

***GOLD***

Taking the heart  
from the land

REPORTAGE BY DAWN PALEY  
COMIX BY JOE OLLMANN

***GOLD***

AFTER TWO MONTHS OF PLANNING, EMAILING AND RESEARCHING, MY REPORTING TRIP IS FINALLY GETTING STARTED. I FLY OUT TOMORROW TO INVESTIGATE MINING IN GUATEMALA BY GOLDCORP, THE WORLD'S THIRD LARGEST GOLD PRODUCER WITH A REVENUE COMPARABLE TO THE GDP OF GUATEMALA.



THE IRONY IS, I'M FLYING THOUSANDS OF KILOMETRES SOUTH TO REPORT ON A COMPANY WHO HAVE THEIR HEAD-QUARTERS JUST A FIFTEEN MINUTE WALK FROM MY HOUSE.



I'VE GOT A SHOE STRING BUDGET, USED AND BORROWED EQUIPMENT, SOME CONTACTS IN MINING-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES, AND REALLY RUSTY SPANISH...



... READY AS I'LL EVER BE.





BY A STROKE OF LUCK, I'M MEETING WITH LUIS SOLANO THIS MORNING. HE'S A JOURNALIST WHO'S BEEN WRITING ABOUT MINING ISSUES IN GUATEMALA FOR THE LAST TWENTY YEARS.



UN CAFECITO, POR FAVOR.



HOLA, DAWN.

UN CAFECITO, POR FAVOR.

HOLA.



CAN YOU GIVE ME AN OVERVIEW WITH REGARDS TO MINING IN GUATEMALA?



WELL, THE FIRST NORTH AMERICAN PROJECT IN GUATEMALA WAS AN INCO PROJECT THAT WE CALLED EXMIBAL.



THE FIRST NICKEL MINING CONCESSIONS WERE GRANTED IN THE LATE 1950s, RIGHT AFTER THE COUP D'ÉTAT AGAINST PRESIDENT JACOBO ARBENZ.



THE COUP D'ÉTAT WAS ENGINEERED BY THE CIA TO BENEFIT THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY, A U.S. BANANA COMPANY THAT WOULD HAVE LOST SOME UNUSED LAND THROUGH ARBENZ'S LAND REFORM/REDISTRIBUTION PLAN.



MINING LAWS WERE REWRITTEN IN THE 1960s BY PEOPLE ON THE INCO PAYROLL TO FACILITATE THE PROJECT.



POLITICIANS WHO OPPOSED THE LAW CHANGES WERE REMOVED FROM OFFICE. SOME WERE KILLED. THE MINE WAS ONLY IN OPERATION FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS.



MANY PEOPLE WERE KILLED - LOCALS WHO RESISTED THE PROJECT OR EVEN SIMPLY ASSERTED THEIR HISTORICAL RIGHTS TO THE LAND...



AS WELL AS CONGRESSMEN AND LAWYERS WHO ARGUED IT WOULDN'T BENEFIT GUATEMALA...



- OTHERS DISAPPEARED.



RELATIVES OF THE VICTIMS OF THESE CRIMES STILL LIVE IN THE AREA. THERE ARE A HANDFUL OF CANADIAN COMPANIES AROUND THERE EXPLORING FOR NICKEL AGAIN NOW THAT PRICES ARE UP AND THE INTERNAL CONFLICT IS OVER.



THE PEACE PROCESS WAS SEEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF GUATEMALA AS NECESSARY TO ENCOURAGE FOREIGN INVESTMENT.



AFTER 36 YEARS OF INTERNAL CONFLICT IN WHICH MORE THAN 200,000 MAINLY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WERE KILLED, THE LAST PEACE ACCORD WAS SIGNED IN DECEMBER, 1996. IN 1997, THE MINING CODE WAS CHANGED ROYALTIES WERE REDUCED FROM 7% TO 1%.



THERE ARE INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS THAT SAY THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE SHOULD BE CONSULTED BEFORE DEVELOPMENT TAKES PLACE ON THEIR LAND. ONE OF THESE IS ILO 169.



WHAT'S ILO 169?



ILO 169 IS THE U.N. CONVENTION ON INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES. GUATEMALA RATIFIED IT, MEANING THAT IT IS BOUND TO CONSULT INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES BEFORE EMITTING DEVELOPMENT PERMITS.



YOU'LL SEE FOR YOURSELF WHERE THAT IS AT WHEN YOU VISIT THE COMMUNITIES AROUND THE MARLIN MINE... -DON'T FORGET TO TAKE A COPY OF MY BOOK.



