

Short History of West Papua

The island of Papua has been inhabited for thousands of years by tribal Melanesians practicing a horticulturalist lifestyle. In 1511 the Spanish named the island New Guinea, but it was the Dutch who undertook the colonial project, setting up towns and cities to extract resources from the island. In conjunction with missionaries, parts of the island were invaded by Europeans bent on “civilizing” and converting the Papuan people. Indonesia invaded West Papua and militarily occupied it in 1962. This occupation has been promoted by the United States and Britain because Indonesia served as an anti-communist ally during the Cold War, and corporations such as Freeport-McMoran both aided and encouraged the occupation by funding the military and providing Indonesia with financial incentive for colonization. Resistance has occurred since colonization began and continues today through the struggles of the OPM (Papuan Freedom Organization), and other pro-independence organizations.

Enter Freeport-McMoran

Freeport-McMoran Copper and Gold Inc., an international mining company headquartered in New Orleans, plays a major role in the exploitation of the Papuan people. Freeport became interested in West Papua in the 1950's and in 1965 negotiations between Freeport and Indonesia began one month after a military coup and widespread massacres brought General Suharto to power. Freeport was the first foreign corporation to sign a deal with Suharto's regime, negotiating amid widespread armed

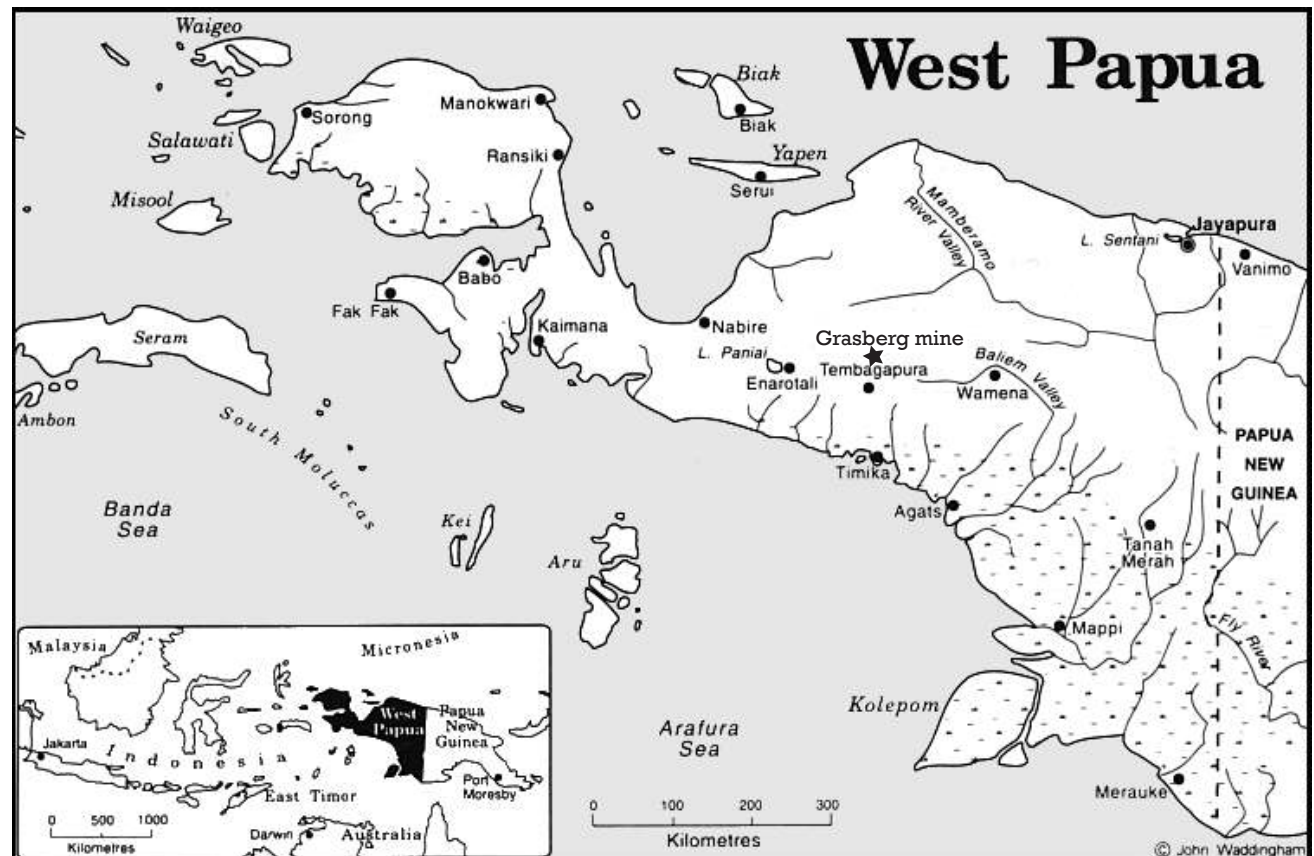
resistance by the West Papuan people and even prior to Indonesia legally controlling West Papua. Freeport's Grasberg mine, located near Tembagapura (see map), is the world's largest gold mine, and is now one of the most militarized areas of Indonesia.

