

All the world's at C

Part One



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Everything I've written for Mines and Communities has been covered by an Open Access policy as you will find on such contributions as London Calling, and I'd like this to be continued.

A second part will be ready in 2-3 weeks, with the third and final part to arrive for endorsement and posting in December 2020.

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Introduction

This Essay - though book length – isn't intended to intimidate, far less employ the current Corona Virus pandemic as a means of galvanising even more trepidation along a global trajectory that's already cowed so many of us.

Instead, what this essay attempts doing is to instrumentalise (rather than merely conceptualise) future communally-shared existence on earth. And to do this, by re-invigorating modes of social intercourse and survival (*modus vivendi*) that have served existence (if not always shared values) in the pre-endemic era. These must surely now, as swiftly as possible, inform and regulate construction of all our futures.

Much of the information, discussion and methodology for this essay is based on the work of the soon-to-be 20 years old Mines and Communities group (MAC).

As a transnational collective, comprising Indigenous activists, civil society organisations acting in solidarity with them, academic researchers, trustworthy analysts, industry observers, journalists and others, MAC evolved in 2001 from several other UK NGOs, and then proceeded to link with other global alliances.

Its founding document, The London Declaration, was agreed by common assent at the group's foundation and updated in 2007: it provides a matrix for this paper.

Criminal extractivism

Our colleagues in MiningWatch Canada and the London Mining Network along other NGOs, recently graphically depicted numerous examples of some ill-conceived, devious, quasi-criminal (if not unlawful) means, used by some mining corporations, ostensibly in order to "save" their businesses at the expense of adjacent communities. (*These are summarised in Chapter Three*).

Moreover, it became clear throughout the 1980-90's that fresh "green", environmental, justice-seeking and "ethical" global movements were stridently surfacing; to a significant extent, owing their existence to research and action earlier carried out by critics of mining. We trust that there is now a much wider audience amenable to learn from this critique of extractivism as they re-frame their own declarations for the "post-covid" era.

"Disruption" - merely rhetoric?

From early in the new millenium, a lot of "Big Business" became entranced by the concept of Disruption, something that supposedly marked a substantially radical change in "doing things".

Initially, the proposition was strongly advocated by Canadian mining prospectors and developers (PDA); then swiftly adopted by others of a similar ilk, notably Rio Tinto, BHP, Anglo American, three of the world's richest and most diversified extractive corporations. All such companies were being confronted by major strategic challenges following a period in the early nineties enjoyed by China's upsurge of investment in vital "modernising", foreign-owned. minerals and metals, as well the acquisition of stakes in overseas companies.

Indeed, China's leading aluminium producer, Chinalco, became Rio Tinto's most important shareholder in the eighties, and remains so until today.

"Let's disturb the present, to get richer"

Mining owes a primary relationship to the current pandemic in several respects. Rio Tinto was among the first companies - if not the first – to broach "disrupting" as a means of consolidating its geographic spread and grabbing a brighter share of global investment.

Not only is resource extraction, *prima facie*, now increasingly presented as a means of essential infrastructure construction and the abolition of global poverty.

Mining corporations and nation states have also attempted to ensure the survival of various modes of disruptiveness, in order to ensure fiscal integrity and advance "business as usual".

In some respects, many corporate players not only ignore ESG [**Environmental, Social and Governance**] Principles - to which they have already paid lip-service. They've used the cover of Covid-19 to justify measures which are intrinsically anti-survival for workers and peoples, and unconstitutional in some ostensibly democratic jurisdictions. (see BOX 1).

Addressing some Urgent Questions

* Can counteracting the tribulations of Covid-19 in itself compel institutions and civil society to adopt a radically new global mandate?

* Is there the time and motivation to do this?

* Will a viable "New Normal" emerge post-pandemic, encapsulating this projection at institutional and government levels? Or:

* Are some elements of the recent past (rather like a badly renovated workshop antique) merely returning us to a previous era that was not acceptable in any case; quashing whatever potentially revolutionary corrective movements had previously emerged?

