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### Fighting for the Forests: Grassroots Resistance to Mining in Northern Ecuador

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# Fighting for the Forests

## Grassroots Resistance to Mining in Northern Ecuador

by  
Glen David Kuecker

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*The history of a grassroots struggle against proposed mining projects in the Ecuadorian community of Junín reveals the centrality to its development of a “colono mentality” augmented by the conscientization of liberation theology. Links established between local organizers and NGOs in Ecuador and elsewhere helped the community to raise the costs of development sufficiently to drive the mining company away. A subsequent rise in the price of copper altered the comparative-advantage formula again, however, and a new mining company is seeking to win community members’ hearts and minds. While a Gramscian war of position is appropriate under present circumstances, it is highly vulnerable to capitalism’s capacity for survival.*

**Keywords:** Ecuador, mining, social movements, globalization, environment

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José Enríquez had an eventful start to his day on May 12, 1997. José was the caretaker of a copper mining exploration camp near the Andean mountain community of Junín, which is located in the Intag region of Imbabura Province, northern Ecuador. He was alone at the camp, which normally hosted a group of mining engineers from Bishi Metals, a subsidiary of the Mitsubishi Corporation. The previous evening all of Junín’s 50 families had met with representatives from Acción Ecológica (Ecology in Action), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Quito, and Defensa y Conservación Ecológica de Intag (Ecological Defense and Conservation of Intag—DECOIN), a grassroots ecological organization formed to resist mining in the region. The meeting had concluded with the community determined to take dramatic action against the company. Next morning, 87 people from Junín hiked up the 6.5-km mountain trail to the camp, where they collected all of the property at the camp, inventoried it, and packed it for the trip back down the mountain. They had José sign the inventory, which included things like cups, plates, geological equipment, rolls of wire, and an electrical generator. José went to García Moreno, the first town of significance on the road to Apuela, to notify the company and the government. A day passed as people from Junín, now numbering 200, moved the property down the mountain and awaited a response. The next day, not having heard anything and according to plan, they burned the mining camp to the ground. Before leaving, they nailed a simple wooden

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sign to a post. It read, "Not Another Step Forward for the Miners." It was a prophetic slogan: to date the people of Junín have proven victorious in keeping mining out of their community (*El Comercio*, May 27, 1997).

According to Carlos Zorrilla, a 30-year Intag resident and DECOIN's president in 1997, "the case of Junín is a clear wake-up call to governments all over the world, and to big mining companies in particular, that local populations must not be ignored, and that their rights to decide their own future must never be overlooked" (*Drillbits and Tailings*, 1997: 1). A decision by 200 people to confront one of the largest corporations in the world is a story that attracts our attention. The people of Junín, however, challenged more than Mitsubishi; they also frustrated the plans of the Ecuadorian government and the World Bank. When 200 people stop the neoliberal project in their corner of the world, we might expect people to take notice. Their story of resistance, however, remains widely unknown.

Junín's story is a case study of grassroots resistance to neoliberalism, and it highlights three main themes. First, it illustrates the core issue of who has the power to decide. In this case, the people of Junín determined that it was their right and not that of the World Bank, state technocrats, or corporations to decide the fate of the forests. Second, it highlights the distinction between what John Holloway calls "power over" and "power to" that is central to an understanding of today's social movements (2002: 22). In Junín, as in places like Chiapas, highly marginalized communities seek empowerment, the ability "to do" instead of seeking dominion over others. Third, it provides an example of how today's social movements construct alternatives to neoliberalism. Confronted with the prospect of mining, the people of Junín were challenged to devise a replacement for it, an alternative development project that was ecologically feasible and met the criteria of community empowerment. Their resistance to mining has fostered an agrarian-based environmental ethic that constitutes a radical challenge to neoliberalism, placing the idea of community above profit, production, and consumption. Taken together, these themes show that community ultimately proves the key to resistance because it is not reducible to the logic of free-market capitalism. The irreducibility of community is the Achilles' heel of today's capitalism, because the neoliberal paradigm fails to factor the power of community into the cost of production. This essay first places the Junín case in the political and economic context of mining in Ecuador and then explains how the community organized its resistance. It concludes with an analysis of Junín as a social movement.

