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Jesuit Forum

OPENSPACE

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"Yes, the planet got destroyed, but for a beautiful moment in time we created a lot of value for shareholders."

Tom Toro, The New Yorker Collection/The Cartoon Bank

Engaging the signs of the times:

MONEY POWER

OPENSPACE

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The Jesuit Forum brings together
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direct them outward, enabling us to
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ers to build a better world.

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FORUMWORD

For what else do we want to pray? How often we respond to these words and how much we bring into prayer, how many people, how many suffering in so many situations around our world: the First Peoples of Canada and all they endure; those who are homeless or living precariously; those in Syria, in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, in Manchester, England, in Sudan, in Venezuela, in the Philippines....

Today, I also want us to hold in our prayer my partner at the Jesuit Forum, **Bill Ryan sj**, who became seriously ill in April, just as he was turning 92. He is now in palliative care in Pickering, Ontario, tenderly accompanied by the Jesuit Infirmary staff and many visitors.

Bill had previously written our main text on Money Power for this issue of *Open Space*. The other day, he wanted a sentence added! He is still sharp of mind, but he says his thinking is (not surprisingly) a little slower.

It is a happy coincidence that Bill was interviewed in March about his life for the Salt and Light television program, *Witness*, hosted by Fr. Tom Rosica. <http://saltandlighttv.org/witness/?f=fr-william-ryan>

Salt and Light's Sebastian Gomes also interviewed both Bill and me for a program celebrating the 50th anniversary of the **Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace**. It was broadcast in May. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBqbYLq5dY>

I made reference to the Philippines above. On page 9, we include an excerpt from the story of a young Indigenous woman from Mindanao, a strong leader in her community which has long been severely affected by the presence of a Canadian mining company. **Nenita Condes**, a Lumad from Mindanao, was one of a delegation of leaders from the Philippines recently in Canada at the invitation of KAIROS Canada. It was a very inspiring group to meet, and again showed us the appallingly detrimental effects of the extractives industry.

Finally, the Jesuit Forum is taking to the road. We will shortly be in Vancouver, Regina, Hamilton and St. John's. We continue our commitment to promote Pope Francis' encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home*.

Anne-Marie Jackson
Director

MONEY POWER

Who makes the rules?

Some commentators express surprise that Pope Francis speaks so concretely and frankly about the abuse of power in today's world. In his social encyclical *Laudato Si'*, following a description of the astonishing technological and financial power available in our time, he asks: "In whose hands does all this power lie? It is extremely risky for only a small part of humanity to have it." (104).

Several times in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*) he reminds us that reality is more important than ideas. I think he means something like this: pay attention to what actually happens in real life. Do not be put to sleep by words that can be used to reassure and to pacify—whether noble words like "democratic" or tempting words like "profitable."

Many people associate power primarily with governments. But the Pope is keenly aware of, and concerned about, the enormous and often unaccountable power of large global corporations and financial institutions. Because they have the technological knowledge and resources to sustain massive advertising and communications strategies, the power of corporations is not limited to substantial control of markets, data banks, financial institutions, property and especially money. This power also reaches our educational systems and permeates our very culture with a mindset born out of analysing everything in market terms. In all these ways, large corporations are often able to reshape law and public policy in their own interests.

Corporate money-think is perhaps best seen in their persistent drive to put a price on everything—even political power. This leaves many people with only their consumer power. And consumer power is drastically limited for the poor, who have little access to cash or credit.

For many generations in capitalist societies, there has been widespread confidence in the myth that the free

market, without interference by government, will eventually distribute income and wealth fairly. As recently as 2010, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney maintained that the sharing of income in society was not an election issue but a matter for the private sector. Yet there are dozens of studies pointing out that our economy is steadily becoming "an economy for the 1%". The January 2016 Oxfam Briefing Paper (oxfam.ca/our-work/publications/an-economy-for-the-1) states that "62 individuals have the same wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion people in the world."

