JAPAN FAVOURS MINERAL PROHIBITION TOO

Japan has now joined the ranks of those calling for a prohibition on mineral resource activities in Antarctica. This represents a major shift by a country long seen as committed to the mining option.

We strongly applaud this enlightened decision by Japan, which now leaves only the reactionary rump of the UK and USA strongly pursuing mining in Antarctica.

UK OPPOSITION PARTIES REJECT GOVERNMENT POLICY

Gerald Kaufman, the Labour Party's shadow Foreign Minister came to Madrid on the opening day of the SCM to protest the UK Government's proposal for a moratorium on mineral activities in the Antarctic. He said that the Labour party opposed the ratification of CRAMRA and now opposed any moratorium on mining. "A moratorium is a compromise which leaves open the option to mine at some future date" and "this was not acceptable to the Labour Party." He said that any future Labour Government would have one Antarctic policy - that Antarctica should be a World Park and they would "not necessarily be bound by any agreement made this week by the UK Government." The Labour party is the official and largest opposition to the current Conservative Government.

In a separate move on the 18th April, Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats, wrote a public letter to the Prime Minister John Major. He brought Mr Major's attention to the proposal to designate Antarctica a "Nature Reserve - Land of Science." "It is a matter of great concern to me that the alternative proposal has been put forward by the United Kingdom. Its acceptance would prejudice the future of the Antarctic environment by guaranteeing the introduction of a minerals regime after a short delay." He believes that the "Foreign office has repeatedly misled MPs and the British public [and] they have badly misjudged the mood of public opinion on preserving the fragile wilderness of Antarctica."

Both Labour and the Liberal Democrat Parties have advocated a World Park policy for almost two years. With the prospect of a general election by next year the opposition parties are making it known that they reject the UK's current Antarctic policy. Were there to be a change of Government both opposition parties have pledged that their Antarctic policy would embrace a permanent mining ban.

THE BIG RED BUS - THE UK ON THE ROAD TO MINING

The Greenpeace double-decker information bus is parked on General Peron, 36, three minutes from the conference. All delegates welcome.
GERMANY JOINS BAN

After receiving tens of thousands of protest postcards, German Minister of Industry Juergen Moellmann has stated that Germany will push for a permanent mining ban. Germany thereby joins the growing group of nations that support a prohibition lifted only by consensus.

Foreign Affairs Minister Genscher expressed his support for an Antarctic World Park in November 1990, but the final decision on the minerals question lay with the Ministry of Industry. ECO commends Moellmann for his statement. The German government clearly recognizes that protecting the Antarctic environment is more vital than speculative economic interests in the region.

‘US’ AND THEM

Even the most casual reading of the US position on minerals at this meeting reveals numerous half-truths and false assumptions. It is, however, worthwhile to first look at the political atmosphere from which this policy developed. Those not intimately connected with the development of policy within the US, might well wonder why the US position doesn’t reflect the desires of the American people, the Congress, the Marine Mammal Commission, or the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (the executive agency charged with protecting the environment.) All of the above have, in the past 12 months, indicated their support for a prohibition on commercial minerals activities in Antarctica.

So who does support US policy? The strongest support comes from the same agencies in the government which recently released the US strategy for energy “independence”: the Departments of Interior and Energy. This strategy outlines an energy future that continues to rely heavily on fossil fuels, and emphasises the need for secure and reliable sources to feed the US’s oil addiction. The development of exploitable oil reserves in ecologically sensitive areas like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is key to America’s energy “independence.”

The similarities between US Antarctic policy and its domestic energy strategy provide a perspective from which one can better understand the development and persistence of this now isolated position. To further clarify what the position means, one must remove the diplomatic smokescreen and examine the realities behind the US position.

The opening paragraph of the US paper declares their commitment to restoring consensus within the Treaty system. A laudable goal to be sure, but the US speaks from both sides of its mouth when it comes to consensus. It is a fact that of those countries which have taken a strong position on this issue, the majority favour a prohibition lifted by consensus. Not the US: they oppose lifting by consensus.

CRAMRA, on the other hand, is a different story altogether. During the course of the domestic positioning following the CRAMRA negotiations, US officials proudly announced to environmentalists that the environmental jewel of CRAMRA was consensus to open an area. Despite the fact that they opposed this provision until the bitter end, they claimed it embodied the spirit of the Treaty system and ensured any decision to mine would be agreed by all. That is essentially, consensus to lift wrapped in a mining convention. Suddenly, removed from the context of CRAMRA, consensus has lost its appeal.

Not even the UK and US will argue that mining is appropriate at this time. It only makes sense that any change in this position, whether it be in 50 or 500 years, should be agreed to by all Parties. The US paper declares their position to be “a significant shift” from their position at the 1989 ATCM, “supporting the immediate entry into force of CRAMRA.”. The United States has always been a strong champion of CRAMRA, never hiding its intention to keep the door to Antarctic mining ajar. To suggest that its current position represents a change is outrageous.

The US has proposed a time-specific prohibition of no more than 40 years, linked to CRAMRA or a ‘CRAMRA-like’ regime. Given that Antarctic mining is unlikely to be technologically feasible or economically sound before

Harpoons, drift nets, oil pollution, garbage dumps, the ozone hole... what will they think of next? Maybe they’ll find a way to melt the ice
such time - the view of the Office of Technology Assessment - the US position has not really changed at all. This position merely amounts to the delayed entry into force of CRAMRA, with no risk of forestalling actual mining.

In an attempt to justify their intransigence on the minerals issue, they have decided to charge the opposition with the very same offence, demanding that “the flexibility we have shown needs to be matched by those proposing a permanent ban.”

