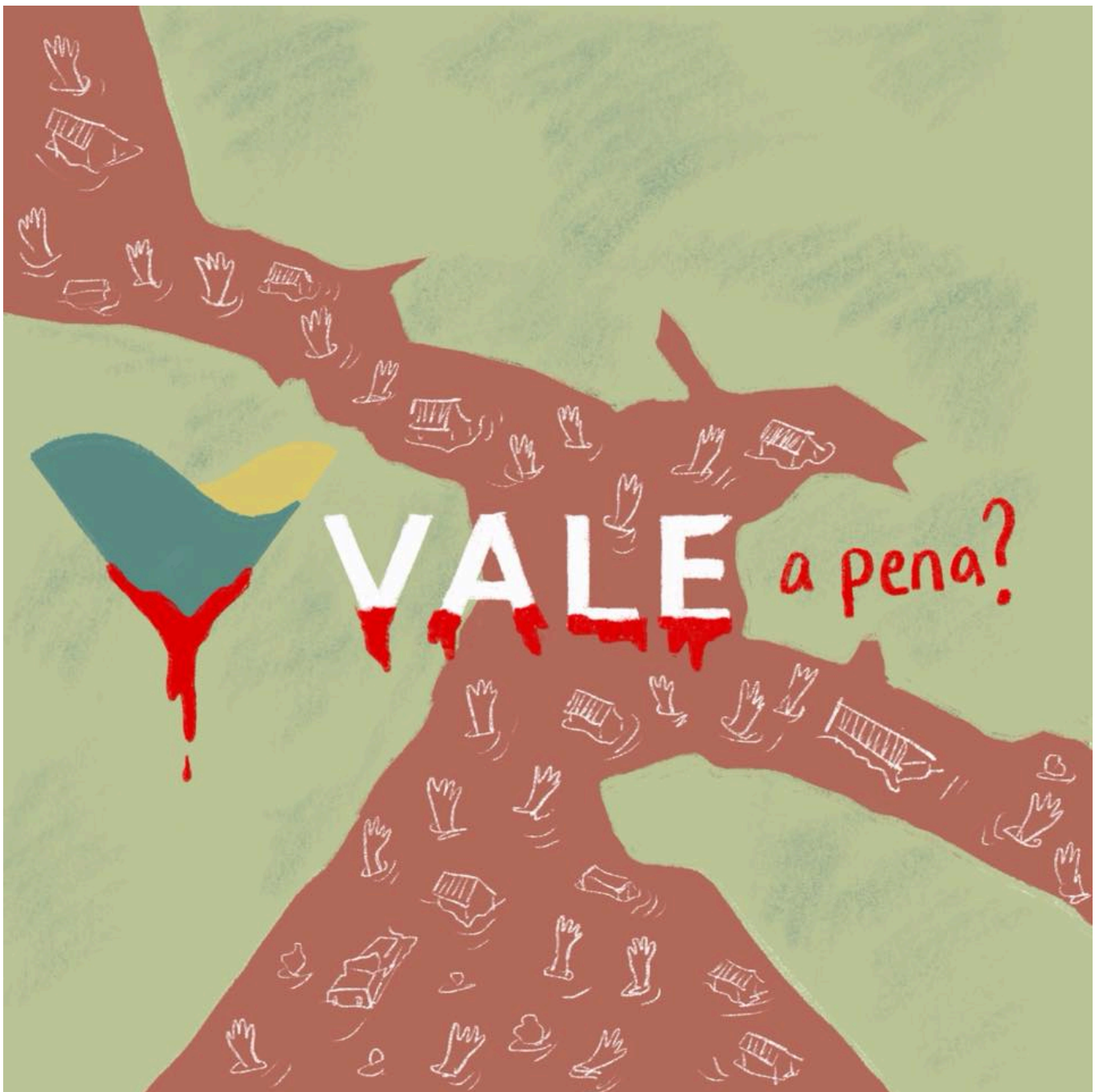


The Mines are Weeping: The Sixth Newsletter (2019)



Dear Friends,

Greetings from the desk of the **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**.