This detailed research paper concludes: "The global inequality crisis is reaching new extremes. The richest now have more wealth than the rest of the world combined. Power and privilege is being used to skew the economic system to increase the gap between the richest and the rest. A global network of tax havens enables the richest individuals to hide \$7.6 trillion."

The January 2017 Oxfam Briefing Paper, titled "An Economy for the 99%", insists that it is time "to build a human economy that benefits everyone, not just the privileged few."



In whose hands does all this power lie?

It is extremely risky for only a small part of humanity to have it.

— Pope Francis

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There are presently (as far as can be determined) about 1,810 billionaires in the world, with an aggregate net worth of about \$6.48 trillion. Thirty-three of these are Canadians.

Super-concentration of wealth is not a new trend. In his meticulously researched *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), Thomas Piketty demonstrates conclusively that since the beginning of capitalism, the long-term trend has been that new wealth and income go to those who already have magnetic amounts of wealth and income.

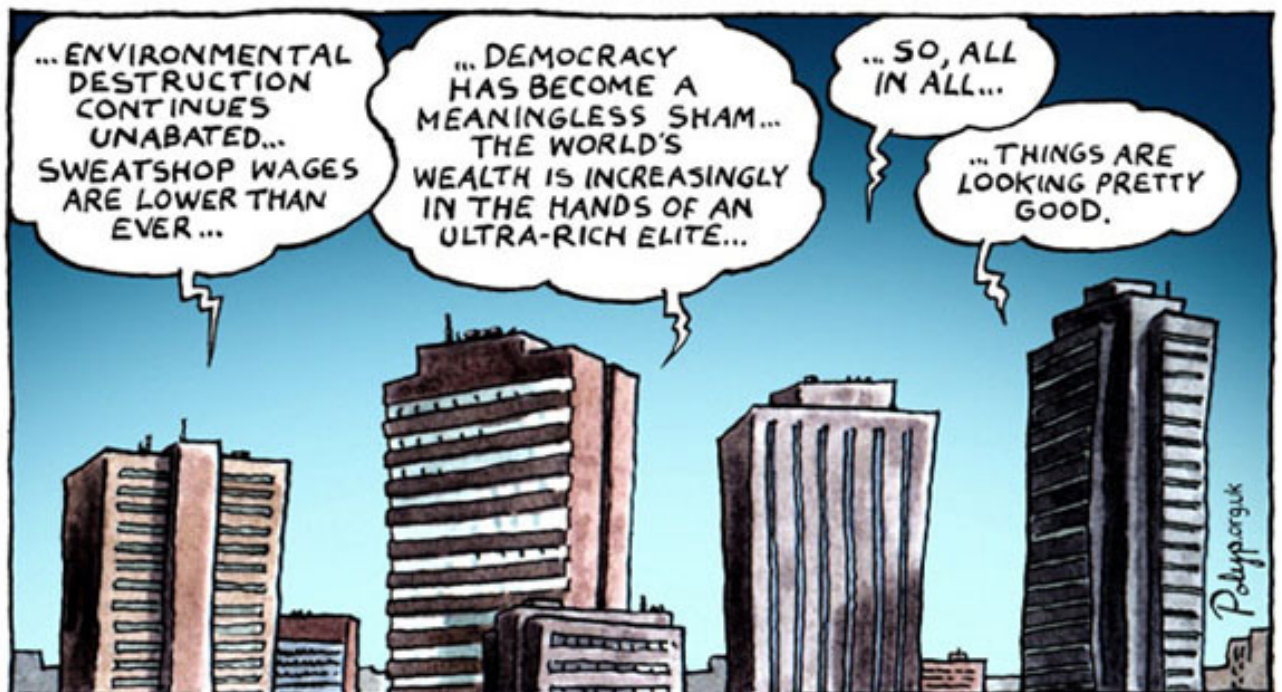
All this concentration and centralization of wealth happens in what we innocently call the globalized “free market”. Of course, all markets, no matter how “free”, have rules, whether written or unwritten. The power question is: Who sets the rules of today’s markets? And the answer increasingly is: global corporations that have the money and political influence to do so.

