

Representatives of the mining company Rio Tinto claim that Serbia will prosper with them – the investment in the vicinity of Loznica is worth 450 million dollars so far. Is Jadar the Balkan Panguna, and Loznica our Bougainville? Or did “Rio Tinto” learn a lesson in ethics after destroying old Aboriginal caves? Will Serbian lithium really be excavated according to the rules according to which the environment is protected, or will the fears of the people of Loznica about the ecological catastrophe come true?

New jobs will be created, world-class lithium will be produced which will be used for electric car batteries, and most importantly, all measures will be adhered to in order to protect the environment and human health. All this is repeated in the Government of Serbia. After a recent meeting with representatives of the company Rio Tinto, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic described “Jadar” as a project of exceptional importance.

Can Rio Tinto be trusted? The citizens of Bougainville, a Pacific island that voted for independence from Papua New Guinea last year, would have something to say about that. Their fate is related to the Pangun mine, once one of the largest and richest deposits of copper and gold in the world, which was managed by this British-Australian company.

Although mining in Panguna ended 31 years ago, after disputes over the mine’s profits and environmental damage led to a decade-long civil war that killed about 20,000 people, the consequences are still being felt. The mine pit has left a deadly legacy to residents – polluted water flows unhindered into local rivers, those living in the valleys suffer from wounds and skin lesions, have respiratory problems, pregnancy complications. Monsoon rains push large amounts of polluted sand and tailings into rivers, destroying forests and agricultural land, because the mine was closed overnight and without rehabilitation.

As for “Rio Tinto”, this story ended in 2016, when the 53% share of the company there was given to the government of Papua New Guinea and the autonomous government of Bougainville. Environmental experts have assessed the move as part of Rio Tinto’s deliberate corporate strategy to rid itself of high-risk projects and high responsibilities. Even before that, this mining company had problems with its image – it remembers how the ore from Franco’s Spain went to Germany and Italy, where it was then used to make weapons. She has not forgotten the Namibian uranium excavated under the occupation of South Africa, which was ruled by apartheid. And this year, due to the expansion of coal mines, they demolished caves from the last ice age in Western Australia. Thus, the 46,000-year-old Aboriginal cultural heritage was destroyed, which contained the oldest known examples of bone tools in Australia, a sharpened kangaroo bone 28,000 years old and a 4,000-year-old hair braid. The explosive was activated on Reconciliation Week, a holiday reminiscent of the injustice inflicted on Aboriginal people, and it was soon announced that

the expansion of the mine was done in accordance with the permits issued to them by the local authorities.

And can the authorities in Serbia guarantee that “Rio Tinto” will work in accordance with environmental ethics and regulations? Those who know the history of this company doubt that, but also those who follow the results of the government in the fight for a better environment. Although it has been announced several times, the legislation that would prohibit the construction of small hydropower plants in protected areas has not been changed yet, nor has a commission been established to review the work of the existing ones. All the credit for the current lower interest in SHPPs goes to activists who, like guerrillas, pulled pipes out of rivers, clashed with investors, often breaking the law. Although the topic of air pollution was the reason for convening emergency government sessions last year, its quality was improved by the Environmental Protection Agency easing the evaluation criteria. That is how the air that was polluted until yesterday has now become acceptable. Hence the suspicion that Serbia, through the “Jadar” project, got something worth destroying 2,000 hectares of land and erasing entire eco-systems. The experiences of others have shown that such companies take away wealth, leaving only crumbs. While Rio Tinto boasts a unique example of technology, which has not been used anywhere before, the people of Loznica are afraid that what was tested in the laboratory will work in practice and that “Jadar” will become a poisonous scar in the landscape of Macva.

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