BOX 1 - India's Pandemic Response Is a Caste Atrocity

Chitragada Choudhury, Aniket Aga

NDTV (India), 27 May 2020

India has a sickness so serious, that even its response to the Covid-19 pandemic betrays a fatal infection. Nowhere in the world has a lockdown been as inhuman or imposed with such contempt for the lives of its millions of working poor. The Modi government's turning of a health challenge into a human catastrophe and the approval of a large section of India's elites can only be explained by casteism, which grades people on a hereditary hierarchy of worth, and legitimises the brutalization of 'lesser beings'.

The lockdown is in effect a caste atrocity i.e. a wilful act of violence inflicted on marginalized castes, and invisibilized in the name of halting a virus.

On March 23, PM Modi proclaimed he was locking down the country in four hours. Absent wages, work or relief, millions were pushed to the brink, sparking an exodus which is yet to let up or be officially acknowledged. When people have protested in sheer desperation, the state has responded with teargas, thrashings and detentions.

Policymakers, the judiciary, media and academia - all dominated by the upper castes - call these millions 'migrant workers'. But this anodyne term obfuscates how deeply caste is intertwined with class, and how the lockdown has unleashed a mass trauma being primarily borne by the Adivasi, Dalit and 'backward' castes of India. Cutting across religions, they are the footloose millions who keep India's farms, workshops and factories running, toil on roads and construction sites, service the homes of the rich and middle classes, care for their babies, and clear city streets and sewage lines. Among them were the Adivasi workers crushed by a goods train, Roshan Lal, a Dalit electrician who committed suicide, and a 12-year-old chilly-plucker who collapsed after walking for four days.

Sixteen migrant workers in a group of 20 were killed after a cargo train ran over them while they were sleeping on the tracks in Maharashtra's Aurangabad

The very preventable saga of distress and lockdown-induced deaths of the last 60 days is apiece with the intensifying brutalisation of the lower castes over the past three decades. Year upon year of high economic growth has masked the unfreedom and fragile existence of the millions who power it, and the shoring up of upper caste dominance. Effectively, liberalization has fused with caste power, hardly an accident when caste circumscribes access to land, capital, education, justice, and healthcare.

Juxtapose the fact that India's top 10% now hold as much wealth as the bottom 70%, with the fact that India's private companies are almost exclusively upper caste-owned, with just two high caste groups, a small minority of the population, constituting 90% of corporate boards. The richest 1% has four times the wealth of the bottom 70%, in large part via a takeover and monetization of the land, waters, forests and resources that were the lifeblood of those at the bottom end of the caste spectrum. Whichever the party in power, this upward redistribution of wealth has remained uninterrupted.

Meanwhile, the joblessness which has come to characterise the economy keeps the lower castes segregated in wage-hunting and piece-work - invariably at below-minimum pay, and without benefits or protections. And so they retain one foot in the village while crisscrossing the country for work, hoping for a better life from the very processes that rob them of dignity in the first place. They end up in slums, cram into work units, or become the homeless millions - enduring immense precarity and exploitation, even though 'normal' times.

The BJP, an upper-caste party at the core, papered over these contradictions under the Brahmin Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. But its 'India Shining' campaign of 2004 failed. A decade on, Modi has triumphed electorally twice, aided by relentless image-making as a bold leader, and a party-machinery flush with contributions from Big Business. What has remained unchanged are the fundamental

contours of the upper caste discourse: a fevered nationalism which refuses to acknowledge systematic winners and losers in the new economy, and little security for the vulnerable, beyond the fig leaf of chronically under-funded welfare programs framed in the interregnum years of the Congress party-led governments.

This explains why Modi could slam shut the economy on March 23 and say nothing of how millions of Indians without any buffer were to survive his plan. Through April, as the exodus on foot intensified in a throwback to Partition, he glossed over the pain of migrants as a necessary sacrifice. His remarks drew little condemnation in a country that thrives on the 'sacrifice' of life, limbs and dignity of the lower castes. Even the term 'social distancing,' to which elites have taken like fish to water, is characteristically tone deaf: for the vast majority, it evokes caste humiliations and proscriptions of touch, dining and social relations.

