Parting Company
The Newsletter of People Against RTZ and Subsidiaries (PARTiZANS) June 1992

Walt Bresette giving an interview before being arrested for taking down the American flag.
See story page 4

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still only 75p
It's post AGM time once again, which sounds like a new condition invented by the medical profession to explain a restful period of self reflection. Things have been anything but restful - as you will see from the wealth of recent material in this issue. There is, however, a slant on the reflective side, with regard to how RTZ's new chair presided over this year's AGM. There was a definite change of presentation in how Derek Birkin handled sitting in the infamous hot seat. Gone was the more confrontational attitude of Alistair Frame's day, which was known to set the seat alight, and a more placatory - some would say patronising - front was presented. Out with the fire and in with more flannel. The implications for Partizans of these shifts in company strategy to deal with dissident shareholders is dealt with in the following pages. We must not, however, lose sight of our main task (as they would wish) of seeing through this flannel into the truth of the issues brought up at the AGM. One result of this new bleeding heart 'openness' on the part of the chair was the occasional clear statement, which no doubt sounded convincing to any neutral shareholders, but when looked at more closely appear to be, basically, a lie. With regard to Rossing uranium, Sir Derek followed typical and bland opening statements on health and safety being "high priorities" and "any injury being one too many" to state categorically that there had been no known cases of any radiation related illnesses at Rossing. This statement has angered the Mineworkers Union of Namibia, who are in possession of lists of injured workers. The Namibian newspaper has also printed a public rebuttal of Birkin's claims that they had printed a rebuttal of an originally critical article. Sir Derek certainly appeared to be worked up about the terrible insults heaped upon his company and 'workers' with regard to Rossing. In kindness he may be simply misinformed, but his blank refusal to confirm or deny the authenticity of the company documents that the exposed, 'Past Exposure', is based on, makes one wonder. In fact, his tacit confirmation of this in stating that the company would be failing if it did not produce self-critical documents not only adds to this speculation, but also begs the question of why aren't these documents made public by the company? The majority of the workforce and people living around Rossing have a right to be given access to documents that affect their lives, and maybe even their deaths, from the company, and not through books like 'Past Exposure'. As much of the contents of this issue show, from East Kemptonville to the talc industry, this continued strain of polite avoidance, with half (or un-) truths, appears to be the company's answer to growing concern on 'green' and human rights issues as a whole. We should be aware of the continued growth of their more 'sophisticated' attempts to dissipate criticism, especially with the popularisation of the polluter pays principle. Until they prefer open, public debate to continued secrecy then we cannot trust their corporate smiles. Real change is a change of heart.

Are they by any chance related?

Laurens Van der Post, as quoted by Sir Derek at this year's AGM: "[RTZ] have humanised mining. I have been to those places and they do one's heart good. They have set a wonderful example which is beginning to revolutionise the whole of mining."

Laurens Van der Post, in his capacity as patron of the Campaign for St. Lucia, fighting Richard's Bay Minerals: "[RTZ/ RBM] represent[ing] one of the greatest threats to conservation in South Africa we have experienced this century."

(Natal Sunday Times, July 12th 1992)

See Richards Bay piece in 'Shorts!'
A flannel vest is no protection......
Taken from Sir Derek's comments at this year's AGM

Activists in attack on RTZ

Roger Crow

Protestors dominated the annual meeting of RTZ in Vancouver.
Activists from the pressure group Parnassus urged the mining group to be more open, more responsible to local communities and to control the environmental impact of their activities.
But a stream of questions and attacks on RTZ's record was met with polite stonewalling from chairmen Sir Derek Birkin, who insisted that the group acted responsibly and sensitively in all its operations.
In his opening address, Sir Derek sought to preempt environmental criticism. He said the group's aim was to maintain efficiency and optimal sensitivity.

Sir Derek Birkin met sternly of questions and attacks on RTZ's record with polite stonewalling.

Mr. Crow

Sir Derek Birkin has been asked to explain the company's environmental policies.

THE GUARDIAN
Thursday May 7 1992

June 1992

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Wisconsin ...... latest update from Al Gedicks

The 17-year-old battle to block construction of a highly controversial open pit copper-gold mine on the banks of the Flambeau River in Ladysmith, Wisconsin, has once again brought together Indians and environmentalists to protect endangered species.

Last August (1991) the Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Chipewa Tribe and the Sierra Club won an injunction against further mine construction by the Flambeau Mining Company, a subsidiary of Kennecott and the British mining giant, RTZ. The injunction halted work until the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) completed a supplemental environmental impact statement (EIS) on endangered species in the Flambeau river next to the proposed mine. The mine’s permits were granted in January of 1991 after studies claimed “no threatened or endangered species are known to exist at the mine site.” In June, 1991, two endangered mussels (the purple wartyback and the bullhead) were discovered in the river, well after the 30-day limit had expired for citizens to appeal a ruling that had upheld the permits. Meanwhile, an internal memo had been leaked from the DNR that revealed that agency officials were aware during the permitting process that endangered resources were probably present at the mine site. Clearly, agency officials had chosen not to act on the knowledge. Within the month, LCO and the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit against the DNR asking that the permits be suspended and that the DNR undertake a supplemental EIS. Within 72 hours of the lawsuit having been filed, the DNR agreed to do a supplemental EIS.

On April 15, 1992, the DNR issued a whitewash study on the endangered species which assured everyone that the mine would not harm the species. In doing the study, top DNR officials ignored the advice of their own mussel expert, who warned that conducting mine toxicity studies on mussels that are not comparable to the purple wartyback mussel found in the river “may not translate into usable information for the goal of listed species protection.”

