

PART 1

Vancouver evening public roundtable. *What obstacles prevented government from creating a forum earlier given long history of environmental and human rights abuses by Canadian extractive companies overseas? *Where is this process heading and how will interventions at roundtable become a part of policy process / contribute to legislation? *Given that victims of environmental and human rights abuses by overseas Canadian companies live overseas, why aren't funds made available to bring those most affected to speak at roundtables? *Why is there no one at roundtable who can speak for government? *How do Canadian companies argue against complying with minimum human rights and environmental standards without sounding murderous? *How does government defend use of public funds to support Canadian companies that can violate international HHRR and environmental standards? * How will my questions be answered and by whom?

PART 2

The following is a written summary of questions I asked at the Vancouver Roundtable on Corporate Social Responsibility: Canadian Extractive Companies in Developing Countries. Rather than converting my comments to formal written style, I have tried to preserve the feeling of spontaneity, anger, and real curiosity that I felt as I asked my questions at the roundtable last week.

First, my name is Kevin Gould. I am a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia in the Department of Geography but I do not represent the Department or the University. I spoke as a concerned person.

My background and motivation for attending the roundtable relates to my doctoral research on World Bank land policy in Guatemala. During 2004 and 2005 I lived in Guatemala. Reading the Guatemalan daily newspaper during that period sensitized me to the problems that Canadian- and other international mining operations cause in that country. Frequently the mainstream national papers reported on communities attempting to prevent mining companies from operating on their lands.

In spite of the Guatemalan government being ostensibly democratic, there seemed to be little interest on the part of the government to represent these communities. Instead the government primarily backed the mining companies. So I guess you could say that my education about Canadian mining has come as a result of reading the daily paper during the last few years while living in Guatemala.

At the roundtable, I had originally intended to present a short anecdote from my research on the World Bank group and then urge the Canadian government to develop policies for

monitoring the activities of the World Bank. However, I think it is more useful instead to ask questions that occurred to me before and mostly during the round table.

(1) As the meeting began, I got the feeling from the government introduction that this is the first time that you have heard about international problems related to mining being carried out by Canadian companies. I also understand that this is the first round table. And yet I am aware, based on discussions with friends in Guatemala that in that one country there is a history of abuses by Canadian companies. The same is true I believe in the Philippines, and I suspect in many other countries. In this context, I cannot understand why this sort of public discussion is occurring for the first time in 2006. Why then has it taken so long for a roundtable to be convened? What have been the obstacles that have prevented the Canadian government from acting on a history of overseas complaints about the behavior of Canadian companies? And more importantly, where is this process heading? Specifically, how will the discussions that occur at the roundtables contribute to the formation of law or to a policy process that will lead to new legislation?

(2) As I understand it the primary victims of Canadian companies working in the Global South are logically people living in the Global South. I imagine that the Canadian government would agree that it is extremely important to find out the truth about accusations against Canadian corporations. Yet, I understand that the Canadian government has not made funds available to bring citizens of affected communities to the round tables. Why? And more importantly, given the seriousness of this oversight—at least I view it as an oversight--how are funds going to be made available to bring representatives of affected communities to the upcoming round tables?

(3) Why isn't media here today? Although I have already been critical of this process in the sense that it has come so late on and seems to be lacking in a variety of ways, I am still impressed that the Canadian government is willing to confront these issues and discuss them openly. Given that this is such an important step, what is the Canadian government doing to insure that these roundtables are publicized? I think that publication is important not only to insure maximal participation but also to advertise the fact that the Canadian government is involved in something progressive and important.

(4) Why is it that there is no one here who can speak for the government? Even if there is a good reason for this, I want to share how the absence of a government spokesperson leaves me feeling. When one comes to a forum like this as a concerned citizen, there is always a nagging fear that the event is just a mechanism to encourage citizenry to vent rather than a stepping stone towards real change. The fact that there is no person vested with the power to speak for the government reinforces that feeling that my participation will come to nothing, that the process is a dead end and perhaps just a waste of all of our time and of taxpayer money.

(5) I don't understand why the Canadian government would consider voluntary measures as a way to get companies to comply with international human rights and environmental standards. Since we are talking about MINIMUM human rights and environmental standards I also don't understand what arguments companies would use to object without

sounding murderous. These are international standards and therefore the decision to obey them is not up for grabs. It seems to me that the Canadian government like all states that signed off on these agreements should do everything in its power to make sure that companies comply. At the least I imagine this would mean that federal support of Canadian extractive companies working overseas should be conditional on companies demonstrating compliance with international human rights and environmental standards. This does not mean, by the way, that I am against the Canadian government creating incentives for over-achieving companies that exceed minimum standards.

(6) Finally, I would like to know who will answer these questions that I have posed and when I can expect to hear back.