

The Ok Tedi Settlement: Issues, Outcomes and Implications, edited by Glenn Banks and Chris Ballard. Pacific Policy Paper 27. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies and Resource Management in Asia-Pacific, Research School for Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1997. ISBN 0-7315-2362-8, xi + 279 pages, tables, map, appendixes, notes, bibliography. Paper, A\$20.

This book is the outcome of a workshop held in May 1997 that was sponsored by Glenn Banks and Chris Ballard representing Resource Management in Asia-Pacific and the Division of Pacific and Asian History within the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies of the Australian National University. It is the latest scholarly contribution to the continuing saga of the infamous Ok Tedi mining project in Papua New Guinea.

The Australian colonial administration laid the groundwork for the production of commodities for export and promoted the use of natural resources to finance "economic development." After gaining independence in 1975, Papua New Guinea rapidly became a mining resource frontier. The Ok Tedi mining project was created in 1981 under the Ok Tedi Mining Limited (OTML) consortium operated by Broken Hill Proprietary Limited (BHP), the "Big Australian." According to Ila Temu, who represents the PNG government in the book, the state refuses to recognize that clans own resources of the land, and it considered that environmental equity for clans in the Ok Tedi settlement could be reduced to economic

terms. Thus, after the start of mining in 1984, Papua New Guinea followed the typical mining trajectory of taking the subsoil minerals while being vague about indemnifying indigenous peoples against resulting ecological devastation. Mining requirements for capital, labor, and food for workers for the mine, as well as the physical output, created an integrated socio-ecological region down the entire Ok Tedi and Fly Rivers. Early localized social protest from the Wopkaimin, the indigenous landowners of the upper Ok Tedi River surrounding the mine, was prompted more by rapid socioeconomic change than by environmental degradation. Moreover, the Wopkaimin have always enjoyed monetary compensation from the mine not received by others in the socio-ecological region.

Since mining proceeded without a tailings dam, it produced large volumes of sediment saturated with heavy metals that destroyed the lower Ok Tedi River and flowed past the D'Albertis Junction into the Fly River. In less than a decade, weak environmental protection plans coupled with a long series of ecological disasters associated with the mine had endangered the environment of thirty thousand indigenous peoples within the socio-ecological region. The resulting ecological crisis was and continues to be centered on the Yonggom, the indigenous landowners of the lower Ok Tedi River. Their intimate association between myth, belief, and environment has been irrevocably broken. Motivated by environmental degradation, Yonggom political leaders eventually succeeded in forging a popular ecological resistance movement. Social

protest culminated in retaining the legal firm of Slater and Gordon in 1994 to represent six hundred clans and thirty thousand indigenous people in the socio-ecological region against Broken Hill Proprietary. A protracted two-year legal battle was fought out in the Supreme Court of Victoria, because of the strategic decision taken to confront Broken Hill Proprietary at their corporate headquarters in Melbourne, rather than in Papua New Guinea. Broken Hill Proprietary deployed desperate tactics as they lost the media battle in Australia, and increasingly appeared as uncaring environmental vandals. An out-of-court settlement was reached in June 1996 that committed Broken Hill Proprietary to implementing a feasible tailings containment system; to paying K40 million by way of compensation to the worst affected areas on the Ok Tedi; and to paying K110 million to all affected persons.

The “landowners, lawyers, academics, students, miners, and representatives of NGOs and the Australian and Papua New Guinean governments” (4) appearing in the book are divided in their assessment of the role of the environment in the Ok Tedi crisis. Unfortunately, the only miners appearing in the book are Gavin Murray and Ian Williams of Placer Pacific. There is no rendition of the mine’s environmental impact offered by Murray Eagle, the former environmental manager for Ok Tedi Mining Limited (OTML) and more recently the environmental affairs manager for Broken Hill Proprietary. Although Michael Ridd from Ok Tedi Mining and Murray Hohnen from Broken Hill Proprietary substituted for

Murray Eagle in the workshop, they also fail to appear in the book. Readers are unable to assess for themselves the “frank and informative” version of the environmental impact of the mine allegedly presented by Michael Ridd during the workshop (4). In a book purporting to analyze the ramifications of the Ok Tedi settlement, Banks and Ballard are remiss in not providing a voice from Ok Tedi Mining or Broken Hill Proprietary. David King, a geographer from James Cook University in Australia, not only misinterprets the environmental protest movement against Ok Tedi as being economically motivated, but also blames me for using terms like “disaster mine” and “ecocide” to personally construct the image of Ok Tedi as an environmental crisis! In politely treating Ok Tedi like the emperor’s new clothes, David King minimizes the impact of the mine’s annual output of thirty million tonnes of tailings and forty million tonnes of waste rock into the river system. Colin Filer, from the National Research Institute in Papua New Guinea, lets Ok Tedi Mining and Broken Hill Proprietary off easily by lamenting that their environmental managers were trying to manage the unmanageable, and that, far from engaging in a cynical conspiracy to disregard the environmental costs of the mine, they were blinded by their own cost-benefit analysis. Gavin Murray and Ian Williams of Placer Pacific identify stakeholder identification and consultation, rather than environmental impact, as the lessons to be learned from the Ok Tedi settlement. Banks and Ballard disappointingly contribute little of their own

analysis, and instead summarize the media representation of the Ok Tedi crisis in Australia.

Scholarly discourses in the remaining collection of papers prioritize indigenous responses to environmental impact. John Burton, an ethnographer from Pacific Social Mapping in Australia, astutely observed that the *terra nugax* (land of no real value) paradigm that informed OTML-BHP operations was not only lost on indigenous people in the socio-ecological region who called their discovered landscapes home, but also misled managers of the political economy in which mining was taking place. John Burton convincingly critiques Ok Tedi Mining's managed science as bad science because in narrowly complying with government requirements it failed to monitor impact. Compelling experience-near ethnography from Stuart Kirsch, an anthropologist from the University of Michigan, establishes how the Yonggom "became leaders of a global alliance of landowners, ecological activists, anthropologists and lawyers who successfully mounted a worldwide campaign to stop the mine from polluting the Ok Tedi and Fly Rivers" (128). Stories from several other members of this global alliance appear in the book. Alex Maun, the prominent Yonggom plaintiff in the legal action against Broken Hill Proprietary, details the devastating environmental assault that mining has had on his homeland. John Gordon, partner in Slater and Gordon, outlines the involvement of his legal firm in the alien tort court action against Broken Hill Proprietary. Brian Brunton of Greenpeace Pacific in Papua New Guinea and Chris Harris

of the Mineral Policy Institute in Australia provide valuable perspectives from nongovernment organizations on the Ok Tedi environmental crisis. The Yonggom-based popular ecological resistance movement has inspired global environmental activism to hold multinational corporations accountable in the home country for their environmental impact overseas. Meanwhile, the mine remains under scrutiny of the global alliance to fulfil its commitment to tailings containment. In their final analysis, Banks and Ballard narrowly view the implications of the Ok Tedi settlement in terms of regional stakeholders, thus failing to appreciate the global emergence of radical and popular environmentalism in the PNG minerals industry.

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A Vision for Change: A D Patel and the Politics of Fiji, by Brij V Lal. History of Development Studies 6. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, 1997. ISBN 0-7315-2350-4, xvii + 282 pages, map, photographs, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Paper, A\$25.

The outstanding political adversaries in Fiji's transition to independence were Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, now the republic's president, and Ambalal Dahyabhai Patel, who died in 1969 at the age of sixty-six. Readers who experienced the Fiji of the 1960s will have vivid memories of the brilliant and vibrantly charismatic Patel capti-