

FOIL VEDANTA NEWSLETTER - September 2013

Vedanta's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in London this August was again disrupted by protests, while parallel demonstrations against Vedanta were held in Delhi, South Africa, and Goa. In London Foil Vedanta coordinated protests out side Vedanta's AGM which brought together many grassroots organisations such as disabled people's rights groups, Tamil solidarity groups and women's rights organisations. The protesters celebrated the victory of the Dongria Kond tribe over Vedanta in the Niyamgiri hills, where they have been prevented from mining after a 10 year battle. A giant inflatable monster with multiple snake-like heads representing Vedanta's subsidiaries in India and Africa was used by protesters to block the road in front of the meeting.



In Delhi almost 100 people braved rains to gather at Odisha Bhawan and celebrate the Niyamgiri victory with beautiful home-made placards quoting the Dongria's statements and songs and speeches, including from famed writer Arundhati Roy who said *"Vedanta has built its refinery at Lanjigarh without environmental and forest clearances, and expanded from 1 to 6 million tonnes, encroaching on reserves forest land and violating a multitude of laws. It has told so many lies to the Supreme Court. Now that the people's verdict has given a clear NO to the Niyamgiri mine the refinery should be dismantled and closed for good. From Lanjigarh to London the people's battle has been won!"*

Meanwhile in Johannesburg, South Africa, a picket by Earthlife Africa protested a coal fired power station planned by Vedanta Zinc. Activist Lerato Maregele released a statement to the media saying: *"Today, we protest in solidarity with anti-Vedanta activists all over the world"*. In Goa a small group of 'clown' activists performed a street theatre outside the offices of Vedanta subsidiary Sesa Goa.



Inside the AGM in London Anil Agarwal tried to paint himself as the saviour of India's poverty, giving a dreamy speech about believing that Niyamgiri mountain was meant for Vedanta, and claiming that they have saved the poor people of Kalahandi while not touching 'a blade of grass'. This blade of grass is very famous now. It is the same blade he claims he hasn't touched during the last ten AGMs. Meanwhile the Lanjigarh refinery has been built and expanded – displacing families who are now destitute, and the Dongria have been harassed, threatened and even killed.



Activist shareholders inside the meeting questioned Anil and the Vedanta board (including former Indian Home Secretary Naresh Chandra) on their legal and human rights violations including their almost \$1 million donations to the Congress and BJP parties this year, the toxic gas leak at subsidiary Sterlite's copper smelter in Tamil Nadu in March which resulted in an \$15 million fine, and their refusal to accept responsibility for a chimney collapse which killed more than 100 people at their BALCO plant in Korba, Chhattisgarh in 2009. Foil Vedanta's activist researcher Samarendra Das sang a protest song from the Niyamgiri hills to the Vedanta board – a message direct from the Dongria Kond to Anil Agarwal that they are not welcome in Niyamgiri.

Niyamgiri victory! Since the AGM, the victory against Vedanta in Niyamgiri has been sealed, as every participant in all twelve village councils held on the mountain voted against the mine, giving passionate speeches against the company, and in praise of the value of their traditional way of life. Activists from Foil Vedanta joined others on the mountain in May to help prepare for the gram sabhas and ensure the Odisha state government and Vedanta could not get away with their usual tricks. We published articles exposing their attempts to threaten Dongria women and children with police firings, harassment and false cases against villagers who resisted the company, and helped make villagers aware of the legal process which would soon decide their fate. We are still celebrating this unique people's victory in London and trying to spread it all over the world so people's movements can gain strength and hope from it. The news has been published in newspapers in the USA, UK and Germany to name a few.

Vedanta is on it's knees. Since the Niyamgiri victory major financial newspapers and analysts have attacked Vedanta for its high debt and pattern of disregarding laws and permissions at it's operations. Vedanta is on the brink of losing \$7 billion on it's attempt to mine Niyamgiri, as the Lanjigarh refinery (which has been operating at a loss) may now need to be closed for good. Their share-price is also dropping with many analysts rating it as a 'junk' investment. Vedanta's debt currently stands at \$9 billion.

Vedanta out of London! This year Foil Vedanta has been building support among British members of parliament, organisations, and the public, to try to de-list Vedanta from the London Stock Exchange and throw them out of the UK. The London listing is what gives Vedanta its credibility and access to investors and huge bank loans. We are hoping to speak in the houses of parliament this winter. We will tell public figures in Britain how Vedanta violates corporate governance guidelines as Anil Agarwal owns 65% of the company shares, effectively controlling all company decisions, and will detail the catalogue of human rights and environmental abuses at their operations. Vedanta is becoming one of the world's most hated companies, and media reports continue to expose them and deeply damage their reputation.

Who are Vedanta? Vedanta are a FTSE 100 company, operating in India, with an Indian board of Directors, but registered in London (where they can access finance and gain credibility). They started out in mining and metals but are now expanding into oil and gas and power production. The company is controlled and owned by Anil Agarwal and his family via his 65% share. Profits are kept in tax havens all over the world. Vedanta is being opposed almost everywhere it operates for its consistent human rights abuses, poor labour standards, mass displacement, pollution and corruption.



Tuticorin rages over toxic gas leak. In March 2013 Vedanta subsidiary Sterlite's copper smelter released toxic gases which choked thousands of residents of Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu and killed one worker. Hundreds were hospitalised. In response thousands of residents and local trade union members took to the streets in several days of bandh which shut down the whole town. The plant was closed for a few weeks by



the authorities, but was allowed to re-open again after being ordered to pay a fine of \$15 million by the Supreme Court. The judgement accepted that the plant has operated without a license for years, violated environmental laws, and hidden information from the court, but ruled that this should be ignored since it is the biggest copper producer in India, and India needs copper for defence, electricity, automobile, construction and infrastructure.

We ask who benefits from this so called 'development' of weapons, cars and cities? This model of development is destroying India's rural communities and environment, displacing rural people from traditional land based livelihoods and forcing them into waged labour serving the needs of the rich. In Zambia Vedanta's copper mines and smelters run by subsidiary Konkola Copper Mines released sulphur dioxide pollution which killed one and injured others in October. They are now trying to fire 2000 workers, despite a pact made with the Zambian government agreeing not to reduce employment.

Foil Vedanta is a London based independent grassroots group opposing British-Indian mining giant Vedanta Resources. Foil Vedanta targets the company in London where it is registered. It does this in solidarity and collaboration with people's movements fighting Vedanta at its many operations worldwide.