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SP/ALY/HOO
TRANSNATIONALS

TOPIC NO. 3.

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL POSITION PAPER - TRANSNATIONAL
CORPORATIONS AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE RESOURCES AND LAND
OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE.

The reality of rapid mining ventures in this country pose serious questions not only for the survival of its Aborigines and our culture and traditional lands, but for the Australian public in general, particularly in relation to the future structure and direction of the Australian economy which will profoundly affect the lives of working Australians, now and in the future.

The Fraser Government and comprador sections of business are responding to these changes in ways that will tie the economic future even closer to the interests of foreign owned multi-national corporations. Unfortunately, the labour movement has hardly understood what is going on and is yet to articulate an Australian strategy to counter this operation. In fact transnational corporations dominate the economy of Australia.

All companies aim to make a profit. And to make sure that they keep making profits year after year, every company has to be quite ruthless in pursuing their own economic interests. Because of their enormous size transnational corporations are able to draw on very considerable economic, political, ideological and industrial power. This means that they are able to be much more ruthless, and have a much greater impact than smaller companies.

Since the 1950's we have witnessed an incredible consumer boom in the west which has been boosted by the Korean and Vietnam wars. This boost did in fact increase the western consumption of minerals well beyond their own domestic resources thus sending mining companies on a world wide hunt for cheap, easily accessible mineral deposits.

In this search they found tribal people living in a self sufficient, non-mechanical, non-consuming way of life and the land on which they lived was a place of vast mineral wealth and because of their way of life they had no need to mine these minerals. At the same time mining companies realized that these people had no way to protect their lands, since the white colonists had taken all political power and had title to all these lands in one way or another and it was this factor that enabled multi-national corporations to negotiate in a way that falsely pretended to the government that in mining minerals the economic boost to the colony would be enormous, they also stated that mining would in fact create a great deal of employment.

They also stated that the development of our resources would lead to a better way of life for the Aborigines. But what they are in fact doing to underdeveloping our societies.

The multi-corporations are continually moving on to traditional land of various tribes, and on to the various reserves in search of minerals. This mineral exploration is in fact endorsed by the Commonwealth and State Governments of Australia.

Unfortunately for our people the multi-nationals are finding many great deposits - deposits that are being mined without much concern for our people, nor is there any concern about compensating us for the loss of our land and the continued destruction of our society and livelihood.

Today the activities of transnational mining companies in particular, have a very significant impact on the daily lives and culture of Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia.

To understand the impact of transnational mining company activities on Aborigines, and work towards overcoming and avoiding the destructive impacts, it is necessary to understand a little about the way that these mining companies work.

The essential strategy of transnational corporations is to centralise power into their own hands so they can maximise economic benefits to themselves. To do this, they must oppose any moves to decentralise power into the hands of local groups where this may threaten future profits.

This has led transnational mining companies in Australia, and others aligned with them, to oppose recognition of Aboriginal Land Rights and self-determination. This has had a very significant impact on the struggles of Aborigines to regain their cultural sovereignty. In the Northern Territory it has led to pressure to amend or subvert the operations of an already inadequate Land Rights Act. In other states, particularly Queensland and Western Australia, it has led to strong political opposition to Aboriginal rights.

The lack of any legislative framework to recognise the legitimate interests of Aboriginal people has meant that many mining projects have already come into operation without any consideration of Aboriginal interests. The typical situation in resources development in Australia has been that neither the mining companies nor the Governments have given much attention to the consequences for Aborigines of their actions. The result has been the disruption or destruction of many Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal culture focuses on the relationship between people and their land. Virtually all social, political, economic and spiritual relationships within Aboriginal societies are based on the land. Because mining threatens this most basic of elements in the Aboriginal social structure - the land - it confronts directly the integrity of the total social fabric of the Aboriginal communities it effects. Direct attacks against important sacred sites have occurred throughout Australia. Iron ore mines in the Pilbara in Western Australia have already literally dug up and shipped out an entire sacred mountain without any consultation with its Aboriginal owners. The Ranger Uranium Project, despite consistent and articulate Aboriginal opposition, has gone ahead to mine uranium deposits adjacent to the sacred Mount Brockman. The Amax company of the United States of America, supported by a paramilitary force paid for by the Western Australian Government, drilled an oil well in the middle of a sacred area at Noonkanbah. To supply water to the iron ore towns of the West Pilbara, the Western Australian Government is still considering flooding Aboriginal sacred sites by damming the Fortescue River, which Aborigines have told them is sacred from its source to the sea. And at the Argyle diamond mine, RTZ's Australian subsidiary, CRA, has already begun destroying sacred sites.