When asked why Ecuador needs mining, Ecuador's under-secretary of energy and mining, replied, "Ecuador has the moral obligation to conduct mining...the world needs minerals. Ecuador has minerals. Ecuador has the obligation to provide them." It was a perfect statement of the neoliberal project for Ecuador: it has the obligation to destroy its greatest asset, biodiversity, in order to pay off its greatest liability, an unpayable foreign debt. The under-secretary's statements reflect policy makers' thinking about Ecuador's economic problems, which are immense and potentially impossible to resolve. Despite a high rate of increase in gross domestic product (GDP) growth during the 1970s, when it peaked at 9.1 percent per year, Ecuador has faced steep declines ever since. Average GDP dropped to 2.1 percent in the 1980s and 1.6

percent in the 1990s (World Bank, 2003: 1). In 1990, a decade before an economic melt-down, the total payment made by Ecuador on its foreign debt was 10.5 percent of the GDP, a figure that has been reduced to 9 percent in 2002 through vigorous austerity programs. Ecuador is unquestionably a primary-product exporter; in 2000 these products made up 90 percent of exports (United Nations, 2002: 199). Export-dependent, Ecuador is highly vulnerable to fluctuations in global supply and demand and experiences severe limits on keeping capital within the country that make it dependent upon borrowing from the developed world. A chronic inability to meet debt payments drives the political economy (Gerlach, 2003).

When addressing Ecuador's intractable economic problems, World Bank analysts explicitly view mining as one path of development. They think that private-sector development of mineral resources will stimulate economic growth and call for legal and administrative reforms to encourage private investment (Fox, Onorato, and Strongman, 1998). This thinking mirrors the logic of the austerity programs promoted throughout Latin America by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in which loans were made conditional upon a drastic reduction of state spending (Gerlach, 2003; Green, 1995). In Ecuador, the World Bank advised downsizing government by "transferring to the private sector many of the responsibilities currently under public sector purview" (World Bank, 1994). These policies, however, failed miserably, and Ecuador faced total economic collapse in 1999. In August it failed to make the interest payments on US\$6.5 billion in Brady Bonds and then defaulted on them. To save itself, in January 2000 Ecuador dollarized its economy and undertook ever more extreme austerity measures (World Bank, 2000; 2004). With dollarization, Ecuador became directly linked to the U.S. economy. Moreover, it now has only two options available for getting US dollars: borrowing and exporting at higher levels than before. Borrowing is possible only under strict IMF conditions, and therefore policy makers prefer increasing exports of primary products. The Ecuadorian state has consequently been very keen on pushing mining into new areas. Such places, unfortunately, are often ecologically vulnerable rain and cloud forests.

A tiny group of Ecuadorians has power over the nation's mining policy. It determines policy to the exclusion of the communities in which mining takes place and without input from Ecuador's 12 million people. Under Minister of Energy and Mines Pablo Terán's direction, Ecuador encouraged rapid and apparently unrestricted foreign development of the mining sector. In one interview Terán boasted, "This is a very deregulated system, very hands-off on the part of the state. The Ecuadorian government has turned into a facilitator rather than a policeman, as we used to be" (2001). Mining promotion features legal reforms friendly to foreign capital and a slick advertising campaign. According to the Ministry's promotional material, "the Ecuadorian government has made substantial efforts to improve the investment climate for both domestic and foreign companies," including "a complete overhaul of Ecuador's minerals administration system" (*Mining Journal*, 2001).

The reforms featured the "single title," which replaced a system requiring the holder to renew the title for each stage of the mining process. This measure undermined the state's ability to regulate mining and hold title owners

accountable and eliminated community input into the process. The single title is valid for 30 years and can be revoked only for failure to pay fees. The reforms also included “the complete abolition of royalties from mineral production.” There is a US\$100 application fee for a title and a fee of US\$1 per hectare (2.5 acres) until production starts; then the fee increases to US\$16. According to Terán, “You can now obtain a mining title in any region of Ecuador in about two weeks—there’s no hassle, no red tape, nothing like that. And soon you will be able to apply for a title over the Internet.” He continues, “Once you have your title, you don’t have to report what you are doing, and it is up to you what you do.” Lacking reporting mechanisms, a review process, and community input, the new mining law was an excellent way for mining companies to externalize the costs of development and production. Profoundly undemocratic, these reforms provide an example of the way neoliberalism steals the power to decide from communities and gives it to corporations.