The bodies of three hundred Brazilians have gone cold, drowned in the thirteen million cubic meters of iron-ore sludge that swept out of a tailing dam at a mine owned by Vale – one of the world’s largest mining firms. Outrage was the normal emotion that greeted the news from Brumadinho, north of Rio de Janeiro.

In 1984, one of Brazil’s most celebrated poets – Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902-1987) – wrote *Lira Itabirana*. It could have been written yesterday.

I

The river? Sweet.
Vale? Bitter.
Oh, how much we wish
the burden was lighter

II

Between the State
and multinationals,
Pain

III

The debt?
Internal.
External.
Eternal.

IV

How many tons of iron
do we export?
How many tears
do we hide without a scream?



The tragedy at Brumadinho forced the government to act, but as all governments of this kind do, they arrested the low-level managers. The long arm of the law is shortened when it comes to corporate crimes. Vale (market capitalisation at \$77.4 billion) will remain untouched. A few fines will be paid, but this likely will be taken care of by insurance companies. There is no confirmation yet that the iron-ore mud is toxic.

Three years ago, another dam burst at another mine co-run by Vale and the Australian mining giant BHP Billiton in the town of Mariana (Brazil). Then, the companies said that the mud was not toxic, and the same song and dance began about compensation and new regulations. The UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released an important – much neglected – **statement** at that time about the Mariana disaster. UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment John Knox and Special Rapporteur on human rights and hazardous substances and wastes Baskut Tuncak wrote, 'The steps taken by the Brazilian government, Vale and BHP Billiton to prevent harm were clearly insufficient. The Government and companies should be doing everything within their power to prevent further harm, including exposure [of the miners and the residents of the area] to heavy metals and other toxic chemicals'. The 2015 dam burst released 50 million tonnes of iron ore waste, enough to fill 20,000 Olympic swimming pools. Nothing was done at that time, and nothing will be done now.

There is too much money to be made from the extractive industries, who are treated like royalty by governments around the world as they come and make demands on countries, pay miserly rents to destroy the landscape and make fabulous profits by cheating the earth of its riches. The firms that dominate this sector – from Glencore to Barrick – are largely based in Australia, Canada, China, Great Britain, Argentina and

Brazil; the largest, Glencore, is based in Switzerland. Their annual revenues are in the hundreds of billions, their executives living lavish lives, their heads of government protecting them from the embarrassment of their profession.



Canada is home to half of the world's mining firms, who have attracted the attention of the United Nations for their abuses of human rights and the environment. What the UN pointed towards is the behaviour of Canadian firms such as Barrick Gold (which has run into trouble with its private security force in the highlands of Porgera in Papua New Guinea), Goldcorp (which is accused of contamination of aquifers in Zacatecas, Mexico) and Hudbay Mineral (which is accused of being party to violent evictions, during which women were sexually assaulted, in Lote Ocho, Guatemala). It is easy to hide behind the charming smile of Justin Trudeau rather than to establish an independent body to investigate human rights abuses by the 1,500 Canadian mining firms that operate 8,000 sites in over a hundred countries. McDiyan Robert Yapari, a leader of the Akali Tange Association in Porgera (Papua New Guinea) writes to us that Barrick Gold and its partner (Zijin Mining of China) have about 940 allegations of human rights abuses against them. The Association's calls for investigation 'have fallen on deaf ears', he says. At **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**, we are producing a *Briefing* on Canada's mining firms and their impact on the world. For now, please visit our friends at **Mining Watch** (Canada) for more details.



People hold placards reading “Justice now for Marikana, Prosecute police now, Drop the charges, Fight for the living wage” as people attend on August 16, 2014 in Marikana, a ceremony in tribute to miners who were gunned down by the South African police during a violent wave of strikes two years ago. Thousands of South African platinum mineworkers on August 16 gathered at Marikana to commemorate the second anniversary of the killing of 34 of their colleagues by police during a strike. AFP PHOTO/MARCO LONGARI (Photo credit should read MARCO LONGARI/AFP/Getty Images)

In his remarkable *Condition of the English Working Class* (1844), Fredrich Engels wrote ‘The coal mine is the scene of a multitude of the most terrifying calamities, and these come directly from the selfishness of the bourgeoisie’. What happened in Brumadinho, as our **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** office in São Paulo put it in a terrific **report**, is not an accident but a crime. So are the other mining crimes from Soma (Turkey) to Copiapó (Chile). Major mining firms care little for the lives and livelihood of the miners and of those who live in the vicinity of the mines. These areas are the planet’s sacrifice zones, as I write in my **report** this week. The large corporations have declared a war against the planet, their machinery digging deeper and deeper to make mountains of profit for the few as many millions of people perish into starvation and disorientation. The people who live in these sacrifice zones are treated as disposable, as worthless.