As the economy tanks and unemployment soars, announcements in the name of pandemic relief will further squeeze the lower castes. Opening up fresh frontiers for coal mining, privatizing airports, defence deals and bizarrely, space travel, are sops to India's richest. Inter-state workers meanwhile still run helter-skelter for transport, and trains are turning into death traps.

The alacrity with which many states are extending the legal workday to 12 hours, and rolling back worker safety regulations, collective bargaining rights, and minimum wage protections won over a century of struggles, points to something ominous. As a worker abandoned in an industrial park with thousands of others said, "It feels like we have been locked up in a jail." Pleas to release trade unionists, minority-rights, Dalit, Adivasi and student activists, in light of the risk of contracting the virus in overcrowded prisons, have gone unheard. In fact, the pandemic has barely stopped the government's arrests' spree.

Servitude for the lower castes, 'social distancing' for the upper, India's response to Covid-19 is resurrecting the worst excesses of its casteist past. The virus will eventually pass but there is no recovering from the collapse of values of solidarity and fraternity which were the moral inheritance of a republic born in the crucible of anti-colonial struggles. They have always only flickered in the world's largest democracy, but now their light is going out.

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Chapter One:

Making sense of a global catastrophe

Arguably, there's precious little to be gained by recalling historical epidemics, in order to launch fresh petards at the current Corona scurvy. That would surely be unreasonable when we exist at a time that so much else is crowding in upon us, and curative "solutions" seem only to be medically-proposed (if at all); neither politically endorsed nor structurally organised to meet community needs.

Judging by the multitude of tactics being attempted across the world (where over a million Covid-19 victims are recorded as having died this year so far), our governments' chosen targets are being determined by a confusing and confused mix of doctorology, demagoguery, paranoia - and sheer guesswork, at least at the nuclear family level. Much of this is being militarily enforced, and all of it scarcely goes beyond rhetoric or empty "cant".

Could such a stew of confusing rules and disingenuous remedies be sustainable in any form? At times they evoke a witch's brew, over-spilling with "bubble, toil and trouble" (Shakespeare's "Macbeth"). Some civil responses are being sold us as salutary tropes, (in some respects literally) as if it were a new type of millennial mythology. This is underpinned by the pretended solutions of micro-technology and increasingly-universalised 5G/Genesis internet transmission. Access to consumer goods is being seductively re-modelled by advertisers employing this technology, along with attempted revivals of commercial servicing, and the revitalising of local market trading (such as the "Shopify" phenomenon).

Is any of this truly comprehensible and practically acceptable to the majority of us?

It's surely more than likely we will discover only *too late* that most of us remain impoverished, and many of us are in even poorer health of both mind and body - as disempowered and discriminated against or socially discarded - as we were before the all-encroaching dis-easement. That's if this dreaded 21st

century pox is finally extinguished, whatever be the promises of a vaccination.

Metamorphing?

If we *can* bear to learn lessons from previous historical experiences, let's turn to the strikingly crafted 1988 essay "AIDS and its Metaphors", by America's Susan Sontag. This contains much to mull over and, in some respects, remains highly relevant today - specifically in regard to the role of armies and police in attempting to coral Covid-19 under the specious guise of protecting the population.

Says Sontag:

"The metaphor I am most eager to see retired...is the military metaphor. Its converse, the medical model of the public weal, is probably more dangerous and far-reaching in its consequences, since it not only provides a permanent justification for authoritarian rule, but implicitly suggests the necessity of state-sponsored repression and violence (the equivalent of surgical removal or chemical control of the offending or "unhealthy" parts of the body politic)...About that metaphor, the military one, I would say, if I may paraphrase Lucretius: Give it back to the war-makers."

Such a thesis is undoubtedly mirrored by several state-employed methods of attempting to contain the spread of Corona Virus. The Indian ecologist, activist and essayist, Gopal Krishna, has compellingly analysed how this repression works among citizens of the world's second most populous state [See: [Condemning the Indian government's totalitarian surveillance 2020-07-29](#)]

Allegories may better serve than metaphors.