Before LCO and the Sierra Club had a chance to respond to the DNR study, Larry Mercando, vice president of Flambeau Mining Company, announced plans to resume mine construction on May 14, 1992. The Flambeau Summer coalition, which had blocked mine construction last summer, called for a blockade of the mine on May 14.

Resistance to the mine reached a new level when Anishinabe (Chippewa) treaty rights activist Walt Bretsette climbed over a ten foot high security fence carrying a war club once used by Black Hawk and “counted coup” on some earth movers. Bretsette, a member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chipewa and a founder of the Wisconsin Greens, hit the machines with his war club but did no physical damage. With the help of three other Flambeau summer activists—Jan Jacoby, Sean Guilfoyle and Sharon Gulseth—he then removed an American flag flying above a 50 foot pile of topsoil at a site being cleared for mining alongside the Flambeau River. Protesters neatly folded the flag and planned to hold it hostage until RTZ agreed to postpone further mine construction. Rusk County sheriff’s deputies charged the protesters with trespassing and theft. Linda Craemer, an outspoken local critic of the mine, was also charged with theft when she caught the flag thrown to her over the security fence by one of the protesters. Craemer, of nearby Bruce, is the first local activist to be charged in connection with opposition to the mine.

“IT’s obviously a faulty permit,” said Walt Bretsette, “so I don’t recognize the authority of this mine to move forward. There’s no proper environmental impact statement completed on this. The DNR is a rogue government. They are bypassing democracy in this process.” Under the terms of treaty signed between the Chipewa and the U.S. government, the Lake Superior Chipewa have treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather in northern Wisconsin, including the Flambeau River. “The State of Wisconsin has abdicated its fiduciary responsibility to protect the Lake Superior Chipewa. Endangered species are threatened,” said Bretsette. Wisconsin mining rules say a site is unsuitable for mining if the activity would harm endangered resources.

Days after the arrests, LCO and the Sierra Club filed a new lawsuit, asking the court to order the DNR to follow the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act (WEPA) and conduct public hearings on the supplemental EIS before allowing mining to proceed. From June 2-4, LCO and Sierra Club presented experts on toxicology, biology and endangered species to show that the DNR’s study was inadequate to provide protection of the endangered mussels, dragonflies and fish in the Flambeau River. It was a preview of the evidence that would have been aired in a well advertised public hearing if the DNR had followed WEPA rules. Some of the most damming testimony came from Glenn Miller, the DNR diver who discovered the purple wartyback mussel while surveying the Flambeau River for an unrelated dam relicensing application. Now a staff biologist for the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), Miller testified that he was prohibited by his DNR superiors from surveying the Flambeau River to determine possible damage to the endangered species from sediments that washed into the river after the failure of the mining company’s erosion control system last September.

Despite evidence of the DNR’s failure to comply with the requirements of the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act and its reckless disregard for the public’s right to participate in the mine permitting process, Dane County Circuit Judge Angela Bartell dismissed the LCO/Sierra lawsuit on June 13, 1992. Among the reasons for dismissal in her 25-page decision that citizens had 30 days to appeal the January 1991 decision to grant the permits and had failed to do so. Larry Lenthall, a lawyer for the Lac Courte Oreilles, said Bartell’s ruling “essentially says if an agency hides information from the public, it won’t be held accountable for it.”

Legal and legislative victories may slow down the onslaught of large scale, ecologically devastating mine projects. But in these arenas, mine opponents are sometimes outspent and thus outmaneuvered by mining interests. When this happens, mine opponents would do well to remember that we have many other weapons in our arsenal. In addition to aggressive litigation against intransigent regulators, we can mount mass demonstrations, file shareholder resolutions, and organize non-violent direct actions against polluters—all forms of “counting coup” on earth destroyers. Wins in the courts and legislature will never substitute for the hard work of building an extensive and resilient grassroots opposition based upon the defense of Indian treaty rights and environmental protection. This is the combination that has defeated RTZ mining projects in Panama and Papua New Guinea. It may yet defeat RTZ in northern Wisconsin.

Green Net, Wisconsin, July 1992
The East Kemptville saga continues. Those that read the article in the last issue of "Parting Company" will know that Rio Algom, RTZ's biggest Canadian operator, has closed this Nova Scotian tin mine, and that Nova Scotians for a Clean Environment (NSCE) are pressing the company on the fact that reclamation plans have still not been filed and that they have noted pollution leaking into the Tusket River.

More recently still, the local authority has proposed using the pit as a landfill site for domestic rubbish. Such a proposal would not require an environmental impact assessment; although Argyll Council have assured NSCE that they will do one. This is still not good enough though, as the Environmental Assessment Act has resulted in some quick assessments that have never yet stopped a project from going ahead.

The Horner report on this proposal says the pit water should be kept separate from the tailings pond to avoid the confusion of liability. But the report later states that the tailings ponds could be used as part of the cleansing process. If they are, then the local councils of Halifax and Argyll will be liable for past environmental damage, and not Rio Algom.

NSCE passed questions relating to the pollution and landfill site proposal onto us to ask at this year's AGM. The responses that were given were the poorest and most scandalous next to those around the Rossing issue.

First of all Ian Strachan, the Deputy Chief Executive, noted that he had been at the Rio Algom AGM in Toronto recently and no questions had been asked there on "Rio Kemptville" (as he called it). It was pointed out that Toronto was still a long way from Nova Scotia and later that NSCE were not necessarily shareholders, but that we were, and had had the questions passed on to us anyway. Although he said that he took the matter "very seriously", the rest of his answers seemed to contradict this.