Mining crimes are ceaseless. They seem to come each day. Some are more spectacular than others. It is hard to forget the thirty-three miners who sat 700 metres inside the Copiapó mine owned by the San Esteban Mining Company for 69 days in 2010. When the men emerged from the mine – a miraculous rescue operation – they told the journalist Héctor Tobar, ‘the mine was weeping a lot’ (*La mina está llorando mucho*). The mine weeps, and so do the miners. Meanwhile, the mining companies and their affiliates in the governments powder their guns and open fire. The atrocity at Marikana (South Africa), where 34 miners at

the Lonmin platinum mine were shot to death by the police, is an open sore. Lonmin’s director at that time was the current President of South Africa – Cyril Ramaphosa. For a remarkable story about the Marikana massacre and the community that lives through it, please read the **work** of Niren Tolsi and see the photographs by Paul Botes.



The image above is of Mgcineni Noki (age 30), known to his family and friends as **Mambush**. He was a rock-drill operator at the mine and participated in the strike of 2012. On 16 August, Mambush took the megaphone and stirred the morale of his fellow strikers. ‘We are tired of being captive’, he said. ‘We will decide who will remain here – either the police or us’. He was unarmed. As were his comrades. He was killed not long after he said, ‘Don’t run. We haven’t done anything wrong’.

The mines and the miners weep because of the callousness of our system and of our system's managers. Above, Donald Trump tells Fox News in 2011, 'I'm interested in Libya if we take the oil. If we don't take the oil, no interest'. Two years later, Trump sent out this tweet,



Now, Trump's National Security Advisor John Bolton tells Fox News, without embarrassment, that the US regime change drive against Venezuela is.....well, for the oil,

'We're looking at the oil assets. That's the single most important income stream to the government of Venezuela', he said. 'We're looking at what to do to that'.

Resource wars are precisely the theme of the conversation I had with the journalist Jeremy Scahill on his podcast *Intercepted* this week. You can listen to the show [here](#).

Money wants to drill into the earth, take the resources and make more money of it. Nothing else is important – not the well-being of human beings and nature, nor any adherence to truth. Men like Trump and Bolton and Vale's Fábio Schvartsman spell 'democracy' in their own creative way: PROFIT.

A few days ago, Ghana's President Nana Afuko-Addo spoke at the African Mining Indaba summit in Cape Town (South Africa). 'Many foreign thrones and crowns are adorned with the gems taken from our lands', he said, 'not always through straightforward means'. The places from where these raw materials are stolen, said the president of Africa's second largest gold producer after South Africa, 'look like the most deprived places on earth'. 'I believe we have come of age', he said. 'We should not have to give unusual tax and royalty incentives. And mining companies should not expect to make extraordinary profits on our continent'. But they do – and they will continue to do so as long as the people in these states – from Zambia to Brazil – are weakened.



The point is to strengthen popular power.

A million Communists **gathered** at Brigade ground in Kolkata (India), sending a signal that the Left would be on the streets to oust the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and to fight for an alternative (for more on the Indian election, see our **Dossier #12**). At the rally, a former Left Front minister and a Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Deblina Hembram gave an inspiring speech. She comes from an Adivasi community, people who live in the sacrifice zones of the world. ‘We Adivasis lives in the lap of nature’, she said. ‘Dance comes naturally to us. We don’t need any help with that. We need education, recognition and prestige for our language. We need schools, colleges and housing’. We need, she said, to live in the world, not be patronised by the world, not have our resources stolen and our lands plundered.

Not to be swept away in the mud, forgotten and discarded.

Warmly,

Vijay.

