

*Sunday May 6, 2012*

## **Honoring both dollars and sense**

By Jim Taylor

The president of Taseko Mines, Russell Hallbauer, wrote a letter to federal Environment Minister Peter Kent, asking him to ensure that the environmental review of his company's latest proposal for a gold-copper mine in central B.C. should not include an aboriginal representative on the review panel, and should not consider spiritual or cultural concerns.

To put his letter in context, Taseko's first application for the New Prosperity mine, near Williams Lake, was approved by the B.C. government, and then "scathingly rejected" by a federal review panel.

"We are concerned," Hallbauer wrote, "that some of the steps that the panel took or allowed others to take had the effect of giving priority status to the interests and perspectives [of] aboriginal people...."

"In our view, these actions...stray into areas where a reasonable perception of bias begins to exist."

Brian Battison, Taseko's vice-president of corporate affairs, similarly argued that spirituality shouldn't be considered because it isn't part of federal environmental review legislation.

Children's plays, films, and prayers inject too much emotion into the hearings, Battison said. "The whole process moves so far beyond the true facts [that] the science and the facts get lost."

Unfortunately, Taseko's "science and facts" do not extend much beyond dollars. Taseko's primary argument for the mine is that it will create 71,000 jobs and add \$11 billion to the country's GDP over 20 years.

There's no mention of how many jobs, dollars, and even lives may be lost over the next 100 years by damage to watersheds, fisheries, forests, tourism....

### **Inadvertent revelation**

If you visit Taseko's website, you have to search deeply to find any reference to environmental protection. The website's photographs focus entirely on heavy machinery, open pit mines, concentrators, mills...

Obviously, only one kind of science matters – industrial science.

Taseko's website reveals its priorities – extracting resources to make a profit.

I doubt if Hallbauer would ask Minister Kent to ensure that the environmental review panel should not include anyone sharing that bias.

If the mine were on privately owned land, would Hallbauer seek to exclude the property owner from deliberations? B.C. is still negotiating aboriginal land titles. What happens to the mine if a court eventually rules that it was built on land belonging to the Tsilhqot'in First Nation, without their approval?

Hallbauer's request to exclude an aboriginal representative strikes me as short-sighted at best, foolish at worst. Perhaps he's gambling that native land claims will be thrown out. Or perhaps he believes that the original inhabitants have relinquished any rights to the land they once occupied exclusively.

### **Creation spirituality**

Possibly the most interesting of Hallbauer's requests is his desire to ban prayers from the hearings. He must have more faith in the power of prayer than most Canadians.

Or maybe it's not prayer as much as who those prayers are directed to -- a Spirit who doesn't measure things only by money.

Because in the industrial western world, money is our God. It is our ultimate icon. Nothing else counts.

It's often claimed that native spirituality is different; it sees human life integrated with nature. I'm not convinced.

I think respect for creation is more preached than practiced. Gasoline-sniffing youth in Nain, drug gangs in Hobbema, and hovels in Attawapiskat don't impress me as shining examples of humans living in harmony with the world around them.

As author Farley Mowat documented, when native tribes get the white man's guns, they can slaughter migrating caribou just as ruthlessly as white hunters.

And it was not white settlers who drove herds of buffalo over Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in southern Alberta.

## **Universally related**

Nevertheless, my quibbles aside, First Nations' spiritual ideals are worth heeding -- whether they live up to them or not.

Because any examination beyond the purely monetary will show that humans exist in symbiosis with nature. We are not just connected to nature. At any level, we are inseparable from nature.

On the purely theoretical level, we all share a common origin. Every atom of every human -- and of every fish, rock, insect, tree, and mammal -- came into existence via the Big Bang. Not one element in any of our bodies was created later. We are universally united by our ancestry.

On the most personal level, none of us is utterly independent. Remove from my body every cell containing my DNA, and there would still be a recognizably human form left -- the bacteria that assist my body to function. I cannot live without them.

Nor can I live without other humans. I depend on them for my food, my shelter, my clothing, and my personality. No one exists in isolation.

That is the spirituality that -- in part -- the native peoples offer to us. This symbiotic relationship is crucial to our survival, both as individuals and as a species. It cannot, it must not, be excluded from consideration in environmental reviews, simply because it doesn't lend itself to measurement in monetary terms.