Ecuadorian policy makers maintain that mining will bring prosperity to the nation. “We also realize,” explains Terán, “the value that a successful mining project will bring to Ecuador’s development.” He continues, “We would rather that the company made a success of bringing a mine into production, and benefit the communities in the area concerned” (*Mining Journal*, 2001). Such prosperity is only the short-term boom of an export sector. Unlike agricultural export production, the mineral export sector is finite. The potential short-term gains are offset by long-term costs that Minister Terán does not mention. The destruction of Intag’s biodiversity must be weighed against the temporary jobs and infrastructure promised by mining. His “development-at-any-cost” approach overlooks the externalized costs of pollution, environmental destruction, community displacement, health problems, and social ills such as prostitution and alcoholism (Evans, Goodman, and Lansbury, 2001: xiii; Sampat, 2003).

The concept of comparative advantage drives the thinking of neoliberals like Terán. Countries are expected to develop economic specialization where they enjoy an “advantage.” Ecuador’s advantage is abundant natural resources and ecological diversity. According to the neoliberal model, it should specialize in raw-material export in exchange for commodities it does not produce. For many, this approach is the sum of all logic, a beautiful paradigm that justifies free-market economics. Comparative advantage, however, falsely assumes that all countries are equal when exchanging their advantages. Obviously, equality between Ecuador and the United States is an absurdity. Trading bananas, a commodity with minimal value added, for automobiles, a commodity with considerable value added, eventually results in trade deficit and chronic underdevelopment of capital. In the case of mining, as Peter Colley (2001: 25–26) argues, high technology and existing infrastructure encourage companies to invest in the exploitation of existing mines, often in developed countries, instead of launching new mines in places like Ecuador, where low technology, poor or nonexistent infrastructure, unskilled labor, corruption, and political instability significantly increase costs. Ecuador’s comparative advantage is not so much raw materials as the ability to offer highly favorable terms to foreign investors. Its reformed mining laws allow multinational companies to operate in ways that are often illegal in their own countries. Its comparative advantage is in

allowing multinationals to externalize the costs of production in Ecuador—costs that are absorbed by Ecuadorian society while remaining out of sight to First World consumers. Ecuadorians carry the expense while corporations profit; that is the reality of comparative advantage.

One company that took comparative advantage of Ecuador's reformed mining laws was Mitsubishi. It arrived in Ecuador in July 1991, when the Ecuadorian government reached an agreement with Japan to collaborate on mining exploration. Japan turned to Bishi Metals to undertake exploration along with the state-owned Corporación de Desarrollo e Investigación Metalúrgico Minería (Metallurgical Mining Development and Research Corporation—CODIGEM). Junín's selection was made possible by the government Proyecto de Desarrollo Minero y Control Ambiental (Ecuadorian Mining Development and Environmental Control Technical Assistance Project—PRODEMINCA). Funding for PRODEMINCA came from a US\$14 million World Bank loan and a US\$8.7 million loan from the governments of Britain and Sweden and from the Japanese government as part of the Bishi Metals agreement. According to the Ministry of Energy and Mines, PRODEMINCA's main objective was to provide a detailed geological survey of the entire country, the first ever conducted (2001a: 1). The survey was done between 1990 and 1992 and identified 20 percent of Ecuador's surface as containing mineral resources (David Kneas, interview, April 2002). With an estimated 72 million tons of copper, Junín showed immediate promise, but to extract this mineral bonanza companies like Bishi Metals would need to build an ecologically destructive open-pit mine (*Drillbits and Tailings*, 1997: 1).

