992. Although the electricity industry also keeps a stockpile of more than two year's supply, it is now seeking more contracts which will extend imports well into the 1990s.

(Financial Times 9/1/87)

Borax Award

US Borax - wholly owned by RTZ - is the world's biggest producer of boron - used in fiberglass production and nuclear power plants among other applications. Last year the company won a prestigious US award for safety in 1985. Nearly 400,000 employees hours without a "single lost-time injury" (Mining Journal 3/10/86)

Well done US Borax! Well done!!

Perhaps we should pause to reflect however that borax isn't quite as harmless as many might assume. According to the Encyclopedia of Occupational Health and Safety (vol 1 1983), "workers industrially exposed to borax often suffer from chronic eczema", while bronchitis, laryngitis, bleeding of the nasal mucous membranes, pneumococconiosis and other illness can result from borax production.
Uranium: imposing an international blockade

The international campaign against the theft of Namibia's natural resources scored a major success on the 27th of August this year (see the article on Canadian direct action).

Meanwhile the Canadian government has announced that the contracts held by the El Dorado nuclear processing factory for work done on Namibian and South African uranium for Japanese power companies will not be renewed after 1988. (Japanese contracts are crucial for the economic viability of the Rossing uranium mine in Namibia.)

The response of RTZ, which controls Rossing, has been to attempt to secure the support of workers in the Canadian nuclear industry and to shift the argument away from sanctions and the illegal occupation of Namibia to one of health and safety. Having made efforts to polish up Rossing's image, on their own admission once the worst mine in Africa, they have offered El Dorado workers guided tours of the mine.

Moreover, the Canun campaign has grown and gained international backing. In recent months the Campaign Against Uranium Contracts (Canun) has pursued its argument for a blockade of Namibian uranium at the TUC and Labour Party conferences and through a protest march at the Springfields plant on November 14.

On the other hand, the fact that trade unions have been prepared to fly in the face of established union policies regarding management sponsored visits to southern Africa suggests how far the campaign has yet to go. The timing of this proposal, coming so close to the emergence of the new Namibian miners' union, is particularly offensive. Canun has written to the AUEW Convener at Springfields arguing: "You could not expect to gain an accurate view of the conditions that exist at Rossing and we do not believe that you should play a role in crudely legitimising RTZ's presence in Namibia."

But if RTZ and the nuclear industry is organised internationally, for once it may be that solidarity organisations can match them.

First there is the decision by the United Nations Council for Namibia to press ahead in the Netherlands with its court action against the URENOO uranium enrichment consortium (a company which is a three-way partnership between British Nuclear Fuels Limited, Uranit of West Germany and Ultra Centrifuge Nederland). A Dutch court has been chosen because the Dutch government recognises the authority of the UNCC to enact decrees and recognises the validity of UN Decree No. 1, while Article 93 of the Dutch Constitution provides for the adoption of measures such as the Decree into Dutch law, while such action may not be possible in Britain or West Germany, a successful outcome to the case will provide powerful ammunition for campaigns in other countries.

Second is the possibility of concerted action to embarrass the Japanese government. Rossing is now heavily dependent upon its supply contracts with various Japanese power companies. Unlike their British or West German counterparts, who are also deeply implicated in the theft of Namibian uranium, the Japanese government is highly sensitive to criticisms of its failure to force compliance with the key provisions of Decree 1 and of nuclear collaboration with South Africa. Pickets of Japanese embassies, trade delegations etc., in support of campaigns taking place in Japan, may therefore have a significant effect on the future viability of Rossing.

And finally, there is a sharply increased possibility of an international blockade. Before uranium can be burnt in nuclear reactors or manufactured into bombs it has to go to one of five processing plants in the West: 2 in the US, which since the Congress sanctions decision should no longer handle Namibian or South African uranium, El Dorado in Canada which will not be renewing Southern African contracts post 1988, one in France, and ORNL in Oakridge.

Over the coming year or so a major focus of CANUC's work, along with French campaigners, will be to bring together transport and nuclear workers in Britain and France so that Namibian uranium can be finally squeezed out of the industry worldwide.

Phil Boyd

Canadian action on uranium

Canadian Crown Corporation, Eldorado Nuclear Ltd. (ENL) has been processing uranium mined at Rossing in Namibia and selling it to Japan for use in its nuclear energy industry. Since April of this year, the Direct Action Network Against Military and Nuclear Racism has been organising actions to coincide with the arrival of the monthly shipment of Namibian uranium that arrives in the port of Montreal on a Christensen Canadian African Line ship.

