



Vale to use Newfoundland Lake as Dump Site for Tailings

We need to get to the root of the problem and do the right thing NOW!

A report in the Toronto Star (Sept. 11, 2010) revealed that the Brazilian Mining Giant, Vale, would be dumping 400 000 tonnes of tailings from its nickel processing plant in Newfoundland into Sandy Pond Lake. This is a deep, 28-hectare lake known for its prize-winning trout and American eels. This is the same company that recently bought the Inco nickel mines in Sudbury, Ontario, and promptly alienated its workers into a bitter, year-long strike. How could Vale get away with such an outrageous violation of the environment? Meera Karunanantham, national water campaigner for the Council of Canadians, says, "The authorities are allowing the company to use our pristine water as one big garbage dump." An alliance of environmental groups is combining their efforts to mount a court challenge. They will be contesting a 'loophole' in the Fisheries Act that allows for the re-classification of lakes for dumping mining waste and protects the companies doing so from being sued. The challenge says, "The purpose of the Fisheries Act is to conserve and protect fish habitat. The (government) has enacted regulatory provisions which purport to allow the total annihilation of aquatic life in natural water bodies." Six companies, including Vale, are taking advantage of this loophole that appeared after the Liberal government changed the Fisheries Act in 2002. Cory McPhee, Vale's vice-president of corporate affairs, counters, "we don't consider it a loophole. That's the law that exists." Of course, he's quite right.

The government, which, as all governments do, is acting as the manager of the capitalist system and simply doing its job of making sure of the best conditions for making profits, and the company is simply complying with the law of the land. The federal government has no plans, as far as we know, to amend the act to protect the environment and the Newfoundland and Labrador premier, Danny Williams, despite

his stance of 'no new giveaways' seems quite prepared to give away the lakes for dumping. Concerned environmentalist, Ken Kavanagh, takes the position that any lake is at risk of future reclassification into a dump.

Opposition parties in the legislature have made attempts to legally stop the dumping, claiming that the existing law simply allows mining companies to avoid spending money on building safe impoundment areas. As usual, political parties in opposition make great noises about doing the right thing, but rarely follow through on these promises and rhetoric when in power. In this case, it is water critic Francis Scarpaleggia who is attempting to introduce legislation to prohibit Canada's lakes from being used as 'low cost disposal sites' for tailings from mining operations. Scarpaleggia is in the opposition Liberal Party, that's the party that changed the Fisheries Act to allow the dumping in the first place!

The environmentalists want to see options such as an artificial, lined containment pond used rather than the lake dumping practice. Vale uses the old rubric of providing employment for 475 local workers. One can comment that if creating jobs is their object, then building the proper infrastructure for clean production would produce a lot more jobs. Egregiously, McPhee argued that Vale studied many alternative waste storage plans and concluded that dumping in Sandy Pond Lake would be the best solution for the environment! This outrageous statement is tantamount to the massive blanket of advertising we are currently receiving via the media extolling the environmental practices of oil extraction companies in the Alberta tar sands project, arguably the greatest environmental disaster on earth.

Meera Karenanantham counters that there is the possibility that nickel tailing could leach into the ground water creating problems

Common Ownership means that the resources of the world and the means to produce useful goods from them would be owned by everyone and, therefore, by no one. All humanity would be producers meeting as equals to decide what, how, and where to produce based solely on mankind's needs. Distribution of goods and services would deny no one access to what they needed. This system would end the present class system and render money, trade, employment, exploitation, war, and war obsolete.

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long after Vale has packed up and gone, along with the 475 jobs.