In answer to the question whether NSCE would be allowed on site to test the water, Strachan merely stated that the local government and RTZ had already done tests and that the situation was being monitored. Once more RTZ was pressed to make information public. Strachan pressed on, over the complaints of shareholders, and would not answer the original question.

He merely stated that the local people would be informed in time, and that they were having discussions with the local authorities. With regard to the question of when they would make public their plans (apparently they are already filed - it is a matter of 'semantics' that the public have not seen them) he glossed over the issue with an 'I'm sure you understand', which frankly I, for one, did not.

The chair, Derek Birkin, forced the meeting to move on with an 'I'm sure you can discuss this with Ian after the meeting'. A few of us, annoyed at this stalling, took the opportunity to do so. Strachan at this point made the bizarre statement that, to his knowledge, there were no negotiations with the Municipality of Argyll & the City of Halifax for plans to dump waste on the site!

His only knowledge of this idea (he claimed) had come from a newspaper article. Is the company only ill informed? It is difficult to believe that the Nova Scotia councils are pushing ahead without some sort of negotiations or 'green light' from the company. The local councils have paid for large adverts in the papers defending the proposals, and NSCE are currently in the middle of what appears to be a full scale battle with them.

Strachan would not even comment on whether he thought the proposal was a good idea, despite the obvious advantages for the company, if not the local people.

Once again we are seeing more of the same evasive buck-passing and lies. Let us hope NSCE has more luck with its local government representatives on this matter...
Sir Alistair Frame, the previous Chairman of RTZ, once demonstrated the great advantage of knowing that you were born to rule the world. As a novice shareholder, I was already suitably nervous about asking a question. Frame, however, got in first with a 20 minute diatribe about the world economy and what the Americans had to do to put it right. In that context, who could possibly care about dust levels at a Namibian mine, or a uranium blockade on Liverpool docks? On 6 May, Sir Alistair smiled quietly while his replacement, Sir Derek Birkin, celebrated the New World Order. The collapse of “communism” had opened up tremendous new opportunities for us (them) and RTZ was poised to take full advantage, provided the new climate of political freedom was accompanied by free economic policies. In that context, who could possibly worry about details? Surely not Sir Derek. But after appearing to pre-empt debate by explaining that practices throughout the mining industry had improved dramatically over the last decade and the company had been in the vanguard of these developments, the Chair offered to answer questions on current operations. Soon he was making a lengthy attack on “Past Exposure”, which documents the company’s record on radiation, dust, and tailings waste at Rössing Uranium in the years up to 1985. Sir Derek radiated confidence that the joint investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency and World Health Organisation, planned for September, would vindicate the company. Agreeing that the past remains an important issue, Sir Derek said that it would be a serious matter if individuals were suffering ill effects, but in fact “there was no known instance of any health effect concerning radiation or dust amongst Rössing employees”.

“Read my lips – no new cancers,” he omitted to add. Birkin also stressed that two of the most senior officials from the Mine workers Union of Namibia, including the Chair of the Rössing branch, were responsible for implementing the health and safety programme and had never said there was anything wrong with it. And, when asked directly “what plans does the company have to negotiate an agreement with the MUN at Rössing comparable to the environmental health and safety agreement at Rio Algom (Canada)”, the Chair stated that the company has no objections in principle to such an agreement and has asked the MUN for proposals. The climax came when shareholders - holding between them dozens of shares - rose to demand that Sir Derek (with his zillion shares) answer “yes” or “no”: were the documents from Rössing authentic? The Chairman would only say that a responsible company would be failing in its duty if it did not engage in self-criticism as a means of making progress.

Meanwhile, questions about Rössing have started to appear in the press (“New Scientist” and “Guardian”), trade union (NALGO and NUM), environmental, peace, solidarity, and left publications in Britain, France, Germany, Canada. “The Namibian” newspaper has led the way with a series of hard hitting articles despite legal threats from Rössing.

Above all, the mineworkers are sharpening their stance. Just after the AGM, the union forwarded a series of questions to put to Sir Derek Birkin. One read: “Within the confidential payroll, i.e. the senior management structure, only 19 out of 63 employees are Namibians. Of the 19 Namibians 4 are black and these employees were not developed by Rössing but came as qualified Namibians to Rössing, in contrast to the white South African who heads the Health, Safety and Environmental Services department at Rössing. What qualifications does he hold to handle such a sensitive and scientific field?”

The MUN also documented an incident in May 1991 when the Branch Chair and Secretary expressed their members’ genuine concerns on health and safety issues including radiation, which were then mis-reported in the “Times of Namibia”. This led the Assistant General Manager, Mr. Sean James, to threaten both union officials: “As a senior employee with management responsibility, it is imperative that you are able to demonstrate commitment and dedication to your position, both within the company and to the outside world. Only by doing this will you ever be able to regain and keep the respect and credibility of your own superiors and the mine workforce. Though you claim that you were misquoted, considerable damage has been done to both your reputation and the Health, Safety and Environmental Services effort in general. Should a similar situation occur in the future, I will have no alternative but to remove you from your position within Loss Control...”
Recently, Mr. J. Hangula, Chairman of the Health and Safety Committee of the MUN branch at Rössing, wrote to Mr. James, now the General Manager, requesting: "...that we, the MUN and the Company call upon independent experts who will investigate, evaluate and report on allegations contained in the abovementioned document ("Past Exposure"). These should include the authors, to verify their claims or to reject the same so as to put the workers' minds at ease." Mr. Hangula then referred to numerous complaints from workers in the Open Pit about back problems, from the chemical lab concerning radiation, high readings of uranium in urine in Product Recovery workers, and from residents in Arandis township about gas from the Acid Plant. He called for independent experts to corroborate these complaints. He concluded: "We have also recently read in 'The Namibian' that the chairman of RTZ agreed at the recent Board Meeting in London to negotiate a Health and Safety Agreement with the MUN. We would formally wish to hear your views on how we can commence with such an agreement..."