When the neoliberal project arrived in Intag, it came in the form of the geologists and engineers who conducted the PRODEMINCA surveys. Prior to their arrival, neoliberalism had been defined by the near-total absence of the state and its services, which compounded Intag's marginalization within Ecuador. Deep within the Andes, Intag is a very difficult place to reach. It is quicker to fly from Quito to Houston than it is to travel from Quito to Junín. It is exceptionally difficult to build the basic infrastructure—roads, bridges, telephone, and electricity—needed to integrate Intag and communities like Junín with the rest of Ecuador. In addition, the heavy and prolonged rains reduce roads to quagmires passable only on foot or, preferably, mule. Intag is still recovering infrastructure destroyed during the last El Niño year (1997–1998), whose rains left 20,000 Ecuadorians homeless and destroyed 1,300 miles of roads (Gerlach, 2003: 160). The historic weakness of the Ecuadorian state augments geographic marginalization; the long arm of the state has yet to reach Intag, leaving its population to a rustic existence that fosters strong community bonds for self-preservation. The majority of the region's inhabitants are *colonos* (colonists), both mestizos (persons of indigenous and European ancestry) and Afro-Ecuadorians. They migrated to Intag seeking the independence and security of land acquired either by squatting or by purchase. With the earliest colonists having settled no more than 100 years ago, Intag's distant relationship to the nation-state is also a consequence of the relative newness of its communities.

Like other Latin American social movements, Junín's struggle against mining is embedded in the political economy of the neoliberal state. As is shown by William Robinson (2004), the role of the nation-state has recently undergone



profound change. This change includes the disarticulation of the state from society in its subservience to transnational elites, institutions, and corporations. In Ecuador an already weak and ineffective state became more so with neoliberal economic reforms that reduced government spending by cutting public-sector funding. These policies had the harmful impact of increasing Ecuador's need for social services precisely at a time when the state's ability to provide them was drastically restricted. Unable to address the deepening social problems caused by its economic reforms, the neoliberal state failed to help Ecuadorians as they descended ever deeper into poverty. Poverty has increased from 34 percent in 1995 to 46 percent in 1998 and an alarming 69 percent in 2000. The World Bank estimates that 88 percent of the rural population lives in poverty, up from 54 percent in 1995 (World Bank, 2003: 19). In 1998 the poorest 10 percent had only 0.9 percent of the national income while the richest 10 percent enjoyed 41.6 percent. In 2000 17.7 percent of Ecuadorians earned US\$1 a day or less, while 40.8 percent existed on less than US\$2. With a per capita GDP at US \$1,897, in 2002 Ecuador is one of the poorest Latin American countries (United Nations, 2004). Communities that were already marginalized such as Junín were pushed to the edge. Evidence of the precipice can be found in migration statistics: of a population of 12 million, at least 1 million have migrated to either Spain or the United States. Remittances rank as the second-largest item in the gross national product, making Ecuador's truest comparative advantage the export of humans (de la Vega, 2004). In 2001 they reached US \$1.5 billion (World Bank, 2004: 13). Visit Intag and you will find males in their twenties and thirties who have done their tour of duty in Spain or the United States. Interviews with them reveal a harsh and bitter experience of racism, exploitation, and alienation. Migration, however, is an age-old survival tactic for communities throughout Latin America. When faced with the brutal realities of impoverishment and a debilitated state apparatus unable to deliver basic services, communities organize for self-preservation. In the case of Junín, marginalization was the political and economic context that stimulated the consciousness formation necessary for organizing against mining.

Prior to the arrival of the mining company, a powerful social process was under way. It combined the lived experiences and worldviews of the region's colonos with the empowering and politicized doctrine of liberation theology. Together these created the core of the community's resistance to mining. When I asked community members to describe the colono mentality, the consistent reply was "independent," "hardworking," and "honest." They emphasized the centrality of land ownership, being one's own boss, having a strong family, and counting on members of the community. These are people who know struggle. Many have literally carved a life out of the forests, which can be unforgiving to human inhabitants. One community member, 56-year-old Viktor Calvache (interview, Junín, August 12, 2004), explained, "Not everyone can be a colonist . . . It's a rough, valiant life...Your technology is the ax . . . your consciousness is shaped by hard work." They know the hardships of illness, child mortality, and a short life span. Diet is basic and not always secure. These realities make people from communities like Junín *bien bravo* (defiantly determined), a term often heard in Intag when people refer to the people of Junín. Hard work and sacrifice instill a fierce determination to preserve their

agrarian way of life. “We love our homes and we love our land,” says Calvache; “we are organized to protect our community.” There is, of course, a variant to the *bien bravo* colono identity. It is the colono who seeks quick riches—the age-old dream of El Dorado. Colonos of this kind are willing to sell land for profit or clear-cut trees for the market and are firmly supportive of mining (Walter Garces, interview, Apulea, August 11, 2004).

