
Peru : Community resistance forces Yanacocha Mining Company to retreat

In Peru, the Departments where mining prevails show the highest levels of poverty in the country. Such is the case of Cajamarca, the location of the Yanacocha Mining Company -with 51.35 per cent of its shares belonging to the US transnational Newmont Mining Corporation; 43.65 per cent to the national group Benavides; and 5 percent to the World Bank's International Finance Corporation.

The Minera Yanacocha Company has been operating in Cajamarca since 1993, and is the second largest gold mine in the world. However, while Cajamarca contributes some 10 per cent to the country's exports, it is the fifth poorest Department in the country, with 77.4 per cent of its population living in poverty and 50.8 per cent in extreme poverty.

On 2 September 2004, some 3,000 peasants marched towards the Yanacocha Mining company's camp (see WRM Bulletin No. 86), located in the Cerro Quilish, demanding that the new exploration works foreseen to be undertaken in Quilich, South Yanacocha and Cuenca Porcon should not take place. This is a zone with a very fragile ecosystem, located in a high part of the catchment area. Quilish is only 8.5 km from the "El Milagro" drinking water plant. According to studies and technical reports, its exploration and subsequent exploitation involve a serious risk of poisoning the water, with the resulting repercussions on the health and life of the population in rural and urban areas, in addition to an increasing shortage of water.

Added to the confrontations between peasants and police forces, was an attack from a helicopter provided by the Army, dropping tear-gas bombs on the demonstrators to disperse them. The confrontation ended with various people injured, among them one with a bullet wound and various other people arrested, including children and old people.

A few days later, during a multitudinous march held on 15 September, the day of a regional strike, the population of Cajamarca proclaimed: "Listen Yanacocha, Cajamarca is to be respected," "An intelligent people defends the environment," "Life is a treasure, worth more than gold," "We want clean water, not contaminated water,!" "This is possible, yes this is possible!"

The resounding civil protest by the people of Cajamarca over their legitimate right to consume clean water free from heavy metals, bore its fruit. Following two weeks of mobilizations and civil protests, the Minister of Energy and Mines shelved the authorization granted to the Yanacocha Mining Company in the Cerro Quilish. A formal Negotiation Dialogue will be installed to discuss concrete alternatives for the concrete problems caused by the Yanacocha Mining Company. Civil society will submit its proposals to the Peruvian State.

They still have before them the task of continuing to inform and organize. However, the people are clear and say "When the cyanide ponds start to infiltrate our rivers, no gold or money will save us. Wake up Cajamarcans!"

Article based on information from: "El retroceso de Yanacocha", Iván Salas Rodríguez, sent by

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