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2307 PEDRO GIL, STA. ANA
P.O. BOX 3169, MANILA
PHILIPPINES

TELEPHONE: 58-48-28 • 59-76-41
59-41-76 • 59-76-14

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KAWASAKI STEEL

by

Kaji Etsuko and Jean Inglis

* What do coconut farmers in the hills of Mindanao, Philippines, have in common with residents of Chiba City, a densely populated industrial area in Japan? Two things:

The Kawasaki Steel Corporation

and

pollution.

* Kawasaki is constructing an iron ore sintering plant in northern Mindanao.

* *Residents in the area will soon suffer from sulfuric acid pollution which has painful, sometimes fatal effects on the human respiratory system.*

* Furthermore, much of the 5-million-ton annual output of iron sinter the Mindanao plant will start turning out next year will be fed into a new blast furnace (its sixth) that Kawasaki is building at its giant integrated steel mill in Chiba.

* Kawasaki, Japan's third largest steel producer and seventh-ranking worldwide, turned to the Philippines in part because Chiba residents would no longer tolerate further concentration of air pollution in their community.

* *The fine soot and noxious gases Chiba residents have been inhaling since Kawasaki came to their then peaceful coastal area 25 years ago have already claimed 19 lives and produced hundreds of victims incapacitated with bronchial asthma, chronic bronchitis and emphysema.*

* It was not pure coincidence that 1973, the year the company decided to locate its new sintering plant in Mindanao, marked a new militant stage in the anti-pollution movement in Chiba.

* Kawasaki would take the dirtiest process in its steel production abroad, it said.

* *Still, Kawasaki claims that it is taking measures such as installing dust collectors, to cut pollution at the Mindanao plant to the minimum. However, the cyclone-type collectors slated to go in are not able to pick up the very fine dust particles containing metals injurious to human health.*

* And if its "non-intervention" posture to date is any reflection, the National Pollution Control Commission, the Philippine governmental agency responsible, is ready to let the company get away with anything.

* One reason the Filipino bureaucrats are looking the other way is that the government hopes the sintering plant will attract further Japanese investment into the area to realize President Marcos' scheme for an integrated steel mill, his top-priority industrial development project for the country.

* *A 3,000 hectare estate was created by presidential decree with this in view; Kawasaki's sintering plant is the only occupant to date. Although Japanese firms have so far exhibited no more than a polite*

interest in the project, 1,500 families are being moved off their land in anticipation of the start of the sintering operation alone.

* Interestingly, Kawasaki Steel is cast in the same pioneering role in Mindanao it played when its first blast furnace opened up in Chiba. "Development" is the magic word. But Chiba has since become the "pollution department store" of Japan. You can find every kind of pollution there.

* **Besides Kawasaki Steel, major oil, chemical, shipbuilding and electric power companies now have operations in Chiba. The sea has turned a coffee colour from the crude oil and industrial wastes. The once blue skies are now only a nostalgic memory of older residents.**

* The consequences of quick-profit-oriented development did not begin to disturb Chiba residents until 1961, however, a good ten years after Kawasaki Steel's arrival. The first years were ones of naive bliss with school children, now among the hardest hit by pollution, composing songs in praises of the local giant and the "progress" it was bringing to their area.

* It wasn't until the 1970s that citizens' protest tactics shifted from ineffectual petitions to local governments — almost always sweet on big business in Japan — to direct confrontations with the steel monster in court.

* **In the Philippines, however, it appears that, apart from Manila big shots, only a handful of technicians and local bosses will taste even the honeymoon with Kawasaki. True to form, the Japanese company is building its plant with contractors linked to Japanese capital, and Filipinos are employed almost exclusively in low-paying jobs. Even a Filipino civil engineer takes home a paycheck only one-eighth the size of that of his Japanese counterpart.**

* At most, only 700 Filipinos will work at the plant when it is completed. With iron ore for the plant coming from Australia, the Philippines will supply only the limestone, and this will be extracted and shipped from the island of Bohol by Filipino-front companies set up for the purpose by Kawasaki Steel.

* Mindanao and Chiba are now linked by bonds of exploitation and pollution, thanks to Kawasaki Steel. Their citizens may soon be consciously joined in one struggle.

* Kawasaki, facing a court suit and on the run in Japan, was worried enough to call a press conference in Tokyo, complete with an obliging Filipino "spokesman" to counter the bad publicity about its newest operation abroad.

* **And with good reason: The now militant and sophisticated anti-pollution residents of Chiba City started a leafletting campaign in November with slogans linking the Philippines sintering plant with the new blast furnace they are determined to keep out of their community:**

"Don't Make Mindanao Another Chiba!" say the people.

TEA AND THE CHURCH

by

Fr. Emmett Devlin, OP.

* **Sri Lanka — once Ceylon — has a population of 13 million people. The whole island is only 25,000 square miles in area.**

* 70% of the people are Sinhalese, 20% are Ceylon Tamils and 10% are Indian Tamils brought to the Island early last century to clear the land and work the tea estates.

* *These various racial groups live together in a certain degree of harmony but underneath there are causes for very bitter tension.*

* **In particular the Indian Tamils have been very ill-treated by both the colonial government and the Sinhalese majority since independence in 1947.**

* *My first impression of Sri Lanka was the poverty.*

* Everywhere one sees so many thousands of people, people in rags, barefoot, sleeping in doorways, begging. All around the city and major towns people live huddled together in shanties and slums.

* The children, on the streets at an early age, try to eke out an existence by selling peanuts or betel. I saw a three-year-old girl singing a little song accompanied by a dance and then taking around her tin for a few coins.