“All of us are called to be leaders, because we are all humans. If we all think this, then we can put ourselves in that position,” stated Padre Giovanni Paz at a popular education meeting in Junín (interview, Junín, June 4, 2003). His introduction of liberation theology was central to the environmental awakening throughout Intag. During the 1990s he organized communities for the resolution of problems arising from marginalization, and his efforts led to grassroots projects of environmental and economic diversification. Liberation theology laid the groundwork for grassroots resistance by educating community members to be leaders, to see themselves as humans with full rights as citizens, and to organize for the improvement of the community. In awakening the communities, liberation theology assisted the process of conscientization, in which critical self-reflection leads to analysis of the relations of power; this is an awareness that was lacking in the colono mentality but necessary for the resistance movement to form. Early in the process, Padre Giovanni worked with Carlos Zorrilla, a Cuban national who grew up in the United States and arrived in Intag in the 1970s. Carlos owns an eco-preserve, La Florida, which is a model for sustainable-development projects alternative to lumber production and mining (Carlos Zorrilla, interview, La Florida, August, 2004). Carlos and the padre collaborated on environmental education projects for the region’s youth. Their work provided an ecological framework for the colono mentality’s agrarianism, resulting in a local ethic that linked protecting the environment to agrarian life. A folk environmentalism was firmly in place when the mining company arrived.

When state and corporate engineers and geologists first appeared in Intag, they immediately raised concern among locals. People had learned to distinguish between outsiders like Paz and Zorrilla, who had lived, worked, organized, and socialized among them for years, and newly arrived outsiders, especially those who came to inspect their lands. The presence of these professionals led community members to research the implications of mining and investigate the legacy of mining in other parts of the world. This research revealed a disturbing record of environmental destruction, deepening poverty, and social disintegration. Alarmed, they formed DECOIN in 1995, and it has been in the eye of the storm ever since. DECOIN connected Intag with the emerging antiglobalization movement by establishing links with environmental organizations that provided information, training, money, and solidarity. Of special importance was Quito-based Acción Ecológica, which had experience in supporting community struggles against state and corporate raiders of the environment. Acción Ecológica helped develop international solidarity with the communities’ aims. As has been demonstrated by Keck and Sikkink (1998), international advocacy networks assist grassroots groups in framing issues for campaigns. One such organization is the Sloth Club, a Japanese NGO that promotes permaculture, alternative energy



sources, renewable resources, and ecotourism. It joined forces with DECOIN in 1996 in order to implement alternative development throughout Intag. It also provided DECOIN with an international connection that made possible the movement's first letter-writing campaign, designed to put pressure on Mitsubishi and the state to respect local voices in opposition to mining.

Along with the NGOs, community members made valuable contributions. Mary Ellen Fieweger, for example, played a critical role in a study of mining companies that resulted in the publication of a history of mining (Fieweger, 1998). An organic intellectual, Fieweger offers the movement a lifetime of organizing experience, a deep knowledge of Ecuadorian history, and a special facility for empowering others. She established a community newspaper, *Periódico Intag*, to address the need for communication among geographically separated communities. The newspaper is a model of popular education, serving as a vehicle for teaching computer skills, the basics of journalism, and ways to think about the world. It maintains an antimining editorial position, reports on alternative development projects, and functions as the newspaper of record in the region, which is especially important considering the disinformation campaigns of those who favor mining (Mary Ellen Fieweger, interview, La Florida, August 13, 2004). The newspaper's success is best measured by the attacks it endures from mining interests, especially an effort by Ascendant Exploration to sue it for libel (PLS PROVIDE REFERENCE *Periódico Intag*, October 2004).

At first, community members were favorably impressed by the prospect of mining. This attitude was a result of the effort of the mining company to win their "hearts and minds." Multinational mining companies, as Al Gedicks (2001: 159–178) shows, have faced such fierce grassroots resistance that they prepare locals for mining with propaganda and services and attack the antimining arguments of the ecologists. Mining companies tell people that they will all get jobs, share royalties, and have roads, telephones, health clinics with doctors, and schools as rewards for their support. For marginalized people, promises of streets paved with gold are very appealing, especially given the get-rich-quick mentality of some colonos.