The General Manager replied on 18 May: "...As in the past, the Company has no objections to independent experts being allowed to review its practices. We have routinely carried this out by the use of independent consultants and other international agencies. Upon request from yourselves we have also allowed MUN nominated experts free access to the operation. Subsequent to the publication of the document "Past Exposure" the Namibian Government arranged for an audit of the mine by a senior International Atomic Energy Agency official. In our view his comments indicated that Company practice was perfectly acceptable and we welcome the subsequent more detailed audit recommended by Dr. Ahmed. The Company has already given a public response to the content of "Past Exposure" and continues to stand by that response. We therefore see no point in appointing 'independent experts' on a joint basis with yourselves. The Chairman of RTZ did not agree to negotiate a health and safety agreement with the MUN as indicated by you. "The Namibian" report actually read: '... Birkin said that the Company had no objections in principle to such an agreement and had asked the MUN for proposals.' On numerous occasions in the past Senior Officials of the Company have raised the subject of appointment of Safety Representatives with the local branch of the MUN..." (the letter concludes by inviting the union to pursue the matter of Safety Representatives).

So there it is. RTZ has no objection in principle to negotiating a fully-fledged health and safety agreement at Rössing comparable to Rio Algom (Sir Derek), but Sir Derek didn't agree to negotiate (Sean James). The company has no objection to independent experts (Sean James) but on this occasion sees no point in appointing independent experts jointly with the MUN (Sean James). The MUN officials have never criticised the health and safety programme (Sir Derek) but they expressed members' concerns last summer and were threatened by Sean James after being misquoted in the press.

The union is serious about reaching a comprehensive and effective environmental health and safety agreement at Rössing. Is RTZ?
During flash floods on the 2nd of April 1992, 617 toxic chemical drums were apparently washed into the Kelian river, East Kalimantan, Indonesia; the Kelian is a tributary of Borneo's largest river, the Mahakam. The incident occurred at CRA's 90%-owned PT Kelian Equitorial gold mining (PT KEM) site. One person was found dead amongst the drums, but it is still not clear whether this death is related to exposure to the chemicals.

Despite the seriousness of the incident, there seems to have been an unaccountable delay in PT KEM's reporting of it to the regional authority. Antara, the Indonesia news agency, reported that the accident happened on the 2nd of April and yet it hadn't been notified to regional government until April 8th - six days later.

Apparently, the provincial vice-Governor first learned of it from local people's reports. On April 9th a government investigating team visit the site.

Ironically, President Suharto in a speech delivered earlier this year when opening the mine, that mining companies should pay more attention to environmental concerns. He even commented that "mineral and mining...storage [is] potentially harmful to the environment."

Victims

Thirteen people downstream of the mine have reported their skin blistering and peeling, while the government investigating team concluded that these ailments were caused directly by their handling the drums: "[The thirteen] were injured when they were trying to collect the drums on the river containing residues of sodium hydroxide and hydrochloric acid," said a team spokesperson, Asli Amin (Jakarta Post April 13 1992).

PT KEM representative, Mr Mulyadi, also admitted that the company recovery teams had found 4 people with toxic burns, who were being treated by PT KEM's doctor "because the skin on several parts of their bodies had peeled and blistered" (Pelita April 14 1992) However, responsibility for the woman's death has been strenuously denied by the company. Mr Mulyadi claims: "She fell into the river after her boat overturned". The government investigation team came to a different conclusion. According to Asil Amin, she died of an epileptic attack while bathing in the Mahakam river, and her body had been found floating among the discarded drums.

The Samarinda water company (located in the provincial capital, many miles downstream of the mine) has also been alarmed at the possibility of cyanide pollution. The water company's technical director, Abimanyu Hanafi, advised people not to drink from the river, stating: "We haven't got the equipment to test for toxic chemicals".

RTZ's response

Attempts were made to question RTZ at its recent annual general about this incident. The company appeared not to be aware of anything that had happened. Later, a Partizans supporter with recent experience in Indonesia, wrote to RTZ. He asked what chemicals had spilled into the Kelian and Mahakam rivers; who had been affected, why it had taken so long to report the event to the local authorities, and what measures were being taken to ensure it never recurred.

John Hughes, RTZ's head of public relations, responded three weeks later. He claimed that the incident occurred mainly because of an abnormally high rainfall (more than 600m at
the Kelian site) - a "1 in a thousand year event". The drums had previously contained caustic soda, hydrochloric acid or fuel, declared Hughes - not cyanide. Drums are not used to transport cyanide (which arrives at the site in wooden containers which are burned after use). And - said Hughes - they are washed, cleaned and re-sealed after use.

According to RTZ, all the drums were recovered within 15 km of the mine-site, and there had been no spillage of chemicals into, or pollution of, the river. Immediately after the incident, claims the company, teams from PT KEM together with police were despatched through the neighbourhood to ask residents to return drums to the site. Local officials were also advised of the event, and the loss of drums was reported to the Kepala Dinas DPE (Department of Mines) in Samarinda on April 4th. More senior government officials were not advised at the time, says RTZ, because the PT KEM personnel "...did not consider the drums constituted a health or environmental hazard". Additionally "it should be appreciated that the Monday and Tuesday following the incident were religious public holidays and government offices did not re-open until Wednesday April 8th." Moreover, claims Hughes, a team from the mine's environmental department was sent down the Kelian on April 5th to test water quality and "reassure the local people". These tests "indicated that there was no deterioration in water quality".