In case you think that this is an isolated case, in June, 2007, the governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin, welcomed a luxury cruise ship, sponsored by the conservative magazines, “The Weekly Standard” and “The National Review”, to her state. On board were elite American journalists who were flown by helicopter to the proposed site of Kensington gold mine, owned by Coeur Alaska, part of the Coeur d’Alene empire (Coeur is French for heart). There, Palin gave an impressive speech, criticizing environmentalists who opposed the proposed dumping of millions of tonnes of mining waste into Lower State Lake. One journalist, Fred Barnes, was so impressed by the speech that he wrote, “She’s got real star quality.” After a lower court ruled that dumping violated the Clean Water Act, the case ended up at the Supreme Court. This was the American equivalent of the Sandy Pond Lake debacle, a test case for dumping. Contrary to most people’s expectations, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favour of Coeur and they promptly activated the mining operation. Randy Wanamaker, a Tlingit tribal elder, and, surprisingly, a mine promoter, who advised Palin on the Kensington site for her run up to becoming governor, commented, “This is a muskeg lake, very sterile. The fish don’t live in it, they just pass through it.” Ramsay Hart, an environmental scientist with Mining Watch in Ottawa, countered, “It gives the industry more backing for its claim this is an acceptable practice. It’s the ability of the government to make regulatory change and have it justified. It means Canada does not stand alone in dumping mine waste into lakes.”

According to Mining Watch, thirteen Canadian lakes are potentially ready for re-classification with another six cleared to go under the 2002 regulations. Sandy Lake Pond and Fish Lake, in British Columbia, are being contested by environmentalists and First Nations peoples. It is the way the process has been manipulated to make it easy for the mining industry to dump cheaply into clean water lakes that alarms Mining Watch. Hart says, “Before there had to be a ministerial order. You had to go to the minister to overwrite the existing provisions of the Fisheries Act”...the process has been normalized. It’s the taking of a public trust – a lake – and handing it over to a company to use for its private benefit.” However, the Fisheries Act website states, “Natural lakes can provide a long term, stable environment for storing mine waste. They have a small risk of failure when compared to artificial impound-

ment areas if no dams are required.” Environment minister in 2008, John Baird, adds, “I’m not going to propose to change something I know we are not going to change.” To say this is a typical response from an environmentally challenged government is a tautology. While chief Marilyn Baptiste of the Tsilhqot’in nation wants to protect a lake, known for a unique species of rainbow trout, and long used and cared for by her people, she wonders what the company holds over our federal government. That the government rules in favour of profit making and not the stewardship of the environment, is no surprise to socialists.

The environmentalists are concerned citizens who are trying to do the right thing, as any normal, sane human being would. Unfortunately, sanity is not part of the capitalist mode of production, especially when it gets in the way of profit making. Environmentalists have been trying to get governments and corporations to act responsibly by protecting the environment at least since Rachel Carson’s book, “Silent Spring” in the 1960s. Now fifty years later, we are in a measurably worse situation. The odds are heavily stacked against anyone wanting to do the right thing in the form of millions of dollars spent by Vale and other companies in the advertising and lobbying, and governments whose job it is to support the profit-making system. The little guy, the small self-supporting organization, lacks the human and financial resources to mount a serious challenge. Even if a small victory is gained, what about the millions of other environmental abuses that occur daily around the world? And how long will it be before that small victory is lost once again? All these problems that despoil our earth and are gradually making it unfit for human habitation, to say nothing of the other creatures with whom we share the planet, are endemic to the profit system. Vale’s solution to, and defense of, their environmental practices is just one of many examples. Just a few weeks ago, Syncrude was fined \$3 million for causing the deaths of 1 600 ducks that landed in their tailings pond in Northern Alberta. The penalty was suggested by the company in conjunction with crown lawyers and accepted by a judge. Compared to the billions made annually by Syncrude, \$3 million is loose change. That small victory was followed right after by another incident of ducks landing in their waste ponds.

This kind of flagrant disregard for everybody and every thing is possible because private capital owns most of the land and all of the processing of resources and the means

of manufacturing commodities from the resources, and what they do not own, they control by virtue of assisting governments. Legislatures are there to pass laws to support the private property system so the Vales and the Syncrudes, and all the other capitalist enterprises will continue as is necessary for them to create profit until we, the vast majority who do not own, stand up and make the crucial change to COMMON OWNERSHIP. Then we will, collectively, decide what is to be produced, where, and how. Then we can produce for use and need, not profit. Then we can assure that the environment and conservation of the earth is the top priority.

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