GRACIAS LUIS, YOU'VE GIVEN ME LOTS TO THINK ABOUT.

YOU'RE WELCOME.



OH GREAT, 12 PAGES OF FOOTNOTES!?!



THIS IS THE KIND OF STORY IT WOULD TAKE YEARS TO RESEARCH.



IT'S GOING TO BE TOUGH TO DO IT JUSTICE.



Am in Guate. Everything is fine. Hopefully things will go well in San Marcos...





I TRAVELED FROM GUATEMALA CITY TO SAN MARCOS, THROUGH THE HIGHLANDS ON A "CHICKEN" BUS.



THE RIDE IS LONGER AND FARTHER (AND SLOWER! AND BUMPIER!) THAN I EXPECTED.



ALL THAT SLEEPING ON THE BUS IS INCREDIBLY TIRING...



I'VE GOT A CONTACT HERE FOR JORGE GRANADA FROM THE CAMPESINO WORKERS' MOVEMENT. MIGHT BE A GOOD PLACE TO START.



OKAY, HASTA 10:30.



SAN MARCOS IS SMALLER, COOLER, AND MUCH CALMER THAN GUATEMALA CITY.

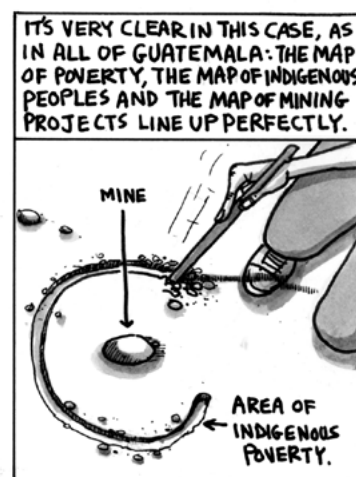


BUENOS DIAS, JORGE?

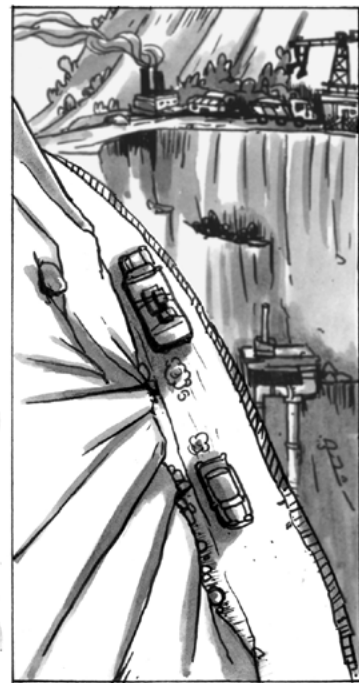


JORGE SHOULD BE ABLE TO GIVE A GOOD OVERVIEW. HE WORKS CLOSELY WITH COMMUNITIES.











SIPAKAPA IS HOME TO ABOUT 14,000 PEOPLE, MOST OF WHOM ARE MAYAN SIPAKAPENSE. IT IS DIVIDED INTO 14 VILLAGES, WITH ABOUT 1000 PEOPLE LIVING IN THE CENTRE.



LUISA TAKES ME TO HER HOUSE FROM WHERE SHE RUNS A CAFETERIA. SHE BRINGS ME COFFEE AND TORTILLAS.



THE MINE ISN'T BENEFITING US... WE LIKE IT PEACEFUL HERE, WITHOUT TRANSPORT TRUCKS GOING PAST AND ALL OF THE VICES THAT MINING WOULD BRING INTO OUR TOWN.

AND IMAGINE, THE WORLD BANK GIVING THE COMPANY \$45 MILLION AS IF IT WAS FOR OUR DEVELOPMENT!



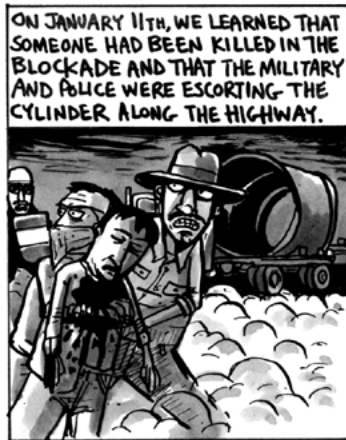
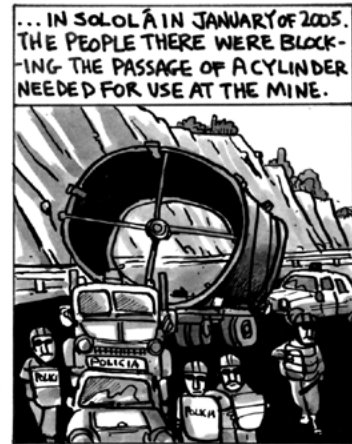
WHAT WE COULD DO WITH \$45 MILLION...