* *Everywhere people . . . poor people.*

* **This is the 'gem of the Orient' as the British called it — this very fertile country, with a relatively small population. There must be some reason for it.**

* Families were living in overcrowded conditions — sometimes two families to a room 10' x 8'.

* There seemed to be no attempt at hygiene at all on many of the lines — rows of houses, back to back — I visited. On many lines there was no running water and the toilets were, more often than not, out of use because there was no running water.

* There was no electricity in any of the houses.

* Many complained about the shortage of rations, pay being withheld, pensions and provident fund payments not being made. There were complaints also of overtime not being paid and of government-distributed 'free rations' of flour and rice being taken from their wages.

* Many of the children showed signs of malnutrition — swollen stomachs, limbs with no flesh on them. Many also had skin infections and sores. Twelve-year-old children looked like five or six-year-olds.

* *When one asks the cause for this misery and for the 'face of poverty' which one sees in the city and towns, there would seem to be a number of reasons.*

First of all the historical fact that for four centuries Ceylon was occupied first by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch and last of all by the British. The British planters brought the tea and the Tamils to work the plantations. These migrant workers have lived in isolation from the rest of the country and for 150 years they have been exploited.

The history of the British in Ceylon is marked with the same characteristics of land plunder, exploitation of resources and people as her presence in so many other colonies. The price of that exploitation is written everywhere across the face of Sri Lanka today.

The second cause for the misery of the estate workers must be placed at the feet of the independent government of Sri Lanka. In 1948 the Indian Tamils lost their vote and their citizenship and ever since they have remained a pawn in the hands of the politicians who fear their political influence should they regain their civil rights.

Many have been repatriated to India but there are still a large number who have not yet been given citizenship in Sri Lanka.

The third cause may be found in the complicity of the trade unions with the government parties. The trade unions have not honestly fought for the rights of the Tamil workers — or other workers for that matter — yet one trade union alone has not been slow to collect A$50,000 per month from the estate workers. Mr. Thondaman, the head of this union, was himself a large plantation owner.

Finally, the cause of the poverty of these people and of so many others in developing countries may be found in the unjust structures of the world marketing system of primary products and raw materials especially from Third World countries.

Ultimately, the cause comes back to the low price of tea. The price of tea paid to the producing countries has remained static for 10 years and this was brought about by the monopoly that is held over the world tea marketing system by a handful of companies which operate from the United Kingdom.

Not only do four companies control 85% of the tea that comes into the U. K. but the buyers of one of these companies, Brooke Bond Ltd., purchases tea for many other companies as well as in many countries throughout the world including Australia. Brooke Bond alone buys almost 60% of the tea that comes into Australia from Sri Lanka.

The auction system which is meant to provide some objective standard of prices for both buyer and producer breaks down when only a few buyers are bidding. Neither the producing country nor the consumer benefits. The producer has to face rising costs, etc. The consumer pays twice as much or more for his tea than the producer gets and he is daddled with very inferior quality tea that comes to him from the blending machines of the trade sold under proprietory brand names.

Good teas are blended with low quality tea and rubbish and the consumer has little option but to buy the result. His tastes have been conditioned to these blends over a long period of time.

The consumer is as much the victim of the monopoly held over the marketing of tea as the producing country.

* **The question which we ask ourselves when we become aware of this situation is this: Where is the Church — the Church in Sri Lanka and the Church in Australia — in all this?**

* In comparison with other countries in Asia, Sri Lanka has a high proportion of Christians: 9% of the whole population.

* *My impression of the Churches was that they were inward looking institutions far removed from the lives of the people and the problems that face people and country.*

* **The clergy and other full time workers seemed in the main to be remote. They enjoy a position of privilege and they seem to accept this approach rather than one of service.**

* There is a small group which could be counted on two hands that have opted to become more involved in changing the unjust structures of their society and they may be found working with others outside the Churches. They seem to understand the task of preaching the Gospel today in a country like Sri Lanka as having something to say about the social environment in which the Gospel is preached.

* *The word of Christ, they would claim, has a liberating effect on the lives of those whom it reaches and the situation in which they live is changed in and through the gospel as it frees people from the forces of oppression, from their fears and from the unjust structures that keep them bound.*

* But what of the Churches in Australia?

* **How does a Christian react to an awareness of these exploitative structures that cause so much poverty and suffering?**

* In the past our reaction has been one of indifference brought about by ignorance or a sense of helplessness. Can we afford this indifference any longer with the Churches overseas appealing for help and in the light of current thinking on the global concept of man and the mission of the Churches?

* *The Churches have an international character and there are strong links that bind Churches together on a transnational level. Are these links being used as effectively as they could be to work for more justice in the world and in particular in the structures of trade between the developing countries and the so-called developed countries?*

* Are the Churches in Australia willing to take a stand and work for a better system of marketing of Third World commodities? Will the Australian Churches join with Sri Lanka and other tea-producing countries to help them change the present marketing system and the monopoly that controls the tea industry?

* Will the Christians in Australia work for the removal of duties that protect the trade but do not serve the interests of either the producing country or the consumer?

* All of these questions look for an answer from the Churches in the developed countries.

* **We cannot afford to ignore the questions nor to be indifferent towards the problems of world poverty, malnutrition and hunger which are the result of unjust structures.**

* The years ahead will be difficult ones for Sri Lanka as she tries to diversify her production, free her people and keep up her foreign exchange earnings through the sale of tea and other crops.

* *The Australian Churches can lend their support to the voluntary action groups which are trying to create an awareness of these problems. The Churches can raise their voices on behalf of the voiceless and use their influence to change the unjust marketing system.*

* **Sri Lanka is one of the four countries most adversely affected by the current shortage of food in the world. How these people will come through will depend in no small measure on the people of Australia and the Australian Churches.**

Editor's Note:

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