

MINING TO STOP AT TIMBARRA

Environmentalists appear to have scored a major victory of late, with the Ross Mining company announcing that they will be suspending mining at the Timbarra mountain gold mine. The Timbarra project was to consist of three open cut mines, destroying the top of the mountain to retrieve 50,000 ounces of gold a year from 2 million tonnes of rock. The plan was to use the cyanide leaching process to derive the gold from the ore, endangering the entire Timbarra catchment area. There has already been - one week after ore processing commenced - a cyanide leak which forced the mine to shut down for two weeks in order to clean up. The controversial mine has been the site of a long-standing blockade, part of a three-year campaign to prevent the operation.

Following Ross's recent decision, mining will cease from the end of this month; sixty workers will lose their jobs. The company is claiming that the crestfallen world gold price, as well as extra costs incurred by their failure to properly take into account the levels of rainfall in the area, have made it unviable to expand the mine any further. Those involved with the blockade, however, think that the constant pressure from the blockade, the extra security costs involved in securing the site against blockade, as well as the threat from a recently commenced court case might have had something to do with it as well. It appears that Ross believes that they must only admit to taking economic concerns into account, in order to maintain their practice of rationalising all concerns into economics.

The area has been subject to conflicting native title claims, as the various Aboriginal groups in the area were artificially collapsed [for the purposes of Anglo definitions] into one group, the Bundjalung. A recent case has seen Cathy Malera Bundjalan register as a native title claimant; she claims that the mining lease was signed by men who had no authority to do so, and that the matrilineal descent line of her people gives her the authority to grant or refuse land usage requests.

The mining will continue, blasting as much as possible, until the end of this month, damaging the sacred mountain, the site of Bundjalan burial grounds for thousands of years. Also, Ross will continue exploration for further reserves all down the plateau to Armidale. The campaign to stop Ross is not over. Natasha Verco, the NSW National Union of Students co-Environment Officer, has been heavily involved with the blockade.

"The win is firstly that the cyanide won't be leaking into the whole catchment" she said yesterday, "but most importantly the indigenous people have some kind of self-determination over their sacred land. The more the mine expanded, the more the more the mountain gets destroyed." But for now, there is some quiet rejoicing.

- Ben Langford



pssst... Wanna buy some bad debt?

This wonderful Federal Government of ours...when Labor were in they tried to tell us that paying into the Higher Education Contribution Scheme was "free uni"... last year the Liberal/National Coalition (through that all round, top bloke, David "ha, ha, I don't look like a troll, anymore" Kemp) announced that it fully expected that less than half of the current HECS debt to be repaid.

A report, done for DETYA in 1998 by consultants, Phillips Curran, but kept under wraps since then, has recommended that HECS debt be sold to private interests, in order to create \$2b for research infrastructure in universities, stating that HECS debt stood as an "identifiable asset which is directly attributable to the higher education sector".

I'm sure that there are scores of completely stupid business people, lined up to buy debt that they will never get repaid for.

And should some fat cat want a tax write-off, what sort of infrastructure will be put in place to prevent changes to the wage level for repayments (currently at an abysmally low \$21,700), interest rates or even the staggered payment system.

- James Beach

ABSTINANCE WEEK A FLOP

SRC President Gleeson has been lashed this week by angry students. Gleeson commented "I thought people would like the concept of abstinence - I mean, it takes the pressure off - it stops you from thinking about sex for a whole week"

"It also helps impotent students like myself from feeling inadequate."

Gleeson is one of the 2% of people on which Viagra has no effect. He does however boast large breasts obtained due to his abuse of anabolic steroids and fried chicken in previous years.

Simon Zulian