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## **YOUR TURN**

Last week's column about the U.S. Secret Service agents hiring prostitutes in Colombia produced a flood of mail, only part of which I am able to use today.

Fran Ota wondered about my note that the U.S. military prohibits the hiring of prostitutes. "It may be illegal, Fran wrote, "but that doesn't stop it from happening. When Norio and I lived in Viet Nam, I was approached on the street by an American serviceman who offered \$100 to sleep with him. Norio wasn't big enough to be able to handle the man, but our friend who had served in the Turkish military was quite large enough. Saigon was full of prostitutes, and it was the American military -- mostly -- who were taking advantage of the opportunity. Since the end of the war, prostitution in Viet Nam has dropped considerably as women are given an education and jobs.

"In South Korea a whole town has grown up around the American base in Uijongbu. The major sources of income are prostitution and drugs. If America were to prosecute those who violate Article 134, they would not have a military left to speak of -- so I find this hypocrisy around Colombia ridiculous. Yes, they were stupid -- but they were prosecuted [only] because they got caught.

Vern Ratzlaff thought the column was "a great commentary on our culture and its preoccupation. Our Canadian cabinet members can defraud, lie and [waste] public funds but are all right as long as [there's] no hint of sexual interest."

Bob Stoddard noted that “The US provides the export market for the drug products of Latin American countries, but we insist on eliminating the sources. Yet, the US provides the source of guns [for drug wars], even when Mexico requests we cease exporting this product.”

Diane Bourgeault wrote, “Your comments about Republican obsessions and the market for Colombian drugs are right on. Puritans still live on! I wonder how many employees of the DEA consume cocaine themselves....”

Allan Baker added a wry footnote: “Obama ended his speech to the National Press last week by saying that he had much more material - but he had to get the Secret Service home to meet their new curfew time!”

“Sexuality, in the human species, is fraught with symbolism,” wrote Charles Hill. “[On the one hand] it is the closest possible union; Christians are the ‘bride of Christ.’ It is [also] used as a weapon -- Bosnians raping Serb women and vice versa; mass rapes in some African countries as a means of intimidation... With sex offenders and many, many husbands, it is a means of power and control. Many, if not most, prostitutes have no other means of economic survival or have been forced into the trade. We’ve also seen, in the past few months, a presidential candidate not being believable because of his affairs and multiple marriages. Sex means many things beyond a moment of pleasure or torment. As someone asked me once, ‘how could something that feels so good be so bad?’ Surely God could have figured out a less conflictual way of reproduction.”

Grant Bracwell thought that that the “crotch complex of Americans brought to mind an oddity of slang. I often wonder [about the significance] of the fact that men in the US keep their ‘junk’ where men in the UK keep their ‘family jewels’.”

Jean Hamilton admits she was jolted by my reference to the Cartagena women as “Hookers”.

“I find the use of the term ‘hooker’ and its implications quite disturbing. The pictures of the women the tv channels have been running look like heartbreakingly young teenagers. Who is ‘hooking’ whom? And how do we know who is an unwilling victim?

“We know nothing of how these women became involved in prostitution, but we do know that the very young and the vulnerable are targeted.

“Otherwise, I agree with your observations about the American obsession with genital morality, and wonder whether it can be separated from their obsession with religion. Are we so different? The Christian church does not have a great record when it comes to how women are regarded, or to the hierarchy of ‘sins’ implicit in centuries of religious teaching and practice. Are we dealing with motes and beams here?”

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## **PSALM PARAPHRASES**

I have started including a psalm paraphrase for the coming Sunday with my Soft Edges column, on Wednesdays. Why not on Sunday, you ask? Well, partly because psalms seem to me to fit better with the general mood of Soft Edges, which is more likely to deal directly with faith-related matters than these Sharp Edges columns. And partly because Soft Edges is about 250 words shorter than Sharp Edges, and so including the paraphrase on Wednesday won’t make the e-mailing quite as long.

That does mean that if you want to receive the paraphrase, and are not on the Soft Edges mailing list, you’ll need to subscribe. No charge, just send me a message, [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or you can subscribe automatically by sending a blank e-mail to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca).

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## TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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## PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslikeGod" page, [www.seemslikegod.org](http://www.seemslikegod.org);
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com](mailto:isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin's "Model T Websites." a simple (and cheap) seven-page website for congregations who want to develop a web presence <<http://www.modeltwebsites.com>>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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