In addition to this direct assault on our cultural identity and integrity, Aborigines subjected to mineral exploration activities and large scale mining developments face the constant threat of many social impacts. For example, during construction phases, large numbers of single, itinerant men literally invade their communities, bringing with them often irresistible pressures for prostitution, alcohol abuse, family breakdown, health problems, neglect of children and what the Indians of Latin America call marginalisation. The penetration of roads into previously isolated areas, and the commercial and often tourist development which follows, has devastating effects which many Aboriginal communities wish to avoid. The direct responsibility of the project management in these situations, for example, the management of CRA's Hamersley Iron Ltd in the pauperisation of the Aboriginal community at Roebourne, or the management of Comalco at Weipa, is difficult, if not impossible to prove. The social impacts of such projects, however, and the social process they set off, are undeniable.

But for transnational corporations, the mine which devastates an Aboriginal community is simply one of a number of global options through which the company can meet its economic goals. And its impact on Aborigines is of little consequence to these goals. Only when they become a threat to profitability,

as they did at Noonkanbah, do the interests of Aborigines receive much attention. The following statement by RTZ's former Chairman, Sir Mark Turner, is typical of the attitude of the management of many transnational corporations operating on Aboriginal land:

It is certainly true that we are concerned about (Aboriginal) people at Weipa South, they are not our responsibility...I think our company's policy is a perfectly clear policy which is that we are in the business of seeking minerals and mining minerals for the benefit of the whole world and for ourselves too...I don't think it is our concern to take care of sectional protest interests, I think it's the responsibility of the Government (of the area) in which we operate... (quoted from a transcript of an interview with Granada TV's Mike Gillard, broadcast by ABCTV on the Four Corners programme, 20.5.1979).

The inequality of power between the wealthy transnational mining companies and the impoverished and dispossessed Aborigines whose land they invade is stark. The impact of the companies' operations is immense and varied. Without legislative recognition of Aboriginal rights, and support for Aboriginal community development programmes, it is inevitable that the power of the transnational companies to further their own economic interests will swamp the interests of Aboriginal people, and destroy forever their cultural heritage.

1957. Consolidated Zinc (later to merge with another British company, Rio Tinto, to form Rio Tinto Zinc - R.T.Z.) took mining rights for bauxite over 2,270 sq. miles at the heart of the largest continuous Aboriginal Reserve lands in north-east Australia - on the Reserves of Weipa, Mapoon and Aurukun.

The rights secured, Kaiser Aluminium of the U.S.A. joined forces with Consolidated Zinc to form Comalco to mine the world's largest known deposit of bauxite (aluminium).....over 3,000 million tons. Management responsibilities for the mine were later held by R.T.Z.'s Australian subsidiary - Conzinc Riotinto of Australia (CRA).

The companies adamantly refused to pay compensation or royalties to the Aborigines. They took all timber, cattle and water rights too.

MID 60's. In the mid-1960's, the Tipperary Corporation (American), Billiton Aluminium Aust. BV (Dutch) and Aluminium Pechiney Holdings Pty. Ltd. (French) were granted authority of prospect for bauxite on the Aurukun Reserve.

1965. Alcan, of Canada and the U.S.A. took out an adjacent bauxite lease over 536 sq. miles of the Mapoon Reserve. The Queensland Minister for Mines stated in 1957 that the Alcan lease had on it 'just as much bauxite as the Comalco lease', an enormous deposit. Again the Aborigines were not consulted and no compensation went to them.

1965-75. The iron ore mines of the Pilbara, in the north-west of Australia were opened. These mines make Australia the world's leading exporter of iron ore and currently account for about 90% of Australian production.

This region is a major centre of Aboriginal culture and of Aboriginal resistance, yet has never had any large areas set aside as Aboriginal Reserves.

The major producers are Hamersley Holdings, controlled by R.T.Z. of London, but again with substantial involvement by Kaiser of the U.S.A.; Mt. Newman Mining Co. (owned by Australian, American and

Japanese interests - BHP, CSR, Amax and Mitsui); Goldsworthy (American and British - Cyprus Mines, Gold-fields, Utah); Robe River (Australian and Japanese - Cliffs Western; Englehard; Burns Phillip and Mitsui).

An anthropologist reported that Newman Mines initially employed a few Aborigines ^{but} by 1970 the mining company was making quiet ~~eff~~orts to get rid of both Aboriginal employees and the small group of local Aborigines who were living on the edge of the town. Local police were telling Aborigines that they were not welcome in Newman.

