



## Pacific Islanders use US Law to Sue British Mining Giant for Ecocide, Human Rights Crimes.

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### Rio Tinto Unraveled

Rio Tinto, a company with a century old history, has not gained wisdom with age; rather it continues to maintain coercion, deception, racism and manipulation as primary functions of its operations. Notable quotes and facts in five key areas outline Rio Tinto's continued abuses against its fellow man:

#### Human Rights Violations

- In building the Weipa bauxite mine in Australia in 1963, Comalco, a company owned by Rio Tinto, forcibly removed two Aboriginal communities from their land at Weipa and Mapoon. The Mapoon community was arrested in the dead of night and their homes, the school, the shops—were burned to the ground.<sup>i</sup>
- Common Cause, the miners' union journal, states that Rio Tinto's Argyle Diamonds in Australia has been linked to child labor in the diamond polishing industry of India.<sup>ii</sup>
- In Third World countries, the company's treatment of workers is almost feudal. In West Papua, Freeport-McMoran, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, pays local workers about \$3.50 a day. Furthermore, in 1995, the Australian Council for Overseas Aid found Freeport-McMoran turning a blind eye to Indonesian armed forces killing and torturing people protesting in the vicinity of the mine.<sup>iii</sup>

#### Safety and Health Issues

- Rio Tinto closed down Capper Pass, a major tin smelter in the United Kingdom, in 1991. After first denying any wrongdoing, Rio Tinto admitted it had persistently violated health, safety and environmental laws at the smelter. Rio Tinto is now facing major legal liability from ex-workers, their families and their communities for cancer risk exposure and other major health and environmental problems.<sup>iv</sup>
- In 1997 Rio Tinto endangered the health and safety of employees at its Hunter Valley No. 1 mine, by using unqualified staff to operate machinery during a workers strike. "Rio Tinto wants open slather on health and safety standards in the coal industry. We have lost too many members through fatalities and crippling injuries and diseases to allow them to downgrade safety standards," said the president of the Northern District of Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Mick Watson.<sup>v</sup>

#### Manipulation of Power

- Rio Tinto has a long history in leading cartels that fix prices and eliminate competition. In the 1970's, Rio Tinto was part of the Uranium Producers' Club, which boosted the price of uranium five-fold.<sup>vi</sup>
- At Weipa, Rio Tinto acquired the land almost free, paying \$4 per square mile in rent.<sup>vii</sup>
- In the 1980's, the Papua New Guinea government tried to hire foreign mercenaries to help Rio Tinto regain its mine from Bougainville separatists.<sup>viii</sup>
- Rio Tinto opened a copper mine in Chile in the 1990's after dictator General Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected Allende government, presumably to take advantage of laws favoring their operations.<sup>ix</sup>

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## Union Busting

- In 1997 alone, workers in Australia, Brazil, Indonesia, Norway and Portugal took industrial action over Rio Tinto's "deunionsation" policy.<sup>x</sup>
- At the Escondida mine in Chile, the majority of workers are afraid of being blacklisted or retrenched for becoming involved in the union and have therefore requested help and support from the Rio Tinto Global Union Network.<sup>xi</sup>
- According to the Federal Court of Australia's Justice Catherine Branson, Rio Tinto breached Part XA of the Workplace Relations Act in 1996 at the Hunter Valley No. 1 Mine, by refusing delegates of the CFMEU to attend to their duties as union officers, and then penalized them for being absent to attend to those duties. Further the delegates concerned were all later selected for retrenchment on grounds that included attendance, disciplinary matters and compliance with company directions.<sup>xii</sup> "What runs through as a common thread is their philosophy that they want to see the trade unions out of their operations," said the former Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke.<sup>xiii</sup>

## Inequality

- In 1972, in white minority-ruled Rhodesia, black miners were paid just 10% of the wages of white workers. Even after the end of white rule in 1989, the Mineworkers Union of Namibia charged that 92% of black miners at Rio Tinto's Rossing uranium mine did not earn a living wage. Rio Tinto supplied uranium from its Rossing mine in Namibia to England, under both Conservative and Labor governments, in defiance of United Nations sanctions against apartheid.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Rio Tinto has often bragged about the jobs it creates for Aboriginal people. At Weipa, approximately 10% of the work force was Aboriginal in 1977. At Argyle Diamonds' mine, only three of the mine's 1000 person work force were Aboriginal people.<sup>xv</sup>
- In 1999, Rio Tinto illegally fired 312 mineworkers at the Gordonstone coalmine in Australia resulting in hardship and stress for thousands of people. At same time, Rio Tinto announced a 25% pay raise for its top executives, bringing chairman Robert Wilson's salary to \$3.17 million a year. Tony Maher, Vice President of the (CFMEU) accuses Rio Tinto executives of "prospering through the creation of misery."<sup>xvi</sup>