These global actors, and the individuals who set their goals and plans, are less and less publicly accountable, because governments have ever less control over them. In a phrase made famous during

the financial near-collapse of 2008, some of them were said to be “too big to fail.”

The respected economist Robert Reich served in three US federal administrations. In *Saving Capitalism—For the Many, Not the Few* (Vintage Books, 2016) he writes: “Although global businesses are required to play by the rules of the countries where they do business, the largest global corporations and financial institutions are exerting growing influence over the make-up of these rules, wherever devised. ... Moneyed interests do not want the curtain of the ‘free market’ lifted because that would expose their influence over the rules of the capitalist game and reveal alliances that could countervail their power.”

It should be clear that I am talking here not about business as such but about power concentrated in huge transnational corporations and financial institutions. In fact, smaller business enterprises today co-exist uneasily with the behemoths which are taking over many locally-oriented enterprises. Within the capitalist mix, there are many business-oriented groups calling for a more transparent, more social form of capitalism. They envision an entrepreneurial horizon which has many goals and values



in common with the cooperative movement. *Corporate Knights, A Magazine for Clean Capitalism* is a Canadian publication which researches and names “the hundred most sustainable corporations in the world.”

Money power over democracy

However, money power continues to play a significant role in overwhelming the democratic voting power of ordinary citizens in many countries. This was very evident in the November 2016 US election. Jane Mayer describes how this is happening in her meticulously researched book, *Dark Money – The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (Doubleday 2016).

She documents how, under the leadership of the Koch brothers, a group of billionaires set aside almost \$900 million to influence the presidential and congressional elections. They use anonymous donors and avoid public scrutiny by funnelling money into a labyrinthine collection of foundations, think tanks, and anonymous political groups – many under the aegis of charitable educational works. Among them are the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute. They are credited with birthing the Tea Party and moving America to the right in recent decades.

In Canada, we have limits on what individuals, corporations and unions can contribute to political parties or to individual politicians. Nevertheless, conservative think tanks such as the Fraser Institute, the National Citizens Coalition and the Canadian Taxpayers’ Federation helped former Prime Minister Harper shift Canada to the right on economic and political issues. It is clear that the power to lobby continues to expand and to infiltrate all levels of government. Funds devoted to lobbying by fossil fuel companies are increasing rapidly at the provincial level.

On many levels, democracy is weakening and inequality is rising, while environmental disaster looms. What kinds

AN ECONOMY FOR THE 99%

Oxfam Briefing Paper, January 2017

It’s time to build a human economy that benefits everyone, not just the privileged few.



Shining Mothers group members, left to right: Top row, Joyce Juma, 35, Diana Perpetuar, 29, Esther Joane, 29. Bottom Row; Jane Muthoni, 50, Mary Kwamboka, 26, Josephine Njeri, 38.

The Shining Mothers, a community women’s group in Kawangware informal settlement (Nairobi, Kenya) have regular ‘table banking’ meetings to learn business skills and help each other with their savings and loans. The Shining Mothers discuss issues which affect them in their community and raise these at public meetings, to ensure their voice is being heard by the local government. (Oxfam 2016)

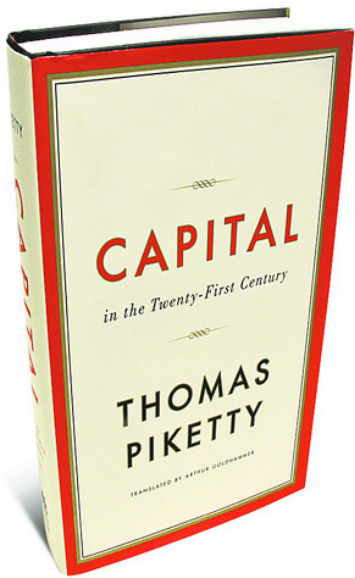
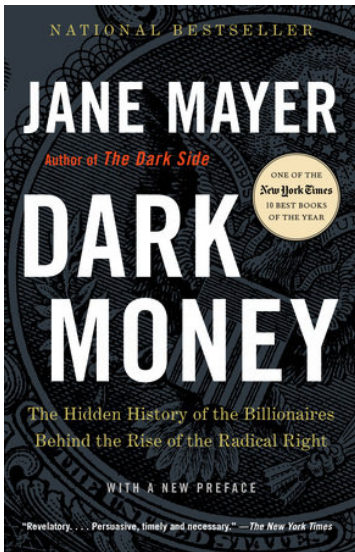
Allan Gichigi/Oxfam

of changes could help to restore an effective social passion for the common good?