1966. Broken Hill Ltd., the major Australian mining company, took a 100 year lease over part of the Groote Eklandt Reserve to mine the largest Austrlaian manganese deposit (500 million tons). This is on the major Aboriginal island Reserve in the Northern Territory. This deposit is big enough to supply the whole world's needs at current levels of consumption for 20 years. Outside of Russia, it is the world's third largest manganese mine. Under Federal legislation for the Northern Territory, the company has to pay the Aboriginal community a small royalty - \$10,000 on the first 100,000 tons produced and 2% royalty on the rest. They have to pay 1% to the Land Councils and 0.75% to an Aboriginal Trust Fund - 3.7% in all. However the Aboriginal community were not consulted about the mining of their land, nor about the settlement of yet more Europeans on their tribal land.

1968. Alusuisse of Switzerland obtained a bauxite mining lease over the eastern part of the major Arnhemland Reserve - the largest Aboriginal Reserve in northern Australia. Again the Aborigines did not consent and were not consulted. Aborigines could not fish within 30 miles of the Alusuisse refinery because of pollution. Alusuisse have at least 250 million tons of bauxite reserves on this lease.

In 1968 discussions were held about certain conditions to reserve lands with Aurukun's managing religious organization (Presbyterians) and the Aurukun Aboriginal Council, and the corporation promised continued consultation.

1975. Shell (through its wholly-owned subsidiary Billiton), working in association with Pechiney (P.U.K.) of France and Tipperary of the U.S.A., took a bauxite mining lease over 736 sq. miles of the Aurukun Reserve to the south of the Comalco lease. They found on this over 1,000 million tons of bauxite. This lease was secured despite strong opposition from the Aboriginal community. Again no compensation is to be paid to the community. A payment will go to the Director of Aboriginal Advancement in Brisbane for government expenses. In October 1977 the British Privy Council heard a case alleging that the government had violated its trusteeship in negotiating this lease. They ruled for the government against the Aborigines.

1976. R.T.Z. secured diamond exploration rights over the largest Aboriginal Reserve in Western Australia - at Forrest River. Again the Aborigines did not want their lands destroyed and were dismayed at the rush of mining companies to secure entry on to their lands.

1977. Mount Isa Mines, (40% owned by Asarco of the U.S.A.), prevented land at McArthur River in the Northern Territory, near the coastal Queensland border, being returned to the local Aborigines. M.I.M. have claimed the largest (200 millions tons) lead/zinc/silver deposit in the world. There is much Aboriginal opposition to mining, especially since it will entail re-routing a river with important sacred places along it.

The Aborigines of Aurukun and Mornington Island sought from the Commonwealth Government assistance in having the land vested in free hold title to their respective communities. The Queensland Government then attempted to oust the Church management. After general ineffective innovations by the Federal Government, the Queensland Government degazetted the reserves, then introduced legislation transferring them, against the peoples will into local government shires under the Act. This will now enable Comalco to mine the Aurukun tribal lands.

1978.

CRA announced the discovery of diamond bearing aluvial deposits in the Argyle area of the East Kimberley's. This discovery led to a frenzied speculative rush which saw 5,775 mineral claims being lodged totalling an area of nearly 700,000 hectares. CRA's shares almost doubled in the first two months of the announcement on the stock exchange.

The Western Australian Government has facilitated CRA's interest by granting more than 270 temporary reserves for diamond prospecting in the last two years over an area totalling almost 54,000 sq. miles.

The operations of diamond mining in this area is an Ashton Joint Venture which is headed by CRA. The Ashton consortium members are CRA 56.8 per cent, Ashton Mining NL 24.2 per cent, AO Australian Pty. Ltd. 4.9 per cent, Tanganyka Concessions 9.1 per cent and Northern Mining Corporation NL 5 per cent.

1980.

The Western Australian Government approved of AMAX drilling operations on traditional and sacred lands at Noonkanbah despite much opposition from the Aboriginal residence and the Australian public.

The drilling on this sight was later found to be illegal during the hearing of the injunction preventing Amax from drilling. This was due to the fact that the museum had not yet been directed by the government to approve drilling on the No. 2 site. However, police were used to force the start of work at the No. 2 drilling site.

1981.

The Northern Territory Government with the approval of the Australian Government are opening up Kakadu National Park (which has been listed for inclusion in the world heritage list) for mineral exploration and future mining. (Kakadu National Park is next to the Ranger and Jabiru uranium mines.)

The Australian Government are at present proposing to grant the Northern Territory full control of Aboriginal Affairs and the full control of Aboriginal Reserves, and it is the intension of the Northern Territory Government to open up all of the Arnhemland Reserve area for mining.