Is "metaphor" an appropriate way of our comprehending this Corona pandemic, even while agreeing that it does display some features of past plagues, while decidedly not being limited to one

country or region, to specific bodily practices, nor being age-specific?

If victims of Covid-19 are predominantly BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) in many countries (e.g. Britain), there's little doubt this is their being economically/educationally/culturally deprived and discriminated against by much of the embracing larger society; not because of their existential origins ("Nurture not nature" couches the villainy).

Sui generis?

Perhaps equally indicative of Corona Virus is its apparent self-determination (some commentators seem to characterize it as a force that's virtually inhuman, thus not "anyone's fault"). It originated and thrives in an allegorical sense. Extirpating "it" must be the business of the polity as whole; no supra-medical initiatives, whatever their ingenuity, will suffice.

Its origins, some have theorised, are due to skilled conspiracies and cleverly disseminated propaganda, engineered by malevolent actors, specifically the Chinese Communist Party [See: **The Epoch Times, April-May 2020**].

However, whatever wild theories may be hatched by politically motivated bodies, or gene-perverting laboratories, objectively the worst Covid-19 risks worldwide are indiscriminately borne by families and like assemblies; they spread beyond all widely-recognised social categories, thus threatening the collapse of community cohesion, and the elimination of most self-generated activity, via "lockdown", state-enforced isolation, quarantining and hospital confinements.

All manner of folk are indiscriminately sunk low by the plague - academics, autocrats, generals, musicians, writers, performers, street minglers, not to mention many nurses, doctors and politicians, however "protected" they're supposed to be. (The theory that males are more susceptible to Covid-19 than females is still to be tested universally).

Susan Sontag again: "It is perhaps not surprising that the newest transforming element in the modern world, computers, should be borrowing metaphors drawn from our newest transforming illness [AIDS]. Nor is it surprising that descriptions of the course of viral infection now often echo the language of the computer age, as when it is said that a virus will normally produce new copies of itself... reinforc[ing] the sense that a disease can be something ingenious, unpredictable, novel." [Sontag page 70].

Sent to the Cloud

These similitudes, valid as they may have been in 1988, should now be substituted for a more relevant sphere of speculation, borne from examining just how the internet has been developed and deployed, whether for good or bad - specifically by mining propagandists.

In fact, a raft of technological new "fixes" -AI (artificial intelligence), robotization, atmospheric drones, data digitization, computerised algorithms, machine "self learning", so-called "materiality" and other devices collectively known as "cyberisation" - hit our interactive world not long before Corona Virus became a pandemic.

And, among the early - perhaps the first among global trend-setters - was British/Australian mining corporation Rio Tinto [see **BOX 2**].

BOX 2 - Is Rio Tinto becoming a Robo Cop?

Nostromo Research (Condensed from its publication by MAC on 14 August 2019).

One of the world's leading practitioners of technical innovation seeks to take us down radically-changed paths, that are ill-evaluated and mind-blowingly challenging. They threaten highly dangerous outcomes - and, worst of all, may license a host of rights violations and regulatory offenses that only now start being widely addressed as they should be.

Traditional mining is to be transmuted into ciphers which we are supposedly better able to comprehend and adjust to in the first half of the new millennium. The substitution will be through the "digitization" of data; employment of robots (Rio Tinto claiming it now has the mining world's biggest fleet); and universal human benefits purportedly gained from employing "Artificial Intelligence".

Significantly, this concept has been refined by financial services firm Deloitte in its recently published "*Tracking the Trends 2019: the top 10 issues transforming the future of mining*". Little guidance, however, was provided by Deloitte as to how such provocative, often highly questionable, intentions would be better served by data digitization than by traditional civil society agitations.

After all, these struggles are already being highlighted by an abundance of NGOs and local community spokespeople. Our fundamental query must be: how can eminently humanistic objectives continue featuring as principle elements in the social transformation now required to carry us from our current human-directed Anthropocentric era into that of the Symbiotic (as one thinker has labelled it) with all this entails?