Redefine “corporation”

The tax system—that beleaguered bastion of inclusive sharing—obviously needs some re-thinking so that the wealthy contribute a fairer share. The legal framework that permits (and sometimes prohibits) corporate commercial activity needs a profound revisioning. It could start with the very definition of corporations, so that they would lose their legal status as “persons” with some of the same legal rights as humans.

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A bigger shift would be in understanding who are the real stakeholders in the life and work of any corporation. Shareholders are not the only stakeholders. What about the workers, whose whole lives are engaged with their employer-corporation? What about the local communities whose environment, as well as their current economic viability, has come to depend on the decisions of the larger corporate player in their area?

Robert Reich puts the question this way: Why should the interests of shareholders take precedence over those of employees? In his analysis, the interests of non-shareholding stakeholders (such as workers) were taken more seriously before 1980, but have lost ground since.

What about worker-owned and cooperative enterprises? In a culture of individualism, these “stakeholder enterprises” are hard to sustain. They demand a set of virtues and a kind of attentiveness to the social dimension of our working life and of our financial underpinnings which are difficult to develop in our distracted, consumer-oriented way of life.

There are, of course, good examples of steps in the direction of “stakeholder enterprises”. German steel and coal corporations, for example, have worker members on their Boards. Reich suggests that the legal privileges that come with incorporation (for example, limited liability) should be available only to entities that share their profitability with workers and with the local communities in which they operate.

Close tax loopholes

Corporations pay taxes and to that degree they are already big contributors to the common good. It seems clear, however, that too many loopholes have opened in recent years, and that we need a concerted effort to close some of them.

There is also the problem of tax havens. A November 2016 study by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and Swiss law professor Mark Pieth states that tax havens “facilitate both money laundering and tax avoidance and evasion, contributing to crime and unacceptably high levels of global wealth inequality.” (*Overcoming the Shadow Economy*, November 2016)

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, estimates of offshore tax havens “deprive public coffers of between \$100 billion and \$240 billion (US) each year. Canada’s share has been pegged at \$6 billion to \$7.8 billion annually.” (*Toronto Star* November 15 2016)

Today there are suggestions for new ways of tilting against economic inequality through taxation. Reich suggests that inherited wealth, which present owners have done little to create, could be heavily taxed without creating too much confusion. Thomas Piketty proposes a global tax on wealth. But these suggestions pale before the challenge of a major rebuilding of countervailing power in a re-inspired, more attentive, much more democratic society.

What then must we do? This question—besides being the anguished response of the people to the fiery preaching of John the Baptist (see Luke 3, 10-14)—is the title of an insightful book by Gar Alperovitz, published in 2013. (See *Open Space* Spring 2014.)

Build resilient communities

The key to the strategy proposed by Alperovitz is the patient organization of worker-owned or community-owned institutions committed to sustaining strong local communities. Resilient communities grow their culture from such rooted economic enterprises, he believes. The multiplication of such democratic institutions, at all levels of society, can leaven even big governments and corporations with the yeast of democracy.

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Out of this can grow effective political parties seriously committed to democracy and social justice. Such growth could open the way for true systemic change.

Gar Alperovitz often collaborates with James Gustav Speth, now a dean at Yale University and formerly a high-level official at the United Nations. The partners have named their visionary effort *The Next System Project*. They intend to search out and to promote, globally, new alternatives to our present economic and political systems. The alternatives will find their footing within civil society as community-based organizations. David Bollier, who is associated with *The Next System Project*, proposes as an overarching approach and goal: the restoration of the commons.

