

Regarding the proposed Raven Coal mine in the Comox Valley

I am a retired citizen living south of Ladysmith on Vancouver Island. Why should I be concerned, for even if the worst happens in the Comox Valley, or in Fanny Bay or in Port Alberni I would be out of the immediate danger zone. My drinking water comes from a different watershed. If I choose to consume seafood, I can buy produce captured elsewhere. I perhaps only travel to Port Alberni once a year taking visitors up to Tofino, so the issue of coal dust dispersal in the vicinity of a marine port remains somewhat distant to my own person well-being. As for the pollution of coal fuelled industries across the Pacific Ocean – well, that is even further away and the problem of other folks (millions of them in areas smaller than Vancouver Island) dealing with governments that have less interest in the well being of their people than even the government of British Columbia.

To paraphrase Pastor Martin Niemöller – “first they came to pollute the watershed, the land and the marine habitat of the Comox-Courtney valley, but I said nothing because I was from an area further south not threatened by the Raven Coal mine project, but years later they came to exploit the mineral deposits west of Nanaimo and Ladysmith, and when we objected, the government and the people from the north would say – but you didn’t speak up when the precedents were being established years before, so now it is your turn.”

This beautiful island is not really that big – and its people so disperse that what happens to some does not happen to all. Beyond our human family we are also aware that we are the custodians of a habitat that is indeed fragile and threatened. There is a diversity of life throughout the Island that is indeed impressive upon which we all depend for our well being – and theirs. In past centuries there was either a lack of concern or an ignorance regarding the delicate balance upon which the health of the planet depends. Today we are more aware, becoming increasingly more aware, of the threats to the biodiversity and the chain of life in which we are only a part. Unfortunately we are a major factor because of the way we have become the greatest threat to this balance.

We are a civilized people after all – we organize and have a government that is charged with protecting our well being. In a perfect world the regulation of the mining industry would ensure that extraction of valuable resources would not harm the environment and would provide benefits to the common good – not just profits for a tiny segment of the corporate world. We would expect that those with the powers to regulate would set strict standards and would establish control mechanisms with an enforcement

capability. Around the world, particularly in third world countries where politicians are easily bribed and private mercenaries can be hired to control local populations and quell dissent, we see clearly that mining companies are not willing to work with standards and control that consider anything other than short term maximum profits. We would think that in British Columbia the regulators would provide greater security for the well being of the "commons". Unfortunately there are serious concerns regarding the ability and commitment by the government to safeguard the local ecosystem in the Comox Valley and throughout the province (Site C dam proposal, Fish Lake, etc.). As is obvious, when there is inadequate regulation or enforcement that results in long term damage to the environment, the mining industry is not held accountable and the debt falls onto future generations (my grandchildren and great grandchildren) to pay the price – in terms of dealing with the consequences and/or paying for the cleanup.

There are indeed benefits to the exploitation of mineral resources hidden deep below the surface. There will be employment and increased financial activity – at least in the short term. It has not been proven that more jobs will be created to offset the potential loss of jobs in other sectors negatively impacted by the consequences of a normal mining operation, even without considering the worst case scenario. Is agriculture, the marine extraction industry particularly dealing with shell fish, and the important tourism industry less important than a short term mining operation. I have yet to hear of tourists coming to see a coal slag!

The watersheds of Vancouver Island are particularly vulnerable. Water from both the surface and aquifers is already stressed and limited particularly along the east coast of the Island. Some watersheds such as Parksville are already described as a "Walkerton waiting to happen"! I know what that means as I was living in Ontario at the time of that tragedy. Ultimately our fresh waters find their way into the ocean waters, and directly impact on the diversity of marine life. The days of over abundance are long past us and it is imperative that our human needs are tempered by a need to restore a balance in the health of the whole aquamarine chain of life. There are already too many dead zones along the east coast of the Island where marine life is in serious danger or near extinction. Another area – that around Fanny Bay – ought not to be again sacrificed – long term loss and pain for the sake of short term profit for corporate concerns and limited benefit for the people of Vancouver Island.

The proposal would see this coal being transported by truck 80 km along already narrow and limited highway access to be loaded onto freighters and shipped from Port Alberni. This highway was not constructed to accommodate such heavy traffic by commercial vehicles. The additional cost of upgrading and maintaining this highway will

be a not so hidden subsidy by the people of Vancouver Island for an industry that is not wanted nor beneficial.

Why would a senior citizen living in the beautiful countryside south of Ladysmith be concerned about what happens in Fanny Bay or Comox or Port Alberni? Self – interest of course. But this comes with a growing sensitivity that concern for my neighbour is the best way to shown concern for myself. We are a community – what concerns one is a common concern.

There would seem to be too few and too limited benefits to the Raven Coal project to justify allowing it to proceed. The commons have spoken in rallies, in town halls and demonstrations.

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"All would be better off if each person took into account the effect of his or her acts upon others."

World Commission on Environment & Development

~~~ Our Common Future, 1987 ~~~