DECOIN understood that it had to counter the mining company's community relations campaign. With Acción Ecológica it developed popular education workshops about the disadvantages and dangers of mining. The aim was to create a context for experiential learning by placing people in situations in which the convergence of reflection and experience leads to individual transformations of consciousness and action. The vehicle for praxis in this case was a jointly sponsored trip to Peru in 1996 that introduced community members to the negative ecological and community impact of an operating copper mine. As a result of these efforts, peoples' attitudes toward mining became increasingly negative. To build upon its successes, DECOIN started shade-grown organic coffee projects as an example of sustainable development alternative to mining (Carlos Zorrilla, interview, La Florida, March 2002).

The movement's turning point came in 1997, when DECOIN's research discovered an environmental impact study for the proposed copper mine. The study had been commissioned by Bishi Metals as part of the process of gaining concessions but never shared with the communities. The study presented a gloomy forecast of widespread destruction. The open-pit mine was projected

to bring extensive deforestation that was expected to lead to desertification. In addition, it would deposit tons of waste minerals; its heavy metals would pollute the surrounding environment. Rivers would also be contaminated with mercury and cyanide, which would pollute drinking water, threaten aquatic life, and present health risks to persons bathing or washing clothes in the water. The report outlined how Cotacachi-Cayapas National Park would be threatened by the project. More ominous, it estimated that 100 families would be displaced by the mine, which would require the flooding of a populated valley for its waste disposal (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 1996). Community leaders went from house to house sharing the study's findings with families, taking the time for discussion and reflection on what it meant for their lives.

The environmental impact study greatly increased antimining sentiment. The threat of relocation was a direct attack upon the *colono* mentality and stimulated the *bien bravo* attitude of defending community. It was clear to people that state officials and mining company representatives had not been forthcoming about the negatives of mining. They had offended one of the most basic *colono* values—honor and integrity. Local values were further affronted when government officials and company representatives failed to respond to repeated requests for meetings; the silence highlighted the way neoliberalism marginalizes communities like Junín. After the third snub, community members took the *bien bravo* action of torching Bishi Metal's mining camp.

DECOIN also challenged the World Bank. As we have seen, it provided the funds and conceptualization for PRODEMINCA, which amounted to "a complete overhaul of the minerals sector administration system and the institutions involved" (Ministry of Energy and Mining, 2001b: 10). In 1999, however, DECOIN threw a wrench into the World Bank's plans. It initiated a claim against PRODEMINCA, using an appeals process that was part of the bank's mechanism for development programs, for failing to conduct an environmental impact study as the bank required. In a victory for the local ecologists, the bank ruled in DECOIN's favor in February 2001: "Management was in apparent violation of certain provisions of the policies and procedures on Environmental Assessment . . . relating to processing, geographical scope, baseline data, and concerning consultation during preparation" (World Bank Inspection Panel, 2001). The victory was perhaps only symbolic. As Rich (1994) demonstrates, the World Bank's appeals mechanism and policy oversight often divert attention from the shortcomings of its development programs. In this case, the bank made the minerals survey available to interested developers, saving them the cost of doing their own surveys.

Junín's victory over Mitsubishi and the World Bank is testimony to the ability of grassroots organizations to alter structures of power. Key to shifting the terrain is the building of national and international networks of solidarity on which locals can depend. The struggle, however, goes deeper than driving companies like Mitsubishi out of places like Junín. Resistance also requires implementing alternatives to corporate globalization. Groups like DECOIN understood this crucial element and proactively worked to implement their vision of a world without mining. To succeed, the communities of the region had to be "cultural creatives." As David Korten explains, cultural creatives

“have a strong commitment to family, community, the environment, internationalism, and feminism. They have a well-developed social consciousness and are optimistic” (1999: 215–216). Cultural creatives are the antithesis of corporate globalization, the concentration of wealth and power by a few individuals, companies, governments, and global institutions.

