



Dirty Money: The True Cost of Australia's Mineral Boom

Matthew Benns

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The Australian mining company trucks had come roaring into the African village and disgorged over 100 heavily armed Government soldiers. The rebels, protesting at the way the Australian company was mining the Congolese silver and copper without giving anything back to the local community, had already surrendered. But their looting of food and fuel from the Anvil Mining depot at Kilwa could not go unanswered. The Australians flew in the Government troops, loaded them onto their trucks and then stood back while they rounded up the rebellion's "sympathisers." "We started running but the soldiers caught and searched our belongings, they arrested my dad and two other boys," said Albert Kitanika. The soldiers refused to say where they were taking his father. "They took him 50 meters down the road where they shot and stabbed him to death." A United Nations investigation found Mr Kitanika was one of at least 100 people summarily executed in the Government operation in 2004. Afterwards, the Australian company issued a press release praising the Government for its rapid response. Asked about its role in transporting the troops, Anvil's chief executive officer Bill Turner said: "So what." Mining is a dirty business. This book reveals that the real dirt lies in the boardrooms of some of Australia's biggest companies. The United Nations named Katumba Mwanke, an adviser to Congo President Joseph Kabila, as one of the people responsible for the illegal exploitation of Congo's natural wealth. Anvil Mining put Mr Mwanke on the board of directors for three years. The Australian company has steadfastly refused to sign the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, designed to prevent dodgy deals, and is instead considering a tie-up with British mining company Trafigura, which is responsible for one of the worst pollution scandals in recent history. When details of deaths arising from Trafigura's illegal dumping of tonnes of sulphur-contaminated toxic waste were raised, Trafigura attempted to stifle reports in the British Parliament with a super-injunction. Anvil Mining is just one of many Australian mining companies whose dubious operating methods have been called into question both at home and overseas. At home mining is impacting on the lives of every Australian. In Esperance in Western Australia a doctor called for the lead levels in children to be checked after 4000 birds died in a few months. Lead from WA mines was suspected. In Kalgoorlie Newmont mining admitted dumping 7000 tonnes of poisonous mercury over the city in just 12 months. It causes chronic brain and kidney damage. In Tasmania 30 km of the Arthur River has been killed by the run-off from the Mt Bischoff tin mine. In Queensland illegal mining pollution is damaging the Barrier Reef while in Darwin a uranium mine sits in the middle of Kakadu National Park—both World Heritage sites. These are issues that affect Australians today. Pollution from mining is entering water courses and the drinking supply of every one of us. The toxic effects are deadly. Overseas, Australians like to boast of their green credentials but it is our mining companies who are representing a very different side of Australia to the world. Companies like CSPB, part of Wesfarmers which owns supermarket chain Coles, which buys phosphate from Western Sahara. Exiles from the region claim Australian money is being used to support an oppressive regime and maintain an illegal Moroccan occupation. Or the Australian owned Esmerelda Mine in Romania, which was responsible for a massive cyanide spill that spread pollution across three countries. Despite this Australian Mining companies oppose legislation that would apply the same standards to their work offshore as they have at home.

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