On the 27th of August, women's groups within the network carried out a water-based blockade of the ship as it entered the port. Everything that could go wrong with such an action almost did. It poured with rain, there were technical problems with the boats. The police turned up delaying the launch and ultimately frustrating the attempt to block the ship's passage. Only two of the 8 boats escaped police interference and managed to approach their ship which has an escort of 10 police boats.

However media coverage was thorough and well done. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation filmed scenes from the event. The water blockade was one event in a civil disobedience campaign which has managed to awaken the Canadian public to the issue of Namibian Uranium through imaginative use of the media.

It is worth noting that Christensen Canadian lines now declines to carry uranium mined at Rossing. RTZ has been looking for another shipper...
NAMIBIAN WORKERS ORGANIZE

The London boardrooms of several key British companies such as Rio Tinto Zinc, Consolidated Goldfields and the Diamond Trading Corporation must have shuddered at the news. On Sunday 23rd November, over 100 delegates from almost every mine in Namibia gathered in Katutura township outside the capital Windhoek to hold the inaugural congress of Namibia's first non-racial national miners' trade union — the Mineworkers' Union of Namibia (MUN). So must the South African rulers of Namibia squirmed in nausea over their Sunday lunch. Mining is the backbone of the Namibian economy and with the miners unionised, tens of thousands of Black Namibian workers will follow suit.

Sanctions Update

Amid much praise of the US Congress for instituting sanctions against not only South African but also Namibian imports of key materials, including uranium, comes the less publicised news that the recent legislation does NOT include uranium hexafluoride (nor, presumably, enriched uranium) but only raw uranium. This means that Rossing uranium, not to mention South African uranium per se, will almost certainly continue to flow into American utilities, where their contracts are for "hex" or U-235 (enriched uranium). Combined with the dogged refusal of the EEC to pass a full package of sanction measures or to include Namibia as a target, it looks as though sanctions will have no more than rubbery teeth.

A Rossing spokesperson (unnamed) was recently quoted in the London Mining Journal as stating that US sanctions against uranium from Southern Africa would cause the mine to close. Rossing's management is no doubt breathing sighs of relief as the holes in the sanctions package become obvious.

Meanwhile, the Japanese government has announced that it is considering switching its uranium supplies from Namibia and South Africa to Niger (whose President once said he'd "sell uranium to the devil if the price was right"). Surprise, surprise! It was all of a decade ago that the Japanese government denied it was getting Namibian uranium despite glaring evidence that it had secured contracts through the Maruben company and RTZ's sinister Mineserve subsidiary in Switzerland.

Source: Foreign Relations (US) 9:10:86, and personal communications.
Disinvestment

Continuing our look at the disinvestment campaign, we reprint here a shorted version of an article on **Socially Responsible Investment in the USA** by Cosmos Desmond.

Socially Responsible Investment (SRI), while still relatively new in the UK is rather 'old hat' in the US. It is not quite true that everybody is doing it; but the practice has been successfully encapsulated within the capitalist system. The main debate now seems to be concerned with just how much more financially rewarding it is to be socially responsible.

The term itself was coined over a decade ago in the US to describe the avoidance of certain classes of investment for moral, religious or political reasons and the promotion of forms of investment which create socially useful products or services. But for more than ten years before that a number of institutional investors had been attempting to apply ethical criteria to their investment policies. Arms and drugs companies were the major targets but in the last few years companies with interests in South Africa and Namibia have received the most attention. Numerous States, cities, universities, churches and trade unions have gone beyond trying to influence the policies of the companies and have withdrawn their pension fund holdings as a means of pressuring the companies to withdraw from South Africa. This has had some success not so much because of the financial effect on the companies but because of the 'hassle factor' and the effect on their corporate image.

A considerable amount of research has been done specifically on the financial impact of divesting from companies with interests in South Africa, but there are conflicting interpretations of the evidence. (The GLC did such a study, which was published only shortly before its demise).

The debate is largely about styles of portfolio management and about the balance between risk and return in relation to small and large companies rather than about the companies products and spheres of operation. Companies which are involved in South Africa, the arms and drug industries (the main concerns of SRI) are invariably large and usually multinational ones. They, therefore, constitute safe and easily managed investments; whether they are necessarily more profitable is at least open to question.