Rio Tinto's expectations may well crumble in the face of campaigns by redundant labour forces, and widespread fears of de-humanisation created by these new "ways of working" - let alone by the addictive power of fresh, often untried, technology on future generations (alongside false bio-metrical equation of social cohesion with "social media").

Allegories and mining's role within them

"The ability to project events with some accuracy into the future...which was once tied to a vision of linear progress, has...turned into a vision of disaster"
[Sontag, page 89]

This, then, is surely the way that a truly unprecedented, category-defiant "disease", should be represented and may be confronted.

Covid-19's defeat doesn't depend on any categorical determination. Indeed, while refusing to characterise it as "similar to", "compatible with" or "describable as" some (*quasi* extraterrestrial) embodiment, the fundamental question must not be "where it came from" nor how it "will proceed" and into what other nightmarish shapes it may transform.

It's true we know some of these answers already in the context of the 19th-20th century: Amazonian tribal extinction by colonialist-induced smallpox and influenza; the advent of Anthrax; in Africa (Ebola) and China (Sars); and the scourge of HIV/Aids which transcended all geographic barriers.

Nonetheless, the main missing element in these outbreaks was the apparent lack of direct, intentional, infection by homo sapiens.

Absent all humanity; pervasive life immolation

The mass gassing of soldiers and civilians, waged by German and other forces in the First World War, was

replicated by the USA's terroristic extermination of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan 75 years ago; along with the radiation poisoning which has followed to this very day. This arguably is the world's most despicable act of any kind in recent decades (apart from World War Two and the emergence of Nazism/Fascism). ***[Interestingly, Rio Tinto relied upon the anti-Republican Italian fascist regime in 1937 to court martial and execute mineworkers rebelling at its Huelva copper mine, then later to provide ore for Nazi re-armament: See PLUNDER! op cit, page 8].***

Moreover, nuclearism - in both its military and so-called "civilian" forms - was predicated and performed by a select cabal of just a few Westerners who knew precisely what they were doing.

In fact Mining was essential to creating the twentieth century's first Cosmological Peril

It was others, primarily Indigenous folk, who were compelled into crucial participation in the 20th century's greatest Earth-bound threat and its possible dissolution.

Essential to nuclear fusion was the mining and despatch of uranium, (***dubbed by Britain's best-read financial journal in summer 2018, "the most-hated metal in the world"***) ***[Money Week, 6 July 2018]*** dependant on the labour of thousands of human beings, deliberately kept unaware of their roles in the impending planetocide.

These men, women and children, were forced by the imposition of state secrecy legislation, to suffer (albeit at a less violent level) what Japanese citizens had to endure with cataclysmic consequences [See: [Hiroshima Day - the invidious fatal connections 2020-08-06](#)].

In any event, what we don't know – and no-one can predict – is when Corona Virus will die out; or avert being tragically revived in fresh, ultimately incurable, forms: the so-called "wave" phenomenon. (Here, Sontag's use of metaphor may come into relevant new play).

Otherwise, we should resort to Allegory, (on medieval or ancient Greek lines) to forge the way to the future: the expression of truths on human, and other existences, through parables, storytelling, symbolism, and dramatisation.

Metaphors relate to perceptions fixed in space and time, and certainly enhance our understanding of

current predicaments. However, Allegories challenge us with "something innovative", paving the way to potential "revolutionary" transformation. In the nuclear terminology of some US scientists, shouldn't we desperately seek to collectively create a new "Cosmology", based on Survival?

More vitally, let's openly confront what we've newly discovered about - not just the "human condition" and its elemental changes - but the existential planetary one.

This requires our re-asserting the movements which narrowly preceded the Covid-19 outbreak but, in so many ways, currently risk relegation to a type of contemporary mythology; pushed to the reserve benches of what was shortly before, a progressively-mounting Archetypal Consciousness.

When fever strikes, several interpretations emerge – both calamitous and chiliastic.