The US suggests that it is doing all the moving - making all the sacrifices - in these negotiations. But, what exactly, have they offered? They say CRAMRA; however, the US did not offer up CRAMRA - it was taken away. CRAMRA became politically unsaleable, domestically and internationally, and they were forced to abandon hopes of its immediate entry into force. In truth the US has not budged from its minerals position, and its policy has just been repackaged as a short-term prohibition, linked to CRAMRA’s kin.

This ‘flexibility’, according to the US, is necessary to bridge the gap between the two so-called extremes. With precious few nations still clinging to mining, those favouring a prohibition gain support daily. It appears obvious that there is only one ‘extreme’ position left - that of the US. In order to achieve true consensus in the Antarctic Treaty System, it is this extremism which must be abandoned.

Consensus, after all, is supposedly at the root of US Antarctic Policy!

CONGRATULATIONS, CATH

Prominent New Zealand environmentalist and long-term ASOC campaigner Cath Wallace was presented with the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in San Francisco yesterday. This is fitting recognition of her work on Antarctic and New Zealand mining issues.

ECO sends its best wishes to Cath and suggests to delegates at this meeting that this is further proof, if proof were needed, that the outside world now watches Antarcrica closely.

GREENPEACE 1990/91
ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

Greenpeace’s sixth Antarctic Expedition has just finished. It included the resupply of World Park Base on Ross Island, several days shadowing the Japanese whaling fleet, and an extended voyage in the area of the Antarctic Peninsula.

At King George Island, off the Antarctic Peninsula, a four-person environmental monitoring team was installed on the Fildes Peninsula for one month. The team studied the impact of four bases (Great Wall - People’s Republic of China, Bellingshausen - USSR, Teniente Marsh - Chile, and Artigas - Uruguay) on the local environment.

The expedition documented many continuing abuses of the Antarctic environment. Among these were the UK’s abandoned bases; drums leaking oil at the abandoned Chilean station Gonzalez Videla; a large fuel spill at Teniente Marsh; Soviet heavy-vehicle tracks-evident throughout the Fildes Peninsula; a dump (that nobody at Esperanza knew anything about!) in the midst of a penguin colony; medical wastes including blood-filled syringes on the ground at Bellingshausen; and oil-soaked moss beds at Arturo Prat.

It is nothing short of a disgrace that this area, once destined to become an SPA, is now littered with buildings, garbage, vehicle tracks and an airstrip.

Most bases continue to burn rubbish in the open, and many still put untreated food scraps out for the birds. Our final visit was to Ecuador’s new base Maldonado, which was constructed without an environmental impact assessment.

Once again, the Expedition returns from the Antarctic with ample documentation of environmental impacts and failure to comply with existing Treaty obligations. Once again, we have seen that most countries cannot run even small bases in a clean way.

The need for an effective, enforceable, and comprehensive regime that puts the protection of the environment first is manifest. The Antarctic deserves and requires real commitment from those at this Meeting in order to halt these abuses and ensure its protection as the last great wilderness on earth.

UK GOVERNMENT POLICY: DIPLOMACY OR DUPLICITY?

On 25 March, after its much-heralded ‘policy review’, the UK proudly announced to the British public a change in its position on the mining issue. In yet another attempt at achieving consensus, it would now support a temporary moratorium on mining. However, it would leave open for this meeting the questions of length of moratorium and the mechanism which would apply when it ended.

Simultaneously the UK circulated to parties specific proposals concerning the mechanism, and made it known privately that the UK (like the US) favoured a specific time frame of 20 to 40 years for the moratorium. After this period a CRAMRA-like instrument would still come into force. Make no mistake, the UK position regarding the moratorium is contingent upon such a commitment.

Frankly, it is shameful that at the same time that it is in fact obstructing the achievement of a mining ban, the UK can claim leadership in the moves to protect Antarctica at home.

It does not take a mandarin to calculate that a short term moratorium followed by ‘Son of CRAMRA’ would give the UK precisely what it wants - access to minerals in the “British Antarctic
With a UK general election due within the next 12 months, isn’t it about time the UK came clean with its electorate on what its Antarctic policy really is?

WHO’S WHERE???

A permanent ban on mining in Antarctica seems more attainable than ever, with an increasing number of states now looking to a ban as the appropriate resolution of the minerals issue:

German Minister of Industry, Mr. Moellemann, confirmed that his country would support nothing less than a permanent ban on mining in Antarctica.

The Netherlands favours an indefinite prohibition which can only be ended with a consensus decision. It also requires a consensus agreement on a legally binding mining regime before any minerals activities can start, should the prohibition be lifted.

New Zealand remains committed to a proposal for a permanent ban, requiring a unanimous agreement to review and to lift the ban if the decision is to debated in the future.

Japan has tabled a proposal calling for a negotiation of a separate agreement on mineral resource activities, supporting a prohibition, requiring consensus to lift, and the providing for the possibility of review at some time in the future.

The US, is maintaining the same instructions it had for the SCM in Chile. This position amounts to a short-term moratorium, tacked to CRAMRA or an equivalent to be entered into force at the expiration of the moratorium, unless there is no consensus to continue the ban.

The U.K. is seeking a fixed short-term moratorium, with a review conference prior to its end with a commitment to negotiate a minerals regime if desired.

Chile has tabled a paper on minerals supporting a prohibition, and specifying the need for consensus to lift.

Australia, Belgium, France and Italy remain firm in their demand for a prohibition, to be only altered by consensus, with the possibility of review after 60 years.

Brazilian President Collor de Mello has announced the Brazilian government’s support for a permanent mining ban.

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