Robert Schwartz (leading US expert on SRI) says "Some people wish to make money; some people wish to better the world; others wish to do both and are convinced that their two goals are not mutually exclusive". I would suggest, however, that it is a contradiction in terms for privately owned and controlled investment to be socially responsible and conductive to the development of a better world. SRI should raise questions about the nature of investment itself and not be simply a conscience-saving exercise. Despite the apparent success of the US movement in relation to South Africa I believe it needs to be treated with caution. Is it designed to bring about a better South Africa as defined by black South Africans or a South Africa which is acceptable to the US?
Namibia: A Contract to Kill  CANUC
Action on Namibia Publications 1986 £1.25
This is first a campaigning book; giving history and background similar to The Rossing File, now several years out of date. The book falls into three parts: chapters one and two give updated history and background to Namibia and the Rossing mine. Chapters three and four try to give an overview of uranium processing in Britain and chapter five deals with the recent campaigns against Namibian uranium. A Contract to Kill brings together a lot of information; it is less concerned with legal matters than The Rossing File. For a more in depth look at the current situation in Namibia look at A Violation of Trust (OXFAM 1986 £3).

The first chapter relates to Namibia, its history and economy; how South Africa exported apartheid - using it as a military base to destabilise its neighbouring Angola. Some political background also; how the contact group failed and SWAPO's involvement. Chapter two gives an account of how RTZ setup and ran Rossing, how it financed the mine, its attempts to clean up its image: the company's claims that Rossing was "the only non-racial and socially integrated" mine in southern Africa will be well known to attenders at RTZ AGMs.

We then have two muddled chapters concerning Britain's nuclear industry. There is a brief description of the physical processes by geographical site: Springfield, Capenhurst, Calder Hall, Sellafield and so on. This material has been covered more thoroughly elsewhere and the chapter on military uses becomes increasingly speculative, as indeed it must. However it effectively shows the 'safeguards' for non-military uses of uranium to be worthless. There are three barely veiled appeals for people with inside information to come forward.

There is some sloppy research - I'm still trying to figure out where the RTZ aluminium plant is in the south west - I presume they mean the lead and tin smelter at Avonmouth. There is no index and only intermittent footnotes. Up to date quotes from RTZ are not always used - Sir Mark Turner is still quoted!

Where the book is really useful is in the campaigning chapter. It gives details of how the campaign was built up around the trade unions, the peace movement, the Labour Party and local groups. Partizans' disinvestment campaign gets a mention though without thought about prospects (see article on SRI in the USA). The campaign against Namibian uranium now has support in the North West region of the TUC, Lancashire Association of Trade Councils and the NW region of the TGWU though not the T&G at Springfield. As the book points out for a blockade to be effective it must be supported by all relevant trade unions and public endorsed by their leaders; there is still some way to go here. These campaigns appealed to workers' common interests in Britain and South Africa - though clearly there are some vested interests - it seems that all workers or managers or governments all stick together in the uranium industry. Even the T&G Springfield shop stewards say the Rossing contract was legal.

The book concludes with urging a blockade of Namibian uranium - though without saying how you could blockade Namibian uranium without opposing all uranium processing.
Unilever: Profits from Misery
What's wrong with Macdonalds
London Greenpeace 1986 Free, from 5 Caledonia Road London N1

In August 1984 the vivisection laboratories of Unilever were raided by members of the Eastern Animal Liberation League. The resulting arrests led to Draconian jail sentences despite shaky evidence, with the leaders getting up to two and a half years each.
This action has been the most important of a number of recent demonstrations seeking to make a public connection between consumption of animal products, animal exploitation, agribusiness and environmental disasters, and the manipulation of Third World economies.
The London Greenpeace group is prominent in this campaign of global interlock. Its two leaflets on Unilever and Macdonalds produced last year are models of what a well-coordinated, radical analysis should look like. For example the Macdonalds polemic doesn't neglect the real exploitation of children - through their bellies rather than through their genitals.
Both documents are strong on the contempt shown by Unilever and Macdonalds for adequate trade union representation. There is a wealth of accurate detail which could have filled a sizable pamphlet. Unilever, with Royal Dutch Shell, has come to monopolise the international seed market and the leaflet lists the company's major products and trade names used to disguise their corporate control (Lux, Timotei, Impulse, Stergene, Blue Band, Flora, Tomor, Birds Eye (sic), Walls, Batchelors).
Its extraordinary that while many established organisations have long drawn the connection between the impoverishment of the Third World and the exploitation of food animals, the overuse of chemicals in farming, and the dominance of multinationals over choices in all our lives, there is still no major campaign aimed at Unilever.
Macdonalds a much smaller kettle of junk has long been targeted by groups in the USA and Australia, Greenpeace London will no doubt be willing to hear from potential activists.