Chapter Two:

How mining assisted globalisation over the past 150 years

"Gold fever" was perhaps the most broadcast and widespread epidemic of the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries. Unquestionably it prevailed as a plague, with consequences that do mirror similar bouts of the age.

Herds of men and beasts, conveying life-threatening diseases, imposed land-theft and natural resources depletion (of water, land, food, existing infrastructure and cultural norms, educational provisions, *et al*) on an unprecedented scale. Underpinning this was what may accurately be termed "primitivism" - rudimentary anti-community human behaviour, setting individual battle for, and accretion of, resources in an aspirational space that had been envisaged during earlier centuries.

The shiniest metal ever known, sharing/evoking near-hysterical success at its earliest discovery in Latin America, the USA, and Africa, became the most desired human acquisition of those times – and in elitist circles remained so for many futures to come. It wasn't accidental; it was an updated version of the archetypal game of alchemy, with gold becoming the most prized of earthbound acquisitions, inducing new classes of men (few women) into customised marketing and metal promotion.

Gold was soon transmuted into a global currency, fired by the imperialism of "Eminent Domain"; usurping the previous use of paper, itself deriving from pebbles and trinkets as means of indigenous person-to-person exchange. Inevitably, this means of exchange became coveted and aggrandized by banks, insurers, governments (*via* central agencies), translating into vast sources of capital dedicated to war and international territorial contestation.

Nowhere was this 20th century ideology more insidiously imposed than on African peoples in states which were compelled to abide by fiscal rules; notoriously those forged by the World Bank throughout the 1980s with Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). The transformation culminated in "The Strategy for African Mining" of 1993 [See: **Moody,**

The Risks we Run, International Books, Utrecht, 2005, page 81 and following].

This bound African nascent, and several already-established state mineral ventures, into accepting regulations which virtually sold off the "house silver" - or else threatened those states with being penalised into penury. It was something almost certain to happen anyway, given the intrinsic reliance on mining into which Africa had been forced by a hundred and more previous years of colonial exploitation. That predicament was acknowledged two decades later - ironically by the World Bank-sponsored independent report "*Where is the Wealth of Nations*".

Not only did the gilded metal serve a greater hegemonic purpose: silver, diamonds, other gems, platinum among "precious" metals and materials, rose headily in market value, accompanied by surges in demand for traditional mineral commodities, such as iron/steel, aluminium, copper, and not least coal and other fossil fuels. These served as the basic materials for fresh infrastructure and stimulated new energy generation for billions more persons.

By the end of World War Two, it seemed that the whole Earth – with the exception of the Arctic, Antarctica, large swathes of the Amazon - had been carved out by men, much of it sequestered by multinational mining corporations, prospering from the previous sixty or so years of rampant profiteering; a fundamental objective that has only somewhat diminished in very recent times.

During all the earlier decades, British company Rio Tinto, founded in 1873, was effectively an agent of the world's then most powerful imperial state, initiating a transnational minerals surge in the late 19th century, and remained the largest and richest mining company on earth until the 1990's. [See: **Plunder, The story of RTZ, 1991, Cafca New Zealand, Partizans, London**]. The attempt to renew its earlier dominion, through cyberisation, has now become key to its attempted saving grace.

Chapter Three:

How some miners have used their Covid-19 as a cover (up)

Just within the past few months, while Covid-19 has served to destroy or significantly diminish the fortune of some companies, others are thriving again. And this isn't despite the rise of a fresh "fever", but due to it. [\[See: Top Global Fifty miners: the "good, bad, and ugly" 2020-07-14\].](#)

The following "snapshot report" was jointly produced by Earthworks (USA), Institute for Policy Studies - Global Economy Program (USA), London Mining Network (UK), MiningWatch Canada, Terra Justa, War on Want (UK) and Yes to Life No to Mining, with "input from numerous partner organizations and communities in different parts of the world".

The findings are updated until June 1, 2020.

The report's conclusions are contained in the following Declaration:

Global Solidarity with Communities, Indigenous Peoples and Workers at Risk from Mining Pandemic Profiteers

The mining industry is one of the most polluting, deadly, and destructive industries in the world. Yet to date, mining company responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have received little scrutiny compared to other industries seeking to profit from this crisis.