Intag’s cultural creatives integrate economic activities with the environment in a sustainable fashion. Communities have developed alternative economies with subsistence farming, shade-grown coffee production, sugar collectives, fish farming, and eco-tourism. These projects typically have support from NGOs, which provide funding as well as technical support. Locals have also sought financial aid to purchase land to be added to eco-preserves that are “no-go zones” for lumbering or mining. In promoting these alternatives, community members have forged a strong alliance with the indigenous mayor of Cotacachi County, Auki Tituaña, one of the leading figures in Ecuador’s indigenous political party, Pachakutik. With 25 percent of the population, Ecuador’s indigenous people have combined formal politics with deeply rooted cultural resistance in becoming strong national political actors. Although they won only 6 seats in the national election in 2002, they have been key players in displacing two presidents in the past decade. Known for honesty in government and strident opposition to neoliberalism, Pachakutik was well positioned to help Intag communities with the struggle against mining. Tituaña’s formal support provided legitimacy, leverage, and national exposure to the local struggle. He worked with DECOIN in making Cotacachi County an *ecocantón*, in which mining is banned and alternative, environmentally sustainable projects are promoted (Sheehan, 2003: 144; Carlos Zorrilla, interview, La Florida, March 2002).

These projects are a key component of Intag’s success. They demonstrate to locals that other paths are possible and that, despite what state and corporate officials say, they can live an agrarian life without mining. This foundation provides community members with the social fabric, organizational experience, consciousness, and commitment to resist mining. The popular education tactics emphasize community and horizontally extend the decision-making process. Community members who have learned about shade-grown coffee or running a newspaper become teachers and pass along their knowledge to others, extending empowerment throughout the commons. In the process people become empowered, fully actualized, and more invested in a world without mining, and they learn to work together and become skilled in consensus-driven decision making. They build momentum with each project and gain confidence in their abilities.

Mining companies, according to the chief executive officer of Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ), one of the world’s largest mining corporations, “are being naive about how easy it is to operate in someone else’s back yard. We . . . see problems virtually everywhere” (Moody, 2001: vii). When RTZ evaluates potential mines, it is fully aware of how grassroots organizations like DECOIN operate. Roger Moody, founder of Minewatch, points out that multinational corporations are increasingly under attack by a global network of environmental activists (2001: vi–vii). The efforts of environmental groups like the Sloth Club and Acción Ecológica, in solidarity with local, grassroots organizations like

DECOIN, have increased the cost of operations for the multinationals. Community resistance tips the balance of comparative advantage by adding negative factors to the cost of production, which includes not only having to abide by environmental regulations that may call for expensive technologies, machinery, and skilled labor but also maintaining a favorable corporate image. Gedicks (2001) shows that corporations spend millions of dollars on advertising, funding NGOs that disseminate propaganda, and supporting academics who advocate underregulated or unregulated mining. Other costs include extra staff required to handle community resistance, lawyers and lobbyists, and payments to corrupt officials or buy off recalcitrant communities. When such costs go up, the multinationals often leave. The cost threshold for Mitsubishi was crossed with the burning of its camp.

Unfortunately for the local communities, the macro-structural factors of comparative advantage subsequently tipped against them. In the past five years the world price of copper has skyrocketed because of the dramatic jump in demand caused by China's construction boom (Kharas, 2005), and the higher price has overwhelmed the previously prohibitive cost of mining in Junín. DECOIN and the local *bien bravos* again have their backs against the wall as they confront a new mining company, Ascendant Exploration. It is a speculator in mining properties. Its goal is to secure title to the lands and government concessions in Junín and then sell them to a major mining company that has the capital to develop them. The cost is estimated at US\$1 billion. Ascendant has to ensure that the communities to be affected are in support of mining because no major company will invest a billion dollars in a project that has a history of organized resistance. To sell, Ascendant needs to eliminate the grassroots resistance to mining, and therefore it has launched an aggressive campaign against it.

Ascendant's efforts have all of the features of low-intensity conflict employed by Latin American states to crush grassroots opposition. It exploits the internal divisions among colonos by attacking the environmentalists and supporting those who seek quick riches through mining. The company offers generous perks to those who work with them by providing the infrastructure and resources that the state is unable to deliver. Roads, bridges, schools, and health clinics have all been built as tools for winning local hearts and minds. An extensive propaganda campaign is under way. Paid informants ride on buses and talk loudly enough for many to hear about the great things mining would bring to Intag if it were not for organizations like DECOIN. The company provides free medical services in which the doctors tout the benefits of mining and plant lies about the leaders of the opposition. It distributes Christmas presents to children in a shameless effort to gain favor. In short, it exploits people's poverty to sell its project.