Common wealth

There is now a growing commons movement that would establish “commoning as a transformative social paradigm” to replace “the interconnected pathologies of relentless economic growth, concentrated corporate power, consumerism, unsustainable debt, and cascading ecological destruction.” Participants in the commons movement—dubbed “commoners”—focus on reclaiming their “common wealth” in both the material and the political sense.

“They want to roll back the pervasive privatization and marketization of their shared resources—from land and water to knowledge and urban spaces—and reassert basic participatory control over those resources and community life.”

This would include making certain resources inalienable, protecting them from sale on the market and conserving them for future generations. This project—to reverse market “enclosures” and re-invent the commons—seeks to achieve what state regulation has generally failed to achieve: effective control of abusive market behaviour.

(See thenextsystem.org/communing-as-a-transformative-social-paradigm/).

David Bollier’s development of this “commons approach” is both creative and fascinating. It is at once a paradigm, a discourse, an ethic, and a set of social practices.

Is the commons approach of *The Next System Project* only a dream? Maybe not. Many respected and experienced knowledge workers, and a number of grassroots action groups, are already supporting particular “commons” projects. We can, I believe, include Pope Francis among them. In his *Laudato Si’*, after reviewing the present frightening situation of our “common home”, he suggests several necessary changes to achieve the common good—which remains, as it has always been, the basic principle and goal of Catholic social teaching. And he would also appreciate the patient, gritty process of “commoning”, because it illustrates his enduring conviction that actions in the real world are far more important than beautiful abstract words.

We will reflect further on this “commoning” approach in a future issue of *Open Space*.

Bill Ryan sj

The Next System Project

The Next System Project is an ambitious multi-year initiative aimed at thinking boldly about what is required to deal with the systemic challenges the United States faces now and in coming decades.

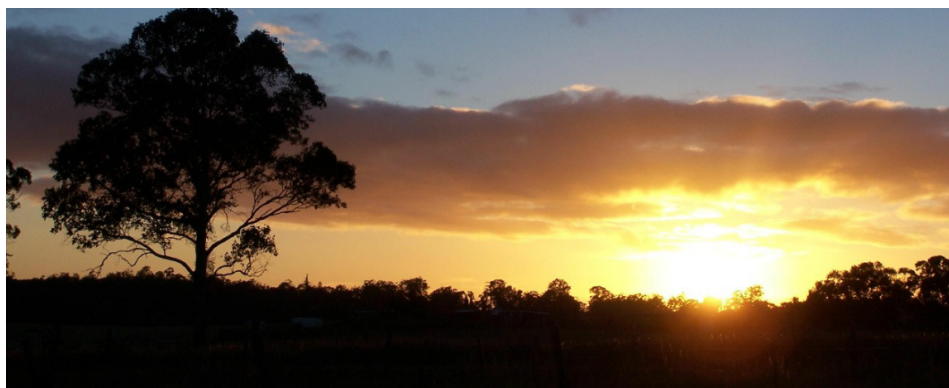
Responding to real hunger for a new way forward, and building on innovative thinking and practical experience with new economic institutions and approaches being developed in communities across the country and around the world, the goal is to put the central idea of system change, and that there can be a “next system,” on the map.

...Despite the scale of the difficulties, a cautious and paradoxical optimism is warranted. There are real alternatives. Arising from the unforgiving logic of dead ends, the steadily building array of promising new proposals and alternative institutions and experiments, together with an explosion of ideas and new activism, offer a powerful basis for hope.

www.democracycollaborative.org
www.thenextsystem.org



Tom Toro, The New Yorker Collection/The Cartoon Bank



BRING BACK THE COMMONS

“
***A commons
is not just a
resource (land or
trees or software)
but also the
community of people
managing and
protecting it.***

— David Bollier

With one breath, the friends of power told us that global capitalism was a dynamic, disruptive force, the source of constant innovation and change. With the next, they told us it had brought about the end of history: permanent stability and peace. There was no attempt to resolve this contradiction. Or any other.

