

Canadian company runs from mining mess

By RJ Navia

If you've seen the 1998 film *A Civil Action* starring John Travolta you would realize just how threatening our world can be. In that real-life film Travolta was a lawyer trying to hold a big corporation accountable for its awful and threatening environmental practices in a small rural town. While the differences between the movie and the Marinduque mining disaster are of location and government protection laws, the issue of corporate abuse is pretty much the same.

Since President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's visit this past January one of the main issues that has arisen is the Canadian company Placer Dome's practices in Marinduque. For those who are unaware of the issue, here's a bit of a background: Since 1969, Placer Dome has owned 39.9% of the shares in the Marcopper Mining Corporation that has been mining in the Philippines. During that time several mining-related accidents happened in Marinduque. Most of them were due to bad management which resulted in the dumping of mine wastes into the waters of Calancan Bay. This has affected nearby sources of food (fish) as well as allegedly causing lead poisoning among area residents. Those in Calancan Bay were never informed of the dumping practices by Marcopper and Placer Dome.

The problems not only dealt with dumping practices in Marinduque. The Mogpog river dam was built by Marcopper and Placer Dome to stop any toxic wastes from

flowing down the mountains into the Mogpog villages. In 1993, a flood caused the dam to burst and resulted in the washing away of houses and the destruction of livestock and crops, people's means of livelihood in Mogpog. The dam was eventually rebuilt, but by 1996, the toxic waste overflow continued downstream into the river once more. Another spill, this time in Boac, occurred in 1996 and raised several

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concerns about the stability of these dams. An internal review was conducted by a Vancouver-based engineering firm, Klohn Crippen, which found the dam in Marinduque to be on the verge of another accident. The report warns that "failure of the dam (in Marinduque) is virtual certainty in the near term under current conditions" and will lead to a "potential for loss

of life."

How does Placer Dome and Marcopper deal with these new findings? Well they keep the report from going public while making a promise to clean up the problem to the Philippine government. To date, the problems remain in Marinduque, only this time Placer Dome has moved its office back into the safe haven of Canada.

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Through the efforts during the GMA visit by people like Philippine Congressman Edmundo Reyes and the people at Mining Watch Canada, the Placer Dome Issue has been projected as a perfect example of bad foreign investment practices abroad.

When it comes to foreign investment, it appears that the general rule is to extract the most profit from underdeveloped countries by any means necessary.

Placer Dome should be held accountable instead of protected. When things like this occur, it should no longer be a profit concern. It should be a humanity concern.

How can people live with themselves knowing that they are killing other human beings in other countries for profit and investments? It's a shame when a country like Canada, which internationally promotes itself as a standard bearer of human rights, in fact houses and protects companies responsible for injustices. We really are no better than those we criticize.

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