

What Eppawela project signifies... 04/10/00 Island

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The newspapers have revealed that the privatization of the Eppawela Phosphate Resource has been given Cabinet approval and that the agreement with the US Company is about to be signed and sealed, if not already done. The manner in which this resource has been subjected to the privatization process as well as the necessity for this privatization and the lack of transparency, forebodes what is in store for our little island.

My concern is firstly as an administrator of minor irrigation works, because for two years I struggled with the farmers cultivating paddy under the tank reservoirs that are fed with water from the Kaia Weva, by the Jaya Ganga. The peasants of Rajarata with their want of land and water were a part of my life. It is also my concern as an agricultural economist as to why our resources are being fritted away to foreigners, offered to them on a platter for exploitation, to make money, while the interests of the country are overlooked. Why have we ever come to this stage of desperation?

Many authorities including scientists have written at length about the fact that the manner in which the Eppawela Phosphate Resource is privatized amounts to a total plunder of a resource, which should not happen. Economists have argued out that it should not be done. Let me quote the Committee of Experts of the National Science Foundation, that premier body of scientists who were appointed by no less a person than Hon. Batty Weerakoon, the Minister of Science and Technology. Their recommendations included that:

(the) proposal from a US Mining Company will exhaust the presently known reserves of Eppawela Rock Phosphate in 30 years, with insignificant economic benefit to the country.

We recommend that a rate of exploitation to meet the national needs only be adopted in the exploitation of Eppawela Rock Phosphate. At this rate of mining this resource should last at least for 200 years.

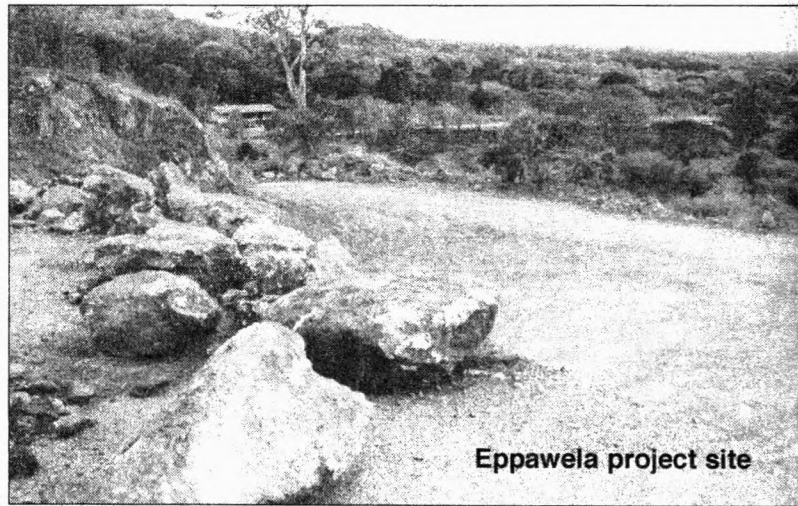
The proposal from the US Mining Company is highly environmentally damaging and does not serve the national interest in any manner. The financial benefits largely accrue only to the foreign Mining Company.

The US Mining Company proposal is not environ-

mentally friendly. Mountains of phosphate gypsum will accumulate polluting the environment.

The exploitation of the Eppawela Phosphate deposit as proposed by the US Mining Company may cause damage to Jaya Ganga — a priceless engineering marvel that has stood the test of time.

This Committee recommended that the Eppawela Rock Phosphate Resource should not be sold to the US Company and that instead a proper comprehensive survey should be done and the resource utilized in the national interest after calling for fresh tenders.



The recommendations of this Committee amounts to a writing on the wall. It is well known that Hon. Batty Weerakoon has on several occasions made utterances against the manner in which the Eppawela Phosphate is being sold off. Does his voice and the voices of the eminent scientists deserve this type of treatment. It is important to note that unlike other politicians Batty Weerakoon has not yet been discredited in any manner. After all it is the cream of expertise in the country crying out in one voice against the stooges of imperialism that demand this privatization. The history and the misdeeds of this particular US Company in various parts of the world, such as Indonesia has been well documented and if this deal goes through what will be our predicament?

What finance does Sri Lanka gain. It amounts to at least \$ 200 million in 30 years. It works out to \$ 7 million a year. With taxes and levies the income can be around \$ 11 million a year. Perhaps there is a great pressure from the US Government that this should be done, because this is how the Third World is opened up

for the benefit of the Developed World.

Let me add my little bit. The Committee has said that the proposed exploitation may damage the minor irrigation system including the stupendous Jaya Ganga. Without any reservation I would state that the exploitation will definitely ruin the minor irrigation system in the area. Though I do not possess an engineering degree I hold over ten years experience in handling minor irrigation works, working with senior engineers and directing technically qualified staff. In the Administrative Service we were posted at the helm of different departments and had to be adept in mastering the work of the department in order to run it efficiently and with proper direction. In 1962, I was the chief of three Assistant Commissioners of Agrarian Services appointed to take over the minor irrigation functions of the Anuradhapura District.

To put the Jaya Ganga in perspective, it originates at Kala Weva and brings down the water from the Kala Weva to around a hundred of minor tanks and finally takes the water to the tanks in the City of Anuradhapura. Eppawela happens to be in between the Kala Weva to the South and Anuradhapura to the North. As the crow flies the distance from the Kala Weva to Anuradhapura is around thirty-five miles, but the Jaya Ganga meanders along about double this length.

It was the task of the Department of Agrarian Services to ensure that the waters are properly distributed by the Jaya Ganga. This never happened. At the inception of every cultivation season there was a meeting of the cultivators to decide when to supply water, when to cultivate, when to pen the cattle, when to fence, the dates to sow, harvest and also to decide the penalties. This was an important meeting and normally presided over by the Government Agent, before minor irrigation was handed

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