We, the undersigned organizations, condemn and reject the ways that the mining industry and numerous governments are taking advantage of the pandemic to manufacture new mining opportunities and establish a positive public image, now and for the future.

These actions pose an immediate threat to the health and safety of communities and organizations that have been struggling to defend public health and their environments against the destruction and devastation of mining extractivism for decades, as well as to the safety of workers in the mining sector.

Based on a collective analysis emerging from conversations with affected communities, workers, and civil society organizations, we have identified the following trends that exemplify this threat. A review of over 500 media sources, press releases, and reports on mining in the context of COVID-19 further informs these findings.

One: Mining companies are ignoring the real threats of the pandemic and continuing to operate, using any means available.

Mining companies and many governments have pushed to categorise mining as an essential service, enabling operations to continue despite substantial risk. In doing so, they have become key vectors for the spread of the virus and are putting communities, rural and urban populations, and their workforces, at great risk. In many cases, Indigenous and rural communities already face acute risk from the virus, especially communities whose health has been impacted by contamination generated by mining extractivism. They are struggling to protect themselves from potential outbreaks.

Two: Governments around the world are taking extraordinary measures to shut down legitimate protests and promote the mining sector.

Free of public oversight and scrutiny, governments have imposed restrictions on peoples freedom of association and movement to protect public health. But these severe and even militarized measures compromise people's ability to defend their territories and their lives. Land defenders face greater risk of targeted violence and some remain unjustly imprisoned, posing additional risks of infection. Governments have also deployed state forces (military and police) to repress legitimate, safe protests, especially in instances where there is long standing opposition to a company's activities. In some instances, this has included the implementation of regulations or obstacles to access the justice system which entrench impunity, as well as heightened military and police presence in these territories. Meanwhile, mining companies are permitted to continue operating in these same territories or do so, despite restrictions. These and other actions cynically and unjustly benefit the extractivist mining sector.

Three: Mining companies are using the pandemic as an opportunity to cover up their dirty track records and present themselves as public-minded saviours

At a time when entire countries are struggling to get the bare minimum of test kits necessary, companies have boasted about the millions of privately sourced test kits they have provided to affected communities

and workers. This is poor cover for the long-term health impacts that regularly result from mining activities and the often underhanded ways in which these same firms operate.

It also represents an affront to the greater public good and the collective efforts of many states and communities to secure public access to tests, highlighting the glaring asymmetries of power between multinational corporations and states in the Global South.

In some cases, companies are giving out food directly to people, creating social division and undermining peaceful resistance while people are unable to mobilize in the context of the pandemic.

Some mining companies have set up assistance funds or made sizable donations to state ministries. These direct cash "donations" are not only far from commensurate with the real impacts of their activities, they also represent a corruption risk, which is already evident as we see governments willing to weaken emergency measures, fail to enforce those in place, or exclude the mining industry from them entirely.

Four: Mining companies and governments are using the crisis to secure regulatory change that favours the industry at the expense of people and planet.

While they frame mining as essential now and for global post-COVID-19 economic recovery, mining companies are lobbying to expedite administrative decisions and weaken the already-limited measures which do exist to address the social, cultural, environmental, and economic impacts of their activities that are almost always borne by affected communities with complete impunity.

Whether explicitly, by suspending the little environmental oversight and enforcement there was, or implicitly, by making it more challenging for affected communities to get information and intervene in permitting processes, governments are making deep concessions to the mining industry and companies are now lobbying governments to make such deregulation permanent.

At the same time, companies are increasingly using supranational Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms, embedded in thousands of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, to sue governments, especially in the Global South. They continue bringing or threatening suits in the hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars for decisions made by governments, courts and even human rights bodies, undermining

national sovereignty to make decisions to protect public health and attacking the self-determination of people fighting to protect their wellbeing from extractive projects.