What future for Broken Hill

By CHRIS SHERWELL

One hundred years ago, in the arid wilderness of a deep-western corner of New South Wales, a bustling mining town was founded near a rich mound of silver-bearing ore. It was called Broken Hill, and it spawned what is now Australia's largest company, BHP. Accounts of those early days speak of appalling living conditions and even worse working conditions. Yet while Broken Hill soon became a one-company town, labour also fought to organise itself, secure recognition and win major improvements. Indeed, in spite of depressions, strikes and hardship, Broken Hill had by 1920 not only evolved into the centre of the lead-zinc industry, it was also something of a mecca for trade unionists because of its unique industrial system. Now, decades on, the life of the mines is once again at stake because of a conflict between management and labour. The companies now operating them - CRA and North Broken Hill - want major improvements in productivity. The highly-organised mine workers have been resisting. The new deadline for a decision is January 26 - Australia Day. That will be almost a year
after the present dispute began, a period which has seen a damaging eight-week strike and some extraordinary brinkmanship. The outcome has a wider importance because Broken Hill’s output is a large component of Australia’s lead and zinc production, and the country is the world’s second largest producer and a big exporter. CRA’s mines have a capacity to produce 2.35 m tonnes of milled ore each year — yielding 190,000 tonnes of lead concentrate and 390,000 tonnes of zinc concentrate. But the grades being mined are getting lower. CRA and North Broken Hill also jointly operate the world’s biggest lead smelter and refinery, at Port Pirie in South Australia. Like the mines, the smelter was out of action for some time in 1986. It can produce 250,000 tonnes of refined lead a year, 45,000 tonnes of refined zinc and 280 tonnes of silver. The effect on the world metals markets shows that this dispute has not been just a little local difficulty. Last month, lead prices briefly reached their highest level in nearly two years in London, having previously plumbed worrying low levels. Market sentiment remains fragile. The miners have their own worries about metal prices. Even if they agree to everything the companies want, they say, this cannot guarantee the future of the mines if prices are too low. The companies agree that, even with changes in work practices and fresh investment to ensure increased productivity, the best hope may only be that the mines will keep going until the year 2000. But they say this will at least prevent Broken Hill becoming a ghost town. According to Mr John Butcher, head of the Workers Industrial Union of Australia, the largest Union involved in the dispute, morale among the miners is now the lowest he can remember in 30 years. In his view, Broken Hill is going through its worst crisis since the Big Strike of 1919-20. But unlike other times, he says, workers have no alternative mines to go to, and would now have to sell their houses and leave town if the mines shut. Already this year, hundreds have accepted voluntary redundancy or taken early retirement. The overall mine work-force is 1,500, compared to 2,100 last November. The WIU’s membership has dipped to 900. A mass meeting of the labour force is set for the weekend before Monday, January 26. Before them will be recommendations on working conditions produced by Judge Cahill of the New South Wales Industrial Commission last month. His judgment became necessary after management and unions had failed to resolve their differences over safety codes and work practices. This was despite an extension of a three-month back-to-work agreement which expired in October. Under this agreement, reached under the auspices of the Industrial Commission, the unions agreed to work 19 shifts a week in certain areas of the mines — still short of the 21 the companies wanted. Over-time would be worked on a voluntary rather than a compulsory basis. Last month the unions also asked the companies for changes in the current severance and pension schemes. Though these claims will be discussed, the management privately sees the requests as a form of industrial blackmail to help ensure an accord in January. The bigger issue remains the commercial performance of the mines themselves. According to CRA, results last year were seriously affected by the dispute. North Broken Hill appears slightly less worried. If metal prices remain firm, the companies may be able to live with smaller productivity improvement than they originally sought. But no one doubts that the longer-term future of the mines themselves is at stake. That means Broken Hill itself — and thus a unique piece of Australian history — is also under the gun.

REPRINTED from The Financial Times London 8/1/87
"The (other) GEC Report"
The Transnational Information Centre London (TIME) 1986
Octavia House, 54 Ayres Street, London SE1 1EU

Another alternative report: This one is on Britain's largest manufacturing company, GEC, which celebrated its centennial last year. Funded by the GLC Industry and Employment Branch, the report provides information on a company, which like RTZ, has been attacked by many organisations especially anti-apartheid groups, the anti-nuclear movement, and Trade Unions.