The People and Resistance

The indigenous people of West Papua are of the same ethnic origin as those in the rest of New Guinea and are related ethnically and culturally to other Melanesians. Though only making up a tiny portion of the world's population, West Papua contains 20% of the world's languages. The tribes that have been affected most by Freeport's mining

operations are the Amungme of the highlands and the Kamoro of the lowlands. Their lands were stolen by Indonesia, and given free of charge to Freeport for its mining operations. Freeport was given free rein to resettle local populations and the right to take land, timber, and water without regard for the effects on the Kamoro and Amungme. Displacement of highland people has forced them into the lowlands where many have died from malaria.

Resistance to Freeport and other colonizers began immediately. This has taken the form of armed attacks against the mine and its workers. In 1977, the OPM blew up an important pipeline, shutting the mine down for several days and



costing Freeport millions of dollars. There have also been numerous clashes between resistance fighters and the Indonesian military. Public protests are rare because of the brutal repression of the military and Freeport's security forces, but people continue to speak out in defense of their land and autonomy.

Freeport and the Military

The Indonesian military, known as the ABRI, has a long history of murder, rape, torture and outright massacre. It is responsible for the hundreds of thousands killed in East Timor, Aceh, and of course in West Papua. According to their own reports, Freeport paid the ABRI \$16 million from 2001-2003, and prior to that paid the military another \$35 million. Each year this money goes towards food, housing, fuel, infrastructure, travel, vehicle repair and administrative costs for the military. The "infrastructure" that Freeport builds includes security checkpoints and military bases. According to Freeport's 2003 SEC report, the payments to the military are primarily compensation for the 2,300 troops that the Indonesian government provides. By the end of 1996 the Freeport concession area was the most militarized zone in all of Indonesia.

The first documented Indonesian military killings in the Freeport area occurred in 1972, and have not ceased since then. Entire villages have been murdered and thousands have been forced to flee their homes. There are also numerous cases of torture and rape. Any resistance is met with fierce repression. The military is also involved with prostitution, the sale of alcohol, illegal logging and extortion schemes.

Freeport and Ecology

The ecology of West Papua is one of the most biodiverse places on Earth, with up to 7% of all plant and animal species being found there. Freeport's mining operation in West Papua has destroyed this environment, which the Amungme and Kamoro hold sacred and subsist on. The mine has taken 120 meters off of the top of a sacred Amungme mountain. Freeport dumps millions of tons of silt-like tailings into the local river system, polluting it with metals and turning a miles-wide lowland river area into a dead, barren landscape. The river is now almost entirely devoid of any life. They pile toxic waste rock thousands of feet high at dumpsites in the surrounding area including at a sacred lake used by the Amungme. Filling valleys with mine waste that leaches copper, acid, and mercury into the ground, they have polluted springheads tribal people miles away use for drinking water. The rainwater run off from these toxic landfills has resulted in even more pollution. Local people have died when Freeport poisoned the water people drink, and the piles of waste have resulted in landslides.

Further Reading:

The Politics of Power: Freeport in Suharto's Indonesia by Denise Leith

Irian Jaya Under the Gun by Mark Davis

The Culture of Make Believe
by Derrick Jensen

For more information:

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Anarchist Action in New Orleans

http://nolaanarchy.cjb.net

Freeport McMoRan:



Committing Genocide in West Papua