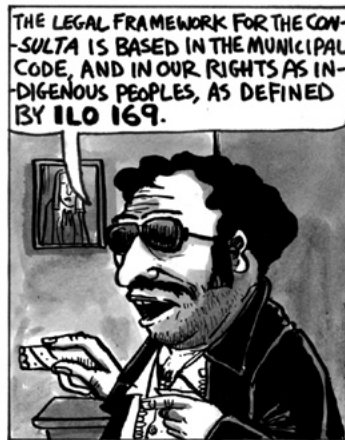


IT'S THE FIRST LOAN OF ITS KIND SINCE 2001, WHEN THE IFC STARTED A REVIEW PROCESS FOR LOAN POLICY TO THE EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES.







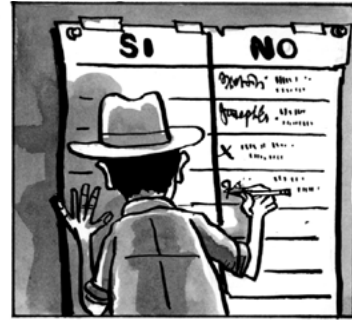




IN ALL THIRTEEN COMMUNITIES IN SIPAKAPA, PEOPLE WENT TO VOTE IN THEIR LOCAL HALLS...



...USING VARIOUS METHODS TO TALLY THE VOTES.













IM ALMOST DONE WITH MY ARTICLE, BUT THERE ARE NEW DEVELOPMENTS EVERY DAY... IT'S HARD TO KEEP UP WITH IT. IM INTERVIEWING VINCENTE FICO FROM SIPAKAPA FOR THE LATEST

WHAT'S HAPPENING THERE, VINCENTE?



IN SAN MIGUEL IXTAHUACÁN, PEOPLE DIDN'T HAVE THE CHANCE TO HOLD A CONSULTA. MOST PEOPLE DIDN'T REALIZE WHAT WAS GOING ON UNTIL THE MINERS STARTED BRINGING IN THE HEAVY EQUIPMENT.



THE PEOPLE ERECTED A BLOCKADE ON THE ACCESS ROADS TO THE MINES IN MID-JANUARY, 2007. THEY'VE BEEN OUT THERE FOR ALMOST TWO WEEKS.



PEOPLE WERE COMPLAINING THAT THEY WERE UNFAIRLY PAID FOR THEIR PROPERTIES. THE COMPANY STILL ACCESSED THE MINE BY HELICOPTER.



YESTERDAY, THERE WAS ANOTHER CONSULTA IN A MUNICIPALITY CALL COMITANCILLO, WHERE PEOPLE AGAIN REJECTED MINING.



DURING THE CONSULTA, THE COPS SWOOPED DOWN IN SAN MIGUEL IXTAHUACÁN AND ARRESTED PEOPLE WHO WERE BLOCKADING!



AT THE SAME TIME AS THEY WERE BLOCKADING IN SAN MIGUEL IXTAHUACÁN, PEOPLE LIVING IN A COMMUNITY NEAR GOLDCORP'S LOS FILOS MINE IN GUERRERO, MEXICO WERE ALSO BLOCKADING THE ROADS.

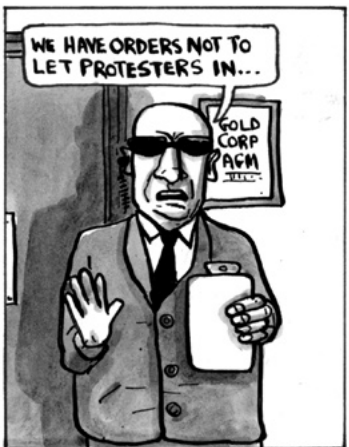


THE SITUATION FOR EVERYONE LIVING NEAR THESE PROJECTS IS DIFFICULT. PEOPLE'S HOUSES HAVE STARTED CRACKING, THERE IS NOISE, TRUCKS AND SO ON.















JUST TWO WEEKS AFTER THE AGM, THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT DECLARED THE CONSULTA LEGAL BUT NON-BINDING, REAFFIRMING KEVIN MCARTHUR'S POSITION...

BUT THE COMMUNITY WILL KEEP STRUGGLING FOR ITS RIGHT TO CONTROL ITS TERRITORY. — STAY TUNED...