The campaign also includes intimidation, such as the disruption of e-mail, the stealing of regular mail, death threats, and a million-dollar libel suit against *Periódico Intag*. A former Ecuadorian general, César Villacís, once in charge of Ecuador's secret police, is the member of Ascendant's board of directors responsible for community relations. He makes frequent appearances at community meetings and makes it clear that the Ecuadorian military supports mining in Junín. During meetings in the summer and fall of 2004,

pro-mining people physically confronted those in opposition, pushing some, destroying video equipment, and brandishing pistols. With millions of dollars on the line, it is only a matter of time before Ascendant's tactics of low-intensity conflict are transformed into open violence.

This case of grassroots resistance to mining in Ecuador illustrates the importance of community in the analysis of social movements in Latin America today. Capitalism is a ruthless mechanism of social, political, and economic exclusion, one that destroys the social fabric and effective citizenship. People are not, however, passive recipients of this assault. They fight back. The *bien bravos* of Junín are the resisters, organizers, activists, and organic intellectuals who are working to reconstitute community. Through their organizing, they are constructing a new form of citizenship from the bottom up. This citizenship is opposed to the market-based citizenship promoted by neoliberalism. These competing constructs of citizenship are central to an understanding of the tension between corporate globalization and new social movements throughout Latin America. While social movements defined by concepts of autonomy, empowerment, and citizenship do not aim to take state power and constitute significant departures from past revolutionary ones, they are no less revolutionary in their style, substance, and actualization. They constitute a radical challenge to the capitalist system as currently constituted, but they do not necessarily represent a challenge to capitalism itself.

One key area of debate in the social movement literature concerns the question whether today's resistance constitutes a departure from the "new social movements" of the 1980s (Kuecker, 2004). The Junín case is clearly an agrarian-based social-justice movement of resistance to the marginalization of neoliberalism. Its environmental aspects share tendencies with the environmentalism of the new social movements, especially their "not in my backyard" feature. In defending their agrarian way of life, the people of Junín effectively relocate mining to other parts of the world where the costs of environmental destruction are lower because of lack of community resistance. Yet, Junín does represent a significant break with the new social movements in the need to construct an alternative to mining and the harshness of the neoliberal order. While many new social movements lack a critique of capitalism, the movement in Junín identifies a particular form of capitalism—neoliberalism—as the cause of its problems, but it is not necessarily opposed to capitalism.

What is clear from the Junín case is that neoliberalism offers a new context for social actors. It is defined by the transnationalization of sovereignty and power that concentrates them in the hands of elites, corporations, and institutions. In confronting this transnational trinity marginalized people on the local level devise new strategies to contend with the problems caused by neoliberalism. These strategies include new modes of organizing that emphasize empowerment and horizontal decision-making processes that stand in strong contrast to neoliberalism's authoritarianism. Similar developments throughout Latin America constitute a sharp departure from the new social movements that planted the seeds for them (Kuecker, 2004).

The new modes of organizing include an important role for civil society, especially NGOs. The formation of civil society was a significant by-product of the new social movements of the 1980s, and its maturation as an important



actor is a defining feature of today's resistance. In the case of Junín, the grass-roots formation of DECOIN and the support of Acción Ecológica and international NGOs played crucial roles in the development of the resistance to mining. The distinction from new social movements of the 1980s lies in the way civil society changes the relations of power. The involvement of civil society in solidarity with actors at the grass roots can block or frustrate the designs of elites, corporations, nation-states, and global institutions, altering the comparative advantage formula by increasing costs.

Students of today's social movements confront the troubling issue of evaluating the effectiveness of tactics and strategies. Can these movements produce change without taking power? In Junín, constructing alternatives to neoliberalism is not criticizing capitalism and the structures of power it produces. The liberation theology effort at empowerment is not necessarily an attack on capitalism. While in radical opposition to neoliberalism, the movement in Junín is fundamentally reformist. Community consciousness is aimed at altering relations of power as against their overthrow. Yet, a Gramscian war of position, in which social actors are better off transforming structures of power when they are not in a position to take state power, is highly appropriate at this juncture in the history of the movement. It is, however, highly vulnerable to the capacity of capitalism for survival. Junín can drive Mitsubishi out, but that is not a victory over capitalism. As the price of copper goes up, the comparative-advantage formula restores a favorable cost-benefit scenario that negates the negatives of organized community. Until it dies or is overthrown, capitalism ultimately prevails.

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