

To date, the manufacturing of the so called '**green**' metals, i.e., those used to produce batteries that are supposedly meant to lead the globe towards a [green transition](#); has taken place in countries located in America, Africa and Asia. Used to power things ranging from wind turbines to [electric vehicles](#), the manufacturing of these batteries requires large amounts of lithium, cobalt, nickel, etc, which has routinely been mined in all continents, apart from Europe.

For example, almost **70%** of the [cobalt](#) used by the energy industry today, is mined in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. **Indonesia** is leading in the production of nickel, closely followed by the Philippines, whereas the production of lithium is dominated by Australia, with Chile and China coming in at second and third place, respectively.

The energy industry's next target appears to be the significant **lithium deposits** found in Europe and specifically in France and Portugal. Furthermore, European countries that possess these deposits are advocating this as an opportunity for their 'green' industry to become less reliant on imports.

From the subsoil to the 'green' transition

The manufacturing of an electric car battery requires about eight kilograms of lithium. Thus, if the goal is to transition using mainly electric vehicles in the next few years (as per the European Council's targets) then the production of lithium and other relevant metals must increase drastically.

Lithium is, of course, toxic to the fauna and flora in the areas it is mined from. Furthermore, if lithium leaks into a drinking water supply followed by human consumption or even if inhaled systemically, it can cause serious health problems such as certain neurological conditions and cancers of the respiratory tract.

Despite the claims made by governments and representatives of the so called 'green' energy companies, removing lithium and other metals from the subsoil for battery production will only lead to further environmental destruction.

Lithium and the Colette forest

Found in central **France**, and next to Colette Forest, there is an old clay mine, with a total area of 2.000 hectares (20.000 acres) that belongs to the company Imerys. In addition to clay, this specific area has been found to contain large quantities of metals, including lithium, which has spiked the company's interest.

The company claims that the environmental impact will be minimal, as they plan to mine exclusively in the subsoil and not via open pits. This way, dust, noise pollution and the consequences to the forest and the species it hosts should be negligible. In reality, the biggest threat from any type of mining is the potential leakage of toxic waste into the nearby

soil, lakes, rivers, underground water storage tanks and crops. With regards to the Colette Forest specifically, residents and environmental activists believe that lithium mining in that area poses a serious risk to the local biodiversity, as well as to its springs and rivers.

The largest mine in Europe

In the upcoming months and years, north **Portugal**, in its entirety, will be the epicentre of confrontation between its residents and mining companies, who will undoubtedly seek to claim the estimated 60.000 tons of lithium that exist underground in the area. Specifically, the government, local authorities and the company Savannah Resources are planning the construction of the largest lithium mine in Europe near the Covas De Barroso village.

The village residents, the majority of which are livestock farmers, have recently been getting organised and protesting against the construction of the mine. The future of the local natural habitat, as well as the livelihood of the inhabitants, is under threat by these mining plans. They are mainly worried that the local water reserves will not only be exposed to toxic pollutants but also used uncontrollably for the needs of the mine.

In addition, proclamations about new jobs that could be created from the investment are not convincing, as the local residents realise that these positions will require specialised skills which they do not possess.

The hypocrisy, however, doesn't end there. The company has recently stated that the mine will release even less greenhouse emissions into the atmosphere than previously thought. In recent years energy and mining companies have been proclaiming the need to limit greenhouse gas emissions as if it were the be-all end-all in protecting the planet from climate change. The truth is that protecting the ecosystems that are in direct danger from all types of mining is just as crucial as limiting greenhouse gas emissions. More often than not, however, these companies conveniently 'forget' to mention this when they are advertising their supposed eco-friendly façade.

Following Serbia's footsteps

Last year, the Australian company **Rio Tinto** was forced to abandon its plans to take hold of a large area containing lithium deposits in Serbia's Yadar Valley. Mass demonstrations compelled the government to reconsider these plans, setting an example for environmental movements all over Europe and the rest of the globe.

The battle, however, is far from over. Since then, the company has invested over 1,2 million Euros in local businesses as a form of 'economic support'. In reality, this is a clear attempt to bribe the locals in anticipation of a potential upcoming referendum on the matter. As a matter of fact, this is common practice for Rio Tinto. Quite often it invests in public infrastructure, other times directly offers money to locals who have the potential to promote

their business plan.

Further battles are pending

In the future, equivalent battles will be inevitably fought in other regions. Sometimes under the pretext of environmental protection, other times with outright blackmail, bribery or repression, several European governments and mining companies are determined to exploit lithium deposits or the '**white gold**' as they refer to it, as it is a necessary element of the electric-motor industry. This is an industry which theoretically promises to limit greenhouse emissions but in practise this is impossible due to the fact that the energy it will use to charge these batteries is mainly produced with [fossil fuels](#).

On the other hand, local populations and environmental movements have every reason to continue fighting against these plans. It is also very important that the pressure for a massive shift in research around [renewable energy sources](#) (RES) continues, aiming to completely replace fossil fuels and find efficient ways to minimise the burden on the environment in areas where alternative energy production units are created. Tackling the climate crisis will not be achieved by going along with the plans and interests of 'green' entrepreneurs. Only societies themselves can tackle **climate change** by overthrowing those who dominate the economy and production and moving forward by innovating whilst honouring the future of the planet, nature and human life.

Source: Internationalist Standpoint