



The Brief

Vol. 1 No. 11

A project of the NB Media Co-op

June 2010

nbmediacoop.org

"You are just a woman"

Criminalized and threatened, women stand their ground against the Goldcorp mine in Guatemala

By TRACY GUNN

San Miguel Totahuitán, Guatemala - Carmen Mejía waits two hours to work every day. She works for an organization currently under attack because of its support of indigenous communities affected by the Canadian-owned Goldcorp Marlin mine - an open-pit gold and silver mine located in the Western Guatemala highlands.

The 25 year old daughter of campesinos and mother of a five year old learned about the dangers of mining from a friend when she was studying to be a secretary. Today, she speaks about this knowledge but she says, "we are not afraid because we are women, we are indigenous and we are campesinas." She says women are never consulted and in some cases it is their inherited land that is being sold by their husbands for the mine.

The San Marcos highlands like the rest of the country of Guatemala are almost entirely covered by mineral claims and concessions. According to the Commission for Peace and Ecology (COPADE) of the Diocese of San Marcos, the Marlin mine, which opened in 2005, uses 250,000 litres of water per hour, which is equivalent to what a Guatemalan family uses in 22 years. Goldcorp is required to pay only 1% in royalties for the minerals they extract in an area where 97% of the people live in poverty and 79% live in extreme poverty.

Mejía's work with the Association for the Integral Development of San Miguel Totahuitán (AIDISMIT) has made her a target for persecution.

This past Earth Day, April 22, 50,000 people marched in Guatemala City while more marched in communities facing mega projects such as mining and hydroelectric dams across Guatemala. Stops during the marches included the gates of the Marlin mine and the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala City. The Maya Itz'at and Maya Itz'at women, mostly peasant farmers, living near the mine are concerned that the mine is depleting and contaminating their water supplies, deforesting their land and destroying the natural world that is fundamental to the Maya worldview.

Mejía and several others were charged on Earth Day in an incident following a peaceful demonstration at the mine's gates. A man in favour of the mine threatened the women's lives, "demons, you are just a woman and you should be afraid of me. If you were doing this with the mine issues, I will find people and we will kill you." Many say the mine has profited when against husbands, mothers against sons, and brothers against sisters. The women live in the small town of El Estero, where many lost labourers at the mine live.

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"If the mine would listen, it would leave us in peace and we would live as before - happily. No more women would be persecuted and criminalized," says Mejía.

In 2008, eight indigenous women known as the Goldcorp 8, were charged with "obstructing the mine's operations." The most serious outstanding charges are against Gregorio Cienfuegos Pérez, who is alleged to have



Goldcorp and the authorities deny assertions that at least 100 houses have been damaged by the explosions at the nearby mine. They blame rain, poor construction and loud music from the churches. Photo by James Rodriguez, nbmediacoop.org

damaged a power line to the mine that was placed on her property. She initially agreed to allow poles on her property, but she maintains that she did not agree to the amount of damage that the lines caused to her land.

Another explosive charge levelled on tenants is a fee of \$75.00 for having a third story overnight. Tenants asked Mr. Landry if such charges are legal. "If rules are set out in advance, and you've signed them, then, yes," said Landry. He also welcomed tenants and landlords to contact the Rentalismar's office for further clarification before signing a tenancy agreement. "Our services are free... if you have any problems, you can come and see us and we will help you out," Landry encouraged.

Tenants, however, enter into negotiations with landlords with less power than the property owner. In a country where a right outside can result in death, an individual owner has far more to lose in refusing to sign an unfair agreement, than a landlord has to lose when refusing service to an individual who will not sign an unfair agreement.

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anonymously, while still holding landlords accountable for their actions. Tenants would be more free to report problems with an individual landlord, report an individual concern, or critical house reports not completed. Anonymity would allow tenants to file the complaints without fear of eviction.

Mr. Landry informed that New Brunswick public housing units are excluded from the Act. This means that tenants living in a subsidized housing unit funded by NB Housing are not protected even under the new Act. The update in the tenancy act also fails to include price controls on rent. "If you have a problem with your rent, increase my rent in one year?" asked one Fredericton area resident. Mr. Landry answered, "That's a good question, and I've been asked that many times, in some provinces, there's a formula (the rent control) and you can tell how much (landlords) are allowed to raise rent... in New Brunswick, we don't have rent control."

One of the Goldcorp 8, in tears, speaks of what abuse and the mine's toll on her family. "The day before yesterday, my brother was drinking and he threatened to kill me if the mine ever left. He said, 'you are just a woman and you should be afraid of me. If you were doing this with the mine issues, I will find people and we will kill you.'" Many say the mine has profited when against husbands, mothers against sons, and brothers against sisters. The women live in the small town of El Estero, where many lost labourers at the mine live.

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Tenant rights still far from protected in NB

By ANNE GRETA ALLISON

Roomers and boarders now have more protection because of changes to New Brunswick's Residential Tenancies Act. The changes, however, fail to make key improvements for renters. The updated Act still fails to protect tenants of units owned by NB Housing, and does not regulate rent increases.

The Residential Tenancies Act outlines the rights, obligations, laws and rules that landlords and tenants must follow. Anti-poverty organizations were successful in forcing the provincial government to improve the Act for the first time since 1975. At a public information session held on April 27, 2010, René Landry, the Chief Rentalismar for New Brunswick, informed community members that the Residential Tenancies Act now addresses roomers and boarders' rights to secure locks and doors, and their right to receive advanced notice before landlords can enter their unit. Previous to Bill 35, roomers and boarders were excluded from protection under the Act.

Federicton area residents who attended the session were encouraged by some of the new protections, but

were concerned by the failure of the new changes to address important problems they face as renters. According to renters who attended the session, landlords sometimes force tenants to pay \$50.00 for a "key deposit". Tenants report that landlords sometimes do not return this "deposit", even after the key has been returned by the tenant.

Another intrusive charge levelled on tenants is a fee of \$75.00 for having a third story overnight. Tenants asked Mr. Landry if such charges are legal. "If rules are set out in advance, and you've signed them, then, yes," said Landry. He also welcomed tenants and landlords to contact the Rentalismar's office for further clarification before signing a tenancy agreement. "Our services are free... if you have any problems, you can come and see us and we will help you out," Landry encouraged.

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Were the key pieces of legislation accidentally omitted from the updated Residential Tenancy Act? In Baffie it now, economist Michael LeBel of Saint John's University argues, "their concern may reduce private rental construction... if government... (continued)