As for the future, RTZ maintains that action has been taken to ensure that "in future empty drums are stored in a location which is above flood levels" while empty drums will be returned "more regularly" to suppliers after use.

RTZ has thus provided a multiple disclaimer of responsibility for what the East Kalimantan environmental group, ASAP, has called "a possible new Minamata". ASAP has pledged to help the victims of the Kelian spill and work with residents along the Kelian and Mahakam rivers, "who feel frightened to ask PT KEM officials to take responsibility for their negligence" (ASAP statement to PARTIZANS, May 13 1992). However, the group fears that the local authority has neither the skill, nor the equipment, to properly test local waters for dangerous substances, nor the political will to find out what really happened.

So what did happen along the Kelian between April 2 and April 8th 1992?

RTZ blames the incident on a "one in a thousand year" event - one which just happened to occur within a few months of the opening of the mine. State of the art gold mine design in the USA has, for some years, incorporated "worst case scenarios". PT KEM's clearly didn't.

The company also claims that the drums which toppled into the river were cleaned of all toxiics, and simply awaiting return to their suppliers. Yet, at least thirteen people suffered some form of chemical burns from handling these drums down-river. And the regional water authorities issued a call to thousands of river-dwellers not to drink or use the waters for domestic and drinking purposes. Indonesian government officials are not noted for their responsiveness to public issues (as ASAP has pointed out) - but they have clearly been alarmed by this incident.

Certainly someone died as the river filled with floodwaters and drums cascaded into the torrent. RTZ says the body was found 90km downstream from PT KEM. The government investigating team claimed she died of an epileptic attack, and her body was found floating amid the drums. Yet the company claims all drums were recovered within 15km of the mine. There is a clear contradiction between these two reports. Either the woman was not found among the drums, or the spilled containers were swept many miles further along the river than RTZ and PT KEM are willing to admit.

Lastly, there remains real doubt as to why this major incident was not apparently reported to the government investigating authorities for a
Rio Algom sold off

Big news indeed, but not much to go on. RTZ is to sell its 51.5% stake in Canada’s Rio Algom for an estimated £148 million before commissions and expenses. Proceeds from the sales, estimated at about £118 million, will be used for ’general corporate purposes’, and will result in RTZ recording an extraordinary loss of some £30 million. Rio Algom was formed in 1960, and until 1989 remained the group’s principle Canadian mining asset. Since then, however, there has been substantial expansion in RTZ’s North American interests, and last year Rio Algom contributed only £11m or just over 3% of total earnings. It has been suggested that the rush to sell off Rio Algom is so that RTZ can concentrate on its other North American assets, namely Kennecott. If so, this does not bode well for our friends in Wisconsin. How much has the sale to do with the closure and costs of decommissioning the Panel and Quirke uranium mines, as well as the East Kemptville tin mine? We do not know. However, the almost certain knowledge which the directors had of the forthcoming sell-off could well explain their exceptionally smug and bland assurances at this year’s AGM that everything was in order at East Kemptville.

Expansive Frame of Mind

The following article featured in the “Times City Diary” (the what?) on 29th January 1992:

Sir Alistair Frame, cigar-chomping chairman of Wellcome, and British Steel, has added yet another title to his name. However, it is not one that is likely to start share prices fluctuating. Sir Alistair... takes on the chairmanship of the South Africa Club, an organisation in London for expatriots and investors. His first official duty was to host a dinner at the Savoy on Monday evening for Douglas Hardy, the globe-trotting foreign secretary, who used the occasion to reaffirm Britain’s support for South Africa. “A thousand new jobs are needed a day” he told the 300 guests. “Only a South African economy beginning to move fast now can provide resources to meet these expectations.” Perhaps Sir Alistair, past chairman of RTZ, the international mining and minerals group, has some iron-ore contracts in mind.

Campaign for St. Lucia

Coinciding with this view of the South African economy, we have received further news from the Campaign for St. Lucia, who are attempting to save an area of the Greater St. Lucia Wetland Park from mining interests, specifically RTZ. Through its South African subsidiary, Richards Bay Minerals, RTZ is seeking to expand enormously in this region of the country. (For background see “Parting Company”, Fall 1991). It appears that members of the campaign have met with the Chief Director of Multilateral Relations, in the South African Department of Foreign Affairs. They informed him that the they intend to approach the 63 other member governments of the Ramsar convention on wetlands, to enlist their support in encouraging the South African Government to introduce the Wetlands Conservation Act. The purpose of this Act is to ensure the protection of the St Lucia (Ramsar-listed) wetland within the Park. Those who attended the recent RTZ AGM may remember the opening speech, in which Sir Derek Birkin quoted a defence of mining by a certain Sir Laurens Van der Post. We wonder if Sir Derek is aware that this is the same man who is now a patron of the Campaign for St. Lucia... (Shome mistake surely, Sir Derek?)

Amazing facts that you never knew about RTZ, no. 316

Following on with the southern Africa connection, the press interest around the last Lonrho AGM has thrown up some interesting connections between Tiny Rowland, the Lonrho one-man band, and our old friends at St. James’s Square. As reported in the Independent on Sunday (9th February 1992) Tiny Rowland began his business career in Rhodesia in the late Fifties when “he acted for the Rio Tinto mining group, introducing projects and acting as director of some of Rio Tinto’s companies”. Apparently, it was “his breaking role for Rio Tinto [which] brought him to the attention of Lonrho”. Now far be it from us to suggest that there is still any connection, especially given the fact that Mr Rowland appears to be wanting to shed some of his assets (though who knows who may grab what in the end?) In the book “Lonrho”, by Cronje, Ling and Cronje, the authors point out that “Rio Tinto itself was at pains to deny that the [Rowland] connection has been close” despite the fact that “between 1961 and 1969 [Rowland] was very well paid as a consultanat to the main board of Rio Tinto-Zinc.” In a similar article in the Daily Mail (4th February 1992) Tiny Rowland is quoted as not wishing his company to be “an ICI or a Shell, but to be bigger than the biggest mining company, Rio Tinto, whose then boss Sir Val Duncan, he very much admired”. Could there, by any chance, be a connection between his hero worship of RTZ and his near legendary autocratic style of management? Perhaps we will never be told!
Diamonds are for...?