## Environmental Damage

- Massive environmental damage occurred when mine tailings spilled at the Porco Zinc mine in Bolivia and at St. Lucia Wetland Park in South Africa.<sup>xvii</sup>
- In 1998, Rio Tinto forged a deal to dodge taxes on a major mining project in Madagascar, one of the poorest countries in the world. The company's justification for this project, which would destroy unique forests, and severely disrupt local aquatic systems and the coastline, has been that it will benefit the country's economy.<sup>xviii</sup>
- A tailings dam completely collapsed in the Philippines, spewing acidic waste and heavy metals, and 617 chemical drums, suspected of containing sodium cyanide and hydrochloric acid, falling into the river at its Kelian gold mine in Indonesia.<sup>xix</sup>
- In 1998, Rio Tinto's total disregard for the human and ecological rights led to a gathering of delegates from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Namibia, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Sweden, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States and Zimbabwe to discuss how to tackle the destructive international company.<sup>xx</sup> John Maitland, National Secretary of CFMEU notes, "Rio Tinto is running out of places to hide. Its record on environmental management, human rights and now labor rights is attracting criticism across the world."<sup>xxi</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> Vassilopoulos, James. Rio Tinto: the world's worst company? <http://jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/300/300p32.htm>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Vassilopoulos, James. Rio Tinto: the world's worst company? <http://jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/300/300p32.htm>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Vassilopoulos, James. Rio Tinto: the world's worst company? <http://jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/300/300p32.htm>.
- <sup>iv</sup> Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). Capper Pass: Rio Tinto finally begins to come clean. [www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/riotintomain.htm](http://www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/riotintomain.htm). June 5, 2000.
- <sup>v</sup> Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). Rio Tinto "dicing with death" in attacking coal mine safety standards. [www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/media32.htm](http://www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/media32.htm). June 30, 1997.
- <sup>vi</sup> Vassilopoulos, James. Rio Tinto: the world's worst company? <http://jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/300/300p32.htm>.
- <sup>vii</sup> Vassilopoulos, James. Rio Tinto: the world's worst company? <http://jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/300/300p32.htm>.
- <sup>viii</sup> Watson, Mick. Rio Tinto's brutal pedigree. [www.jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/288/288p13c.htm](http://www.jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/288/288p13c.htm).
- <sup>ix</sup> Watson, Mick. Rio Tinto's brutal pedigree. [www.jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/288/288p13c.htm](http://www.jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/288/288p13c.htm).
- <sup>x</sup> Anti-Nuclear Alliance of Western Australia 2000. Rio Tinto. <http://www.aucwa.iinet.net.au/corporate/riotinto.html>.
- <sup>xi</sup> Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). Rio Tinto Global Campaign Fact Sheet. <http://www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/fact2000.htm>.
- <sup>xii</sup> Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). Rio Tinto Guilty of Victimising Union Delegates at Hunter Valley Mine. [www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/med9929.htm](http://www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/med9929.htm). November 5, 1999.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Mutume, Gumisai. Human Right: Workers Brace for World Action Against Rio Tinto. World News, [www.oneworld.org/ips2/feb98/riotinto.html](http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/feb98/riotinto.html). Feb 9, 1998.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Vassilopoulos, James. Rio Tinto: the world's worst company? <http://jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/300/300p32.htm>.
- <sup>xv</sup> Vassilopoulos, James. Rio Tinto: the world's worst company? <http://jinx.sistm.unsw.edu.au/-greenlft/1997/300/300p32.htm>.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). Millions more for Rio Tinto and ARCO executives as miners fight in Federal Court for jobs. [www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/med9909.htm](http://www.cfmeu.asn.au/mining-energy/med9909.htm). April 7, 1999.
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- <sup>xviii</sup> Friends of the Earth. "Rio Tinto Dumps on Environment, Ducks Taxes. [www.foe.co.uk/pubsinfo/infoteam/pressrel/1998/19980513000353.html](http://www.foe.co.uk/pubsinfo/infoteam/pressrel/1998/19980513000353.html). May 13, 1998.
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- <sup>xx</sup> Mutume, Gumisai. Human Right: Workers Brace for World Action Against Rio Tinto. World News, [www.oneworld.org/ips2/feb98/riotinto.html](http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/feb98/riotinto.html). Feb 9, 1998.
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