Known pending mining claims - and where information is available - currently total US\$45.5 billion dollars with the actual total potentially much higher. Further threats are feared in response to measures taken during the pandemic.

We condemn these responses to the COVID-19 pandemic as acts of aggression that exacerbate the threats and risks that affected communities, Indigenous peoples, land defenders and mine workers face on a daily basis.

We reject the central claim that mining represents an essential service either now or for the period of economic recovery. In the context of an intersecting global health, economic, ecological and climate crisis, we assert that healthy communities, Indigenous peoples, workers, and social movements - not the profits of predatory mining corporations - essential.

We call on national governments to respect and support the autonomous organizing and self-determining processes of mining-affected communities and Indigenous peoples. Their efforts are vital to protecting community health and the environment, informed by their own knowledge and traditions, as well as to the food sovereignty of rural and urban populations through small-scale agriculture and other productive activities. Economic "reactivation" must not promote more mining, but should, instead, acknowledge and bolster community-based initiatives.

We call on international human rights bodies to pay close attention to and actively condemn human rights violations committed by governments and mining companies and many governments have pushed to categorise mining as an essential service, enabling operations to continue despite substantial risk.

In doing so, they have become key vectors for the spread of the virus and are putting communities, rural and urban populations, and their workforces, at great risk. In many cases, Indigenous and rural communities already face acute risk from the virus, especially communities whose health has been impacted by contamination generated by mining extractivism.

They are struggling to protect themselves from potential outbreaks.

Black Lives Matter; the roads from Rhodes

*"Black is beautiful
Yellow is golden, and
White is a color, too
But*

Red is the colour of all blood"

(Tom LaBank, Indigenous American,
Big Mountain Action Group, 1992)

Cecil Rhodes attended Oxford's Oriel College in the 1870s before locating to South Africa. He not only founded the world's largest diamond mining company, De Beers, but also helped forge apartheid, based on racial separation and rampant labour exploitation of black peoples. Through such machinations, he became the prime minister of Cape Colony in 1890 and one of the richest of men - ever.

Little wonder, then, that he's now become targeted by the Black Lives Matter movement which has swept through the USA, Britain, South Africa and elsewhere, triggered by the police murder of George Floyd in the USA. It's highly likely that this particular Anglo-Saxon Uber-Imperialist will soon have the statue of him at Oriel College removed or "relocated" to another site (a museum perhaps?). Doubtless, most people in Oxford, especially students and enlightened academics, will welcome the Rhodes de-thronement open-armed. It will surely also prompt similar actions elsewhere, directed at those of his kind.

However, let's ask ourselves what "those of his kind" should really mean, and how it relates directly to a truly transformed post-Covid future.

Digging up the past, prefiguring the future

There were many denigrators and enslavers of Africans during the 19th and early twentieth century who still remain "memorialised" (or simply publicly ignored). It can't be denied - except by bigots - that digging out, ridiculing or defacing their effigies is a valid, potent, activity. But the important challenge (however we choose to self-characterise) is to evolve a clearly-focussed "trope"; a paradigm, that concentrates our focus, while simultaneously broadening its educative and demonstrative appeal.

This must be done by going beyond the allegorical down-fall of just one man, such as Rhodes, who died well outside our living memory. There have been many others, and not all long-deceased. And there are those African leaders who have built on their legacy by re-adopting and supporting colonial-era mining companies (such as Anglo-De Beers and Union Miniere) in ways reminiscent of the past.

As the MAC website has painstakingly shown for the past two decades, we surely cannot and must not, let such perpetrators of human rights abuse, terrestrial invasions, appalling atrocity and dehumanisation, rest in peace. Nor should their current portrayals remain undisturbed -above all in order that future generations will better learn their true history.

A monumental moment

Indeed, black lives do matter - and, as the Black Lives Matter movement has made clear, so do those of millions of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples across numerous jurisdictions.

There's no better or more graphic means of conveying that message than dramatising what extractive industry has done - and continues doing - to millions of people, in pursuit of that sector's own iniquitous attempts to "save the world", as we have been sold this truly heart-rending myth for far too long.