Tucked away in Arkansas is a quaint little reminder of the epoch when frontiersmen were frontiersmen, a spade was a spade, and all that glittered was, if not gold, then diamonds. The Crater of Diamonds State Park has been mined for "micro-diamonds" since the early years of this century. It's still the only commercial diamond lode exploited in America. Thanks to public demand it remains the only land on the sub-continent kept specially for weekend diamond diggers and others who want to try their luck or indulge their fantasy as a "forty-niner". It's also the only mine where the exploiters (by law) must fill in their holes at the end of the day, leaving the land as they found it. A few years ago, however, commercial diamond prospectors became interested in the diamonds below the square few feet reserved for ordinary mortals. They put together a consortium which ostensibly will drill the deposit to test its size and value. But informed sources say that (like those Japanese whalers who continue to murder our fellow marine mammals "for scientific study") the aim is to commence largescale production, with the complicity of the state. The state certainly has a share in the consortium. But so do those noted public servants, De Beers, CRA and Kennecott (RTZ's main North American subsidiary). Ah well, that's all right then! For a moment we thought that yet another state park was in danger from the big bad multinationals.

(Source: DIAMOND INTERNATIONAL (London) May/June 1992 and "Diamond Lil" reporting from Arkansas.)

More Dangerous Talc

In the last issue of Parting Company we featured a short article "Beauty and the Beast" which referred to RTZ's take-over of Cyprus Minerals and its subsequent position as a major talc producer. We referred to research showing that talc mining contributed to lung cancers. PARTIZANS also wrote to RTZ on this issue and received a long reply on 16th March. It stated that: "much of the present controversy concerns tremolitic talc produced from the Gouverneur mine in New York State" which will not pass on to RTZ. The company also claims that "the NIOSH conclude that the excess of lung cancers found in this workforce is unlikely to be due to exposure at Gouverneur. This is reinforced by animal studies on this talc in rats and hamsters, which have failed to demonstrate tumour induction". A great comfort no doubt. The letter gives the customary reassurances of regular health checks and claims that, at RTZ mines, "to date no asbestosifom fibres have been detected in products". RTZ has missed the point. Tests going back to 1979 show that workers exposed to mineral dusts that are "free" of asbestos still suffer up to eight times the normal risk of getting lung cancer, as well as a greater risk of stomach and other cancers. B.A. Katsnelson et al in the "Journal of Occupational Medicine", Vol.21 No.1 (January 1979) showed that Platy Talc Dust caused a five-fold increase in cancer from all sites. This refuted earlier claims that it was only tremolite talc that caused cancer. When the International Research Agency on Cancer (IRAC) 1987 report claims that it has "inadequate" evidence for carcinogenicity to humans in talc not containing asbestosiform fibres, it is really saying that no one has done enough research to confirm it yet! As such, we repeat our call, made in our last issue, for all talc mining and processing to be subjected to the same sort of examination as was asbestos in the early eighties. Otherwise, if the industry continues to be given the benefit of the doubt, it will be the workers who are the guinea pigs (not just rats or hamsters).

No news is bad news on Bougainville

You may have noticed that the continued state of war on Bougainville has been in the news a lot recently. No? Not surprising if you haven't. For, despite the continued rising death toll (as reported in the April '92 edition of the Pacific Monthly) it has just not been deemed particularly newsworthy in most of the "Western" media. It was widely reported in the British press that a negotiator became victim of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army three months ago. So, if he is worth even a couple of column inches, what about all the other victims of the war and blockade - including those who have been shot ferrying relief supplies from the Solomon Islands, and the children who continue to die for lack of vital medicines?

Back in the CIS...

A further interesting point was raised at this year's AGM by Sir Derek, in answer to a question about RTZ's role in the CIS, now that the iron curtain has been drawn back. Sir Derek promised huge megamining projects to help the rising aspirations of the people (to give them some hard currency to buy coke no doubt). He stressed caution, whilst looking for major investment, and announced that a small Moscow office had been set up with an "intelligence network" to aid in this. An intelligence network? Well, now you know where the poor unemployed KGB men will be heading. And the Russian people probably thought that the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was bad news!
full six days. Weather and public holidays notwithstanding, it seems extraordinary that people who might actually be poisoned (some clearly were) had to wait nearly a week before they were informed what had happened - and then to an extent through the media. Whether the government authorities or the mine staff were to blame for this is a matter for debate. But RTZ's admission that "senior government officers were not advised...because mine personnel did not consider that the drums constituted a health or environment hazard" is a major indictment of the company's mindset: a version of the cops policing themselves.

The full truth about the Kelian incident has still to be told. RTZ's contribution to the account has contributed in no way to this process. ASAP and the people along the Mahakam - including the indigenous Dayak communities - are justifiably alarmed.

Kiwis 'don't need to thank Comalco'

New Zealand taxpayers have been subsidising Comalco since 1971 and need feel no gratitude for the multinational closing one site, says the Campaign Against Foreign Control in New Zealand.