We were promised unending growth on a finite planet. We were told that a vastly unequal system would remove all differences. Social peace would be delivered by a system based on competition and envy. Democracy would be secured by the power of money. The contradictions were crashingly obvious. The whole package relied on magic.

Because none of it works, there is no normal to which to return.

... Over the past 200 years, one element has been conspicuously absent from the dominant ideologies, something that is neither market nor state: the commons.

A commons is an asset over which a community has shared and equal rights. This could, in principle, include land, water, minerals, knowledge, scientific research and software. But at the moment most of these assets have been enclosed: seized by either the state or private interests and treated as any other form of capital. Through this enclosure, we have been deprived of our common wealth.

Some commons still exist. They range from community-owned forests in Nepal and Romania to lobster fisheries in Maine, pastures in East Africa and Switzerland, the internet, Wikipedia, Linux, journals published by the Public Library of Science, the timebank in Helsinki, local currencies and open source microscopy. But these are exceptions to the general rule of private and exclusive ownership.

... The restoration of the commons has great potential not only to distribute wealth but also to change society. As the writer David Bollier points out, a commons is not just a resource (land or trees or software) but also the community of people managing and protecting it. The members of the commons develop much deeper connections with each other and their assets than we do as passive consumers of corporate products.

Managing commons resources means developing rules, values and traditions. It means, in some cases, re-embedding ourselves in the places in which we live. It means reshaping government to meet the needs of communities, not corporations. In other words, reviving the commons can act as a counterweight to the atomizing, alienating forces now generating a thousand forms of toxic reaction.

Excerpted from “The Fortifying Commons”
by George Monbiot
The Guardian, December 16 2016

CANADIAN MINING: years of struggle in the Philippines

Nenita Condes was a member of a recent delegation of leaders from the Philippines, visiting Canada to share first-hand accounts of human rights violations in the context of mining projects. They joined KAIROS and the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability in calling on the Government of Canada to appoint an extractive-sector Ombudsperson to monitor Canadian mining operations overseas, and to provide legislated access to Canadian courts for those harmed by the international operations of Canadian resource extraction companies.

I had the privilege of meeting some members of the Subanen in the late 1990s when they visited Development and Peace's Toronto office. I recall the vivid descriptions of harassment and worse that this community suffered when Canadian corporation, Toronto Ventures Inc. (TVI) was establishing its presence in Mindanao. The community members passed around a jagged piece of wood with big nails protruding from both sides. They said these nasty objects had been placed at random along the pathway used by the Indigenous people in their bare feet. Nenita would have been a teenager. What follows are excerpts from *Bayi - Stories of Lumad Women*.

Anne-Marie Jackson

Nenita Condes of Zamboanga del Norte, a province in Mindanao in the southern part of the Philippines was raised by progressive Lumad parents. She grew up seeing her parents and others confront mining companies, government agencies and other trespassers in the ancestral land of the Subanen (meaning 'people from the river').

"My parents are the ones who helped me understand our situation and since then, I have also taken a stand. I participate in discussions. I lend my opinion on community matters. And I value the importance of collective work."

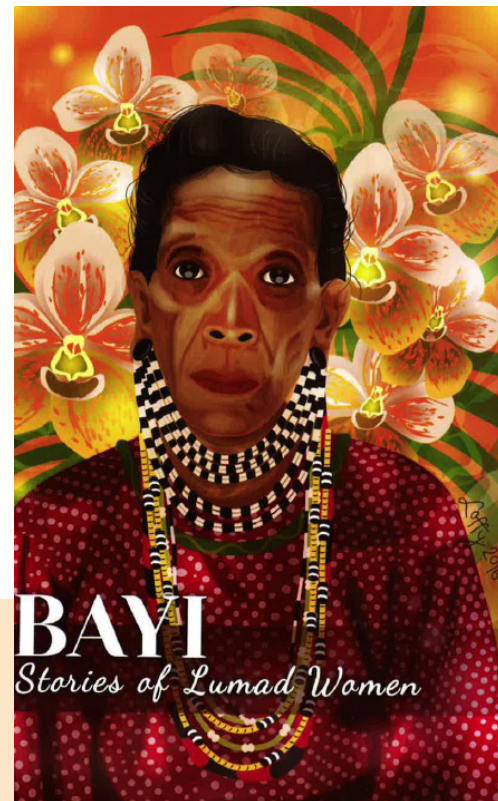
Since 1996, the Subanen have been up against TVI which encroached into their sacred place in Mount Canatuan. TVI had acquired a government permit to mine copper in 508 hectares. The once sacred mountain was barricaded and the tribes were kept out, as the company extracted copper ore from its womb.