Acceptably glossy, with plenty of picts and a few relevant charts, the report provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of GEC's operations and the reasons why the company has come in for so much criticism recently - though the "Even Margaret Thatcher ..." bit on page 6, knocks six points off its Class War street cred score.

There is a short account of each of the eight divisions of GEC (Electronics/Armaments, Telecommunications, Nuclear Power, Electrical, Medical, Automation, Consumer Products, Distribution and Trading) and the notorious 'Cash Mountain'. This is followed by a more detailed look at various aspects of GEC's operations - the bid for Plessey, the strategy of Managing Director Arnold Weinstock, problems with Trade Unions, and its declining manufacturing activities in London. The final chapter deals with the company's involvement in South Africa, and includes a two page interview with Bernie Panaroff, a national organiser with the Metal and Allied Workers Union (a key member of the Confederation of South African Trade Unions), which ends with a plea along the lines of "GEC Workers Of The World, Unite! (and insist on joint negotiations for a common wages deal).

The reason why GEC has no friends (ie its shares are low, despite huge profits over the last few years) is that much of its money has come from cushy MOD contracts many of them via its most lucrative division Electronics Systems and Components - '20% of GEC's total profits are derived from arms-related work'. At the same time it has ruthlessly slashed its workforce, always aiming for short term profits. The resulting 'Cash Mountain' sits there doing nothing except occasionally buying up smaller companies and earning interest in between. No attempt has been made to create new jobs or products with it. With a tightening up of British Defence spending, the future looks bleak for this giant miser.

The report is well-presented, written with firm moderation, and appears to be solidly into the ethos that the word-processor is mightier than the petrol-bomb. But just occasionally it did seem I was reading about what a nasty transnational should do in order to become a nice transnational; and details of GEC's operations in other parts of the world - Australia, Canada, Zambia, Malaysia etc. - would have been appreciated. Though lacking any hint of the irreverence found in my favourite company fanzine - "Power Junky" from CAPCINZ (now re-acronymed CAFCCA) which details the misdeeds of Comalco - this is still highly recommended reading for, as the editor puts it, 'all those concerned with the social and economic distortions which transnationals cause'. (CW)
A Huelva Mess!
Study of pollution in the Huelva Estuary

PARTiZAnS has been sent (by the Social Ecology Action group in Madrid) a copy of the conclusions of a secret study undertaken in 1984 at the request of the Spanish Government into water pollution at Huelva. We have had this translated and after some delays it is now in written form and although some of the biological terms have us stumped, we get the basic idea. (See map at foot of next page for Geographical reference. The numbered dots are the sample stations)

Huelva is on the confluence of the Tinto and Odiel rivers. There are several large industries in the area, all doing their best to mess up the estuary. For example there are gypsum "ponds" on the Tinto river, and various chemical and petroleum works, as well as the Rio Tinto copper mines. It should be noted that in the initial diagnosis (which is all we have) no measurements were taken further upstream (eg at the mines themselves), nor, in general, are fingers pointed at particular industries as being the sources of specific contaminants.

The study was carried out in three zones: The External Zone (stations 6 and above, ie just beyond the estuary itself), the Internal Zone (stations 1 - 3, ie at the confluence of the two rivers) and the Transition Zone (stations 4 and 5, ie at the mouth of the estuary).

Samples in the External Zone indicated an easterly flow, so that any material in solution would wash onto the shoreline further down the coast. Water samples had a high concentration of phosphates, sulphates, cadmium, mercury, lead, copper and zinc: Compared to the normal values for coastal waters, the concentrations were about 20 times greater for zinc, about 50 times greater for cadmium and copper, and 200 times for lead. However, the waters were still found to have abundant life in terms of plankton and biomass, and a bacteriological analysis revealed levels within permissable limits for bathing.

In the Internal Zone the concentrations found in the water and in the sediment were much higher. The water was found to have a pH of about 6, which reflects the massive amount of acidic effluent pouring into the estuary. The high concentrations of solids in suspension (which impede light penetration) and of phosphates were attributable in part to the overflow of the gypsum ponds in the Tinto, while the high concentrations of ammonium and nitrates could be attributed to urban slurry and an ammonium-urea plant. The concentrations of heavy metals were very much higher than those normally found in coastal waters: In the order of 150 times greater for cadmium, lead and zinc, 300 times greater for copper and 10 times higher for mercury. (It says here that the effluent from the Rio Tinto mines has lower concentrations than some of the other effluents, but I don't see how they can say that).
The analysis of the heavy metals in the sediment showed concentrations of cadmium, copper and zinc some 50 times higher than normal and mercury levels 500 times higher than would be found in uncontaminated sediment. The mercury levels were attributed to the E.I.A.S.A. "cloro-sosa" (translation please) plant which uses this element in its production process. In spite of all this muck, the waters of the estuary were found to be well oxygenated, with good vertical renewal; the levels of hydrocarbons were not particularly high considering the refineries in the area; however the diversity of life in the water was very low.