"The fact Electricorp is paying it up to $18 million compensation simply adds insult to injury," the CAFCAN secretary, Mr Murray Horton, said yesterday.

His group held internal Electricorp documents quoting the chief executive, Dr Rod Deane, as saying that under existing conditions, "without any explicit Government subsidy, all other electricity consumers will be subsidizing the smelter. Comalco is benefiting by $1 million - $1.5 million per week as a result of the present agreements."

Mr Horton claimed Comalco was also a corporate tax dodger. A study by a Victoria University economist showed that from 1971 to 1987 the company frequently paid no tax, with payments averaging only $1.5 million a year. Comalco started paying the going corporate tax rate only in 1988.

New Zealand would have plenty of electricity available if the smelter were closed or mothballed, Mr Horton said.

Article from the 'Press' (Wellington)
19th June 1992

Comalco is owned by CRA (RTZ owned 49%) and has been the subject of the longest-standing "green" campaign in New Zealand's history.

Dayak people panning for gold in Kalimantan
An open letter to the collective

Dear Partizans,

I am a relative newcomer to PARTIZANS and this year's RTZ AGM was only the second one that I have attended. I came away feeling depressed and angry, and I would like to make a few points about the AGM. I felt as though we had been trapped in a game which we were increasingly being forced to play on their terms. But for us and the people we are representing at the AGM, it is not a game but a matter of life and death. Our big mistake I think was our failure to be as clear a group about our reasons for participating in this event and to fully discuss and agree our tactics for the day. Roger Lowe in his article in the Guardian "How to play your AGM" makes the following point: "1. Don't forget the objective. The pressure group is not trying to change anybody's mind: it is trying to generate publicity. The company is trying to minimise the publicity which means keeping things as boring as possible." Some of us in Partizans spent a great deal of time before the AGM making banners and producing leaflets to inform the general public outside the meeting about what was going on. We were able to give out leaflets, but we were prevented from putting up our banners before the AGM started by the hall security. When I went into the meeting, these banners were taken out of my bag and held until the end of the meeting. It was like being asked to spit out your chewing gum before you went into lessons at school. A banner hardly constitutes a dangerous weapon! It is, however, a very attractive way of drawing attention to what you have to say. Alerting people to their dirty business is precisely what RTZ does not want us to do. Are we going to let them stop us next year? We should also be concerned about the fact that a shareholder was moved to state that it had been "a polite, nice, sensible, civilised meeting". Praise indeed from an unenlightened bunch of crooks... If we are being complimented on our good behaviour, we should be asking ourselves if we are acting appropriately. I don't generally turn to the Guardian for guidance on challenging multinational companies, but I am going to quote Roger Cowe's "How to play your AGM" again. This time it is point three; "Act Appropriately. A bit of shouting is needed to make sure everybody realises it is a protest, which will, in turn, improve the publicity value..." But does everyone in Partizans realise that this is a protest? I think that we should be very cautious about accepting any invitations from the company to discuss issues further over drinks after the formal business meeting is over. This invitation is a disarming tactic and one that is inappropriate for most of us to accept. I personally feel that I have nothing to say to people with a vested interest in not changing their minds, and would rather spend my energy raising awareness among the people who are ignorant of the issues. Only the most skilled tactician is likely to extract any information of real value to our battle against the company in such a situation. We should make it clear to the company that as shareholders we expect our questions to be answered in the public arena after all, the majority of questions simply require straightforward answers, not lengthy informal discussions or negotiations. We should, in fact, have organised our own social gathering after the AGM where we could have exchanged views, restated our solidarity and enjoyed each other's company. I could kick myself for not thinking of this before the AGM.

Finally, I was extremely irritated by one of the shareholders' comments at the end of a rather futile discussion about Wisconsin and the land rights of the Chippewa people. We might as well have been speaking to each other in two completely different languages, and I drew the discussion to a close very quickly. The shareholder responded by saying, "Well, I expect we'll all see each other again next year with your opinions and us with ours..." I am sure we will, but it's not a matter of opinions. It's a matter of profits against people and the earth. In a year's time they will gather again to congratulate themselves on their ill-gotten gains. But we will be representing people who face an even bleaker future: more communities driven off their land, more rivers poisoned, more miners dying of lung disease. This is not a game we want to draw out for long. Partizans would welcome any replies to this letter, or further thoughts in general, on the strategy that we employ and our own behaviour at company AGMs.

K.M.

June 1992
Mog O’Dor

Sleeping with the enemy?

Imagine. You and Alistair Frame (Aly Frame as he used to be known, during the days when RTZ owned Everest double glazing) are standing at Heaven’s Gate. St. Peter lays on both of you his adamantine glare: "What did you do to help the people of the earth, when you were down below?" Frame has come up with a dump-truck of easy answers: all those jobs given to the Aboriginal people at Cape York, after their ancestral land was stripped from beneath their feet; nice, cheap power, derived from Rössing’s pristine uranium; and don’t forget the dollar-whack used to resuscitate the Lillian Bayliss Dance Company back in 1992.

And you for your part? "Well I bought my hair oil from the Body Shop" (St Peter glares) "...and I planted a tree in the Korup National Park" (snort). "But, I let them dig it up again...And I did attend the 1992 RTZ annual general meeting, where I nearly had a question nearly-answered!"

At this, the holder of the keys leans back and pulls a little lever. Muttering "God protect me from my friends, I can take care of my enemies" he promptly despatches both you and Alistair to that Great Smelter in the Sky...