Timuays (male tribal leaders) who led the strong opposition to such encroachments soon became the target of harassment by army soldiers and the corporation's security unit.

"Even when I was still young, the grueling experiences of my parents in their struggle left their mark on me. I realized that I also have responsibilities that I have a place in the struggle. I was always aware of this, which is why the initiative to sharpen my views on issues and community matters has always been ingrained in me," Nenita said.

"It inspires me to see that when people come together, nothing is too difficult. It encourages me to see the support of different sectors, and the unity of different Indigenous communities. Also when I see communities in extreme poverty, I am challenged and I take it as my responsibility to empower, teach and guide people to have a brighter perspective towards change."

"What I want to achieve, along with the community, is to overcome poverty, and to have freedom – to have the right to decide our fate, our future and our development, especially for the Lumad."

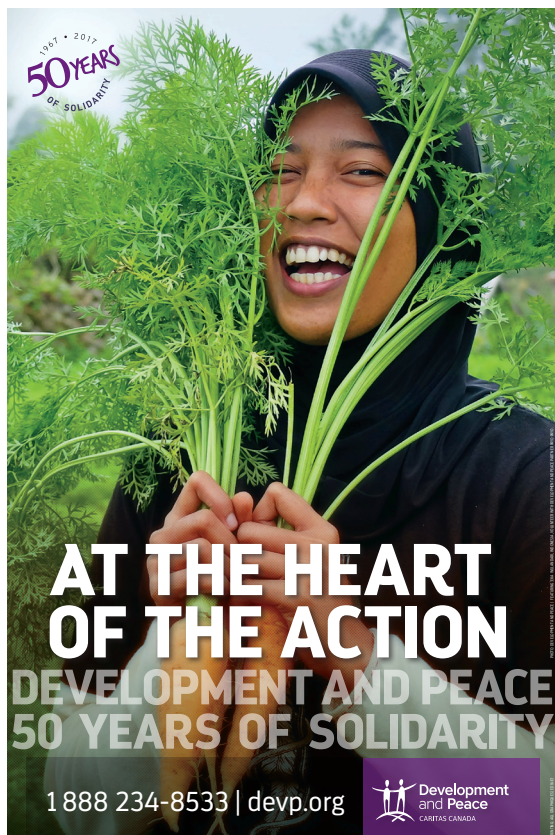


Bayi - Stories of Lumad Women is published by KARAPATAN and Tanggol Bayi 2016, Philippines. Cover illustration by Loffy.

This is a strategic moment to add your voice to the growing calls for mining justice by writing to your Member of Parliament and the Minister of International Trade to ask for the Government of Canada to appoint an extractive sector Ombudsperson to monitor Canadian mining overseas. The Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability is a coalition of 30 environmental, human rights, religious, labour and solidarity groups from across Canada. Canadian Jesuits International is a member. The CNCA has been coordinating a month of action. Please go to <http://cnca-rcrce.ca/campaigns-justice/take-action/>

Congratulations!

Development and Peace at 50



*Thank you, Development and Peace,
for inviting us and offering us ways
to act in solidarity with impoverished
and marginalized people in the world.*

*Thank you for the many ways you
have taught us, especially through
your partners in the Global South,
how to open our minds, reflect on the
Gospel message to love our neighbour
and to take action
for the common good.*


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