The studies were carried out under unusual weather conditions: As a result of a long drought, the Tinto and Odiel rivers were not carrying water, and mathematical models indicated that with normal flow from these rivers the contaminants would be carried to the sea much more rapidly. However it was also found that the Odiel would flow more efficiently, so that effluent in the Tinto would take longer to reach the sea. The study was also incomplete in that there were no birds present at the time.

The report concludes that while there are areas where the ecosystem is being conserved, others have suffered as a result of human activities, in some cases irreversibly, particularly the right bank of the Tinto. It also suggests that future studies on the environmental impact should reflect not only the the ecological consequences, but the socio-economic impact of attempting to reclaim the area.
TRIVIA

"Lighter, thinner, shorter, smaller" Who used these adjectives to describe the metals/mining industry in a recent interview?

No prize for guessing it was the heavier, fatter, still rather short and small chief executive of Rio Tinto, Sir Alistair Frame, in a prognosis given to the Financial Times in its last Saturday issue of 1986.

True to form Frame envisages "far reaching innovations" at all stages of the mining production process and far less dependence on mining for those companies like RTZ which have survived the recession, than "even five years ago".

In a forthcoming coming issue of Parting Company we will be reproducing part of the last year's correspondence between Frame and PARTIZANS since his apparent 'apertura' (opening the door) policy, which followed the 1985 AGM.

--------------------

Who said,

"There are some good people in the CIA"?

Answers, on a postcard please, to the editor. Answer next time.

--------------------

Television

11.5 THE PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES
Voodoo in a Cornish Village where
the squire likes to resurrect the
dead in order to cut down on labour
costs in the tin mine. Andre Morell
leads potty but beautifully
photographed horror tale, made in 1966

Whodoo that voodoo that I know so well? Not dear Rioo Tintoo Zoone, surely - with its 1986 plans to save Cornish tin, the
Tory vote in Cornwall and its own face? Relax dear TV
viewer. The above appeared in the Guardian of 19th September
1986. Potty tale indeed! Who could think it had any bearing
on real life......?

This space was left for a very funny cartoon

..but the editor left it at home - whoops, sorry
Anyway have you a good laugh.... turn the page and while you are
recovering write out a very large cheque to PARTIZANS and
send it with the slip over leaf, together with your comments
on this edition of PC to 213 Liverpool Road London N1 1LE

I fear this is slightly amusing, you'll also get your
 exciting issue of PC if you don't add £4). Thanks.
Published six times a year. Subscription £4 per year, which includes information about Partizans' activities.

Contributors to this edition: Roger Moody, Patrick Trench, Paul Thomas, Chris Whitehouse and others.
Especial thanks to Chris for use of facilities.

This edition of PC (and the December Issue) has been put together by the new editorial team (really a reshuffle of the old one!). We hope you like the new format and the style of the articles. Please let us know what you think. If you are involved in any local campaign of interest to PC readers please write a short report. If you would like to write a review or feature then please write to the office for the leaflet "Writing for Parting Company". You can contact us at the address below or via Telecom Gold. If you would like to help with the production of PC then please 'phone the office.

PARTIZANS
People Against Rio Tinto Zinc and Subsidiaries
218 Liverpool Road, London N1 1LE
Telephone: 01-609 1852 Telecom Gold mailbox: 72:MAG11228

Partizans

PARTIZANS was formed in 1978 to campaign against the multinational mining company Rio Tinto Zinc, which has interests throughout the world including Namibia, Australia, North and South America, Britain and South Africa. PARTIZANS publishes an annual alternative report on RTZ which is critical of the companies record of environmental damage, lack of respect for native peoples culture, involvement with the nuclear industry and bad industrial relations. To keep informed of what PARTIZANS are doing subscribe to Parting Company. You will also receive information on the RTZ AGM and other PARTIZANS events. Donations are essential if PARTIZANS is to continue.
All are welcome to the monthly meetings in London to discuss campaigns. These are held on the first Friday of each month at 7.30 at the office.

[ ] I enclose £4 for a year's subscription to Parting Company
[ ] I enclose a donation of _______

Name ___________________________ Tel ___________________________
Address ___________________________