* * * * *

Don’t get me wrong. I’ve followed Partizans’ participation at RTZ annual general meetings with clockwork regularity since the late 1970’s. On occasions - such as the 1981 meeting, where an Aboriginal spokesperson blew the gaffe on the Argyle PR plans, or the 1982 meeting when it broke up in Kaos, or that of 1989 when Lac Courte Oreilles leader Gaiashkabos flew in from Wisconsin - insufferable corporate smugness has been resoundingly thumped by critical outrage and media opportunism.

In these instances, the company has apparently been forced to turn corners it would otherwise have strenuously avoided. Unfortunately, some of these corners are mere folds in a paper dart which the company still aims and fires at will.

The reality was highlighted at this year’s AGM. A questioner (neither company man nor a Partizan) asked why shareholders for some years now had to approve the company’s report and accounts after the appointment of the directors. After all, if the shareholders found out, through questioning, what the company had really been up to, they might be less enthusiastic about voting-in the same bunch of crooks for another thieving year. RTZ chair, Derek Birkin nodded and peeled a metaphorical gherkin: he’d consider the point.

What Birkin didn’t divulge was that RTZ, up until 1982, had in fact followed the
slightly more democratic path. The company changed the AGM format primarily in response to the dissident revolt of that year, when the sheer din of opposition to the annual report jeopardised the re-appointment of directors. Nine years later the company changed the meeting time, too - from pm to am. One educated observer was sure the switch was an attempt to spike successful morning press conferences - like that in 1990, when the Financial Times reported Gaiashkibos as overshadowing the company results.

None of these manoeuvres (and others could be mentioned) have turned RTZ into a more accountable, let alone responsible, company. On the contrary, they have done the reverse. Even more worrying is the thought that the annual Partizans AGM outing ("The Henley of the Left" as the Investors Chronicle immorally dubbed it in 1982) might serve a hidden company agenda. For, the one thing RTZ has certainly brushed up in the past decade has been its public relations. Unable to smash the opposition, the company tries to woo it, and proclaim its facts in nice big neon letters. In 1991 AGM dissidents were invited to view the company's etchings in the parlour upstairs. Only one or two took up the invitation - the rest walked out contemptuously.

This year, the ploy worked a treat. The majority of members of the longest-standing, best-informed (and one of the best organised) single-issue corporate campaign groups, meekly filed upstairs, to chomp the roll and sluice the wine, with the biggest bunch of robber barons this side of the Little Turtle island. Surely this was a case of bartering away the group's heritage for a mirror and a few beads? And wasn't the split in our united purpose just what the company had been praying for?

As the lawyer for Leonard Peltier once told a friend of mine (forgive me if you've heard it before): "When you stand with a foot in both camps, you're in a great position to get screwed!"

* * * *

I hear that the ANC has broken off all talks with the apartheid state. Whatever the outcome of this decision, it puts paid precipitately to any talk of lifting sanctions against South African for the foreseeable future. Readers of this column (if there are any left after the previous diatribe) - please note! RTZ retains the largest chunk of foreign mining investment in the country, and is after more. If you've salted away your anti-apartheid banner, now is the time to dust it off, and prepare to march it into St James Square.

Old Moore's Predictions part(ing company). 3

"[RTZ is] a company which will probably throw overboard once and for all any pretence at servicing the communities whose resources it so ruthlessly exploits. Who knows, we may soon find ourselves longing for the return of Frame. At least his AGMs were never boring!"

Parting Company, Spring 1991
For those that hadn't realised.....
THE CULLIVER FILE
is out!

Written by Roger Moody and published by Minewatch, it has been praised in reviews as "a giant of a book"...

"One of the most epic works of critical corporate analysis to come out of the NGO movement. Unashamedly critical... a truly international work" (Ethical Consumer)

The Gulliver File costs £150.00, but is available to NGOs for £25.00 plus p&p £7.00 (£15.00 outside Europe), and is free to indigenous groups on application. If you're a member of Partizans you too can buy a copy at the special £25.00 rate.
Contact Partizans for further details.

PARTIZANS

Parting Company is the newsletter of PARTIZANS (People against Rio Tinto Zinc and its subsidiaries). It is published four times a year and available on subscription for the ludicrously low price of £3 (nonwaged) and £4 (waged) a year (please don't forget to renew if you need to). We are also very happy to consider reciprocal arrangements with other groups and magazines.

PARTIZANS is a voluntary collective of individuals who liaise with other groups worldwide. It was formed in 1978 to support the struggles of indigenous peoples against the world's most aggressive mining company, to inform the shareholders about the true face of the company and its subsidiaries that it would rather keep hidden, and to encourage and sustain empowerment among those who so often feel helpless in the face of corporate power abuse.

Over the years the main emphasis of campaigning has been on the company's annual general meetings, where the victims of RTZ's greed frequently come - from as far afield as Asia, the Pacific or America - to voice their complaints direct. Those of us less directly affected offer our support and, as legitimate (if minor) shareholders, raise issues in proxy for those who cannot attend.

We have done this with a varying amount of success over the years, whilst maintaining our integrity (it has been quoted that Partizans is the last 'pure', ie uncompromised, organisation left), and providing information that cannot be easily gained elsewhere. Not just what new areas RTZ is moving into, or unholy alliances it is forging or empty rhetoric it is using to try and foil the public at large. But what small communities and self-organised groups around the world are doing to assert and control and renew human values.

As Parting Company shows, the struggle is being engaged on a global level. Act now, and prove the pen is mightier than the mining company!

Many thanks to the contributors.

Yes I would like to commence/renew my subscription to PARTING COMPANY.

I am interested in attending AGMs and I already have a share

I would like to attend as a proxy or to buy a share (please contact us with regard to sorting out share buying)

My particular concerns are:

Name (of individual or organization): ________________________________

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