

Devastating Impact of Canadian Mining in Honduras

Interview of Carlos Danilo Amador

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RW/TG: We're here in Tegucigalpa, Honduras (January 26). Can you give us your name and position in your organization?

CDA: My name is Carlos Danilo Amador. I am the General Secretary of the Regional Environmental Committee of the Valle de Siria, a region in Honduras.

JRW/TG: For the Canadian audience, can you tell us in general terms, first, the role of the Canadian mining industry in Honduras, and second, the resistance that has emerged in the country in response to the activities of Canadian mining companies?

CDA: In the case of Valle de Siria, where the Canadian mining company Goldcorp is active, the company has essentially come to destroy our natural resources, to divide families in our communities. Valle de Siria is a community in which people lived off of agriculture and raising animals before the arrival of Goldcorp. Once Goldcorp became active in Valle de Siria, through the project of San Martín, all of this [agriculture and farming] went under.

It is in this sense that the presence of Canadian mining companies in Honduras, and specifically in this case of Valle de Siria, has caused massive damage to the population and the natural resources. It's hardly obvious that Canadian capital has come to develop our communities; instead, they have caused enormous damage.

It's a question of Canadian transnational capital operating in our territories and lacking respect for the dignity of the men and women who live in Valle de Siria.

These companies create a false image of what they want to do in our territories – hiding the fact that they disrespect the dignity of our peoples, disrespect our human rights, impose cultures that are not ours, and rob our natural resources.

All of this is in order to strengthen the economic interests of Canadian transnationals.

In synthesis, we can say that the presence of Canadian mining companies has brought destruction and death to our community.

JRW/TG: The Conservative government of Stephen Harper in Canada, as well as representatives of Canadian mining capital itself, describe their activities in Honduras as though they favour human rights and development. How has the community mounted resistance against this false image promoted by mining companies and the Canadian state?

CDA: At the national and international levels we have been denouncing the fact that whatever the Canadians, and also the Americans, say about their respect for human rights

runs against their actual flagrant violation of human rights.

Because, in Honduras, for example, the right to health is an important human right. Goldcorp, which is Canadian capital, has gravely violated this right to health in Valle de Siria. Of the 42,000 inhabitants of Valle de Siria, 80 percent have had their health affected as a consequence of the activities of Goldcorp. So we therefore believe that they are violating human rights.

They are also violating the right and the dignity of access to clean water. The water in Valle de Siria is now polluted with heavy metals, like arsenic, lead, and mercury, all of which are a product of the exploitation of natural resources by Goldcorp.

So, how is it possible that they maintain this discourse in Canada that they respect human rights, when in practice what they are doing is the massive destruction of our natural resources; and that the practice of protection of natural resources that they might practice in Canada are not the same as what they do in our countries.

What is more, these Canadian companies contribute to the worsening of corruption in Honduras, the corruption of those who make decisions in this country.

Therefore, it's not correct or grounded in the facts to say that the Canadian mining companies in Honduras respect human rights.

What is certain is that there has been a tremendous violation of these rights. We believe that the discourse needs to be changed. And it's important that Canadians learn about the reality of what these mining companies do and how it contradicts what they are saying back in Canada.

JRW/TG: Did Canadian capital, and particularly Canadian mining capital, play a role in the June 28, 2009 coup d'état?

CDA: We can say that, in Valle de Siria, during the time of the coup, we never saw the face of Goldcorp itself because they were always using the other names of other people to conserve their image as a company. However, employees of Goldcorp's San Martín project in Villa de Siria came to advocate in favour of the coup.

And the question is who financed them, if they were employees of the San Martín project? Logically, it had to have been the role of Canadian capital in the coup in Honduras.

It's therefore ironic to say that the Canadian mining companies didn't have anything to do with the coup in Honduras, if they were indirectly providing money, as we say in Honduras, 'under the table,' so that those receiving the money would act in support of the coup perpetrated by the power groups of Honduras.

And something interesting that we have to say is the fact that here in Honduras there exists the Asociación de Mineros de Honduras (Mining Association of Honduras). The projects for reforms in the mining industry initiated by (ousted) President Manuel Zelaya said that for the time being there would be no more mining exploitation or exploration of mines in the country. This was a severe blow to those who were trying, at the time, to mine gold out of our territories. As a result, the Mining Association of Honduras played a determinant role in the Honduran coup. The coup was mechanized by the huge transnational companies that

had investments in the mining sector in Honduras.

JRW/TG: What are the principal demands of the resistance in the near future in relation to the activities of Canadian capital.

CDA: In the area of mining?

JRW/TG: In mining, in particular, but also more generally.

CDA: In Villa de Siria we have been strongly connected with the general resistance against the coup. Because we think it's important to defend the rights of the people. We have been saying that with all of this process related to the new government of Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo Soza, and before that the coupist government of Roberto Micheletti, the entire scenario changed (relative to the situation under Zelaya).

We are demanding that the current government introduce a mining law that respects the dignity of the people, that responds to the interests of the people, and not the interests of the huge transnationals. We are saying that there cannot be any investment of foreign capital, in this case Canadian, that wants to come and rob our natural resources – who try to intrude in our interests, in relation to our national legislation. This can't happen.

JRW/TG: How has the scenario in mining changed since the fraudulent elections of November 29, 2009.

CDA: The deputies that have assumed their positions in Congress for the 2010-2014 session have said that they are going to reopen all the mining concessions that exist in Honduras. We have access to the entire database, and all the concessions that exist in Honduras are for Canadian mining companies. And so we are saying that this is the new Canadian colonization of Honduras, replacing the Spanish and the Americans in this case. •

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