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International Seminar
on
The Role of Transnational
Corporations in Namibia

Sheraton Washington Hotel
Washington, DC
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.....
Saskatchewan and Namibia; The
Uranium Connection

by: Sterling Bjorndahl
Inter-Lutheran Committee for
Nuclear Responsibility
Canada

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INTER- LUTHERAN COMMITTEE for NUCLEAR RESPONSIBILITY

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Project: ¹
Saskatchewan and Namibia; The Uranium Connection" 1982/1983

Martin Luther

The primary goal of our committee is to stop uranium mining in Saskatchewan (our province has about 20% of the Western world's uranium deposits.) Our target group is the Saskatchewan Lutheran Churches. We became aware that there were corporate links between Canada and Namibia in the uranium industry, and that there were parallels in the history of development as well.

There is a slight consciousness among average Canadian Lutherans about Namibia, due mainly to articles in church periodicals. We felt that we could build on this consciousness to accomplish two things: 1) to increase grass-roots awareness of the Namibian situation and 2) to show that the uranium industry is not a good corporate citizen, and that it serves to perpetuate the Trans-National Corporations' hold over the world.

Our program has two tactics. The first is a twelve page tabloid, attractively laid out, which gives a brief and basic background to Namibia's politics and the role of the Lutheran Church there, as well as devoting some space to Namibia's Rössing uranium mine. It is intended to capture the eye of the typical Canadian Lutheran, to gain sympathy for Namibia.

The major tactic of our project is three-hour workshops, held for small groups of people in individual congregations. So far two workshops have been held and two more are definitely planned. We hope this number will grow. The workshop uses theological study as well as the film "A Cry for Freedom" (produced by the Lutheran Church in America) in order to present the Namibian situation and to describe North America's moral responsibility to help work for Namibian independence. We take a very ecclesiastical approach to overcome a common grass-roots opinion that the church should "stay out of politics." The heart of the workshop is a game-type exercise produced by our committee and described in the appendix. The exercise illustrates for people how their everyday actions tie in to a large web of TNC's which also are stealing uranium from the Namibian people. So far this has had a profound impact on our participants.

As well, in our workshops we point out the parallel development between Namibia and the native peoples of Canada, especially in Saskatchewan's North. This includes the history of colonization, the way in which white Europeans came in and built transportation routes solely to extract and export natural resources. The lifestyle and livelihood of the indigenous people was changed and degraded. Indigenous people were given low paying jobs and were expected to change to a wage-oriented economic system. Development was so capital-intensive that the indigenous people could not easily participate. Indigenous political systems were circumvented and puppet governments were set up. Population controls were introduced--the indigenous people were forced to live on the poorest quality land, and if minerals were found on that land it was (in effect) taken away again. People were told that if they wanted to survive they would have to adapt to white ways of life, white priorities, white materialism, a white understanding of "the good life." The old ways were inferior and bad. Uranium mining is a part of this attitude.

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¹Saskatchewan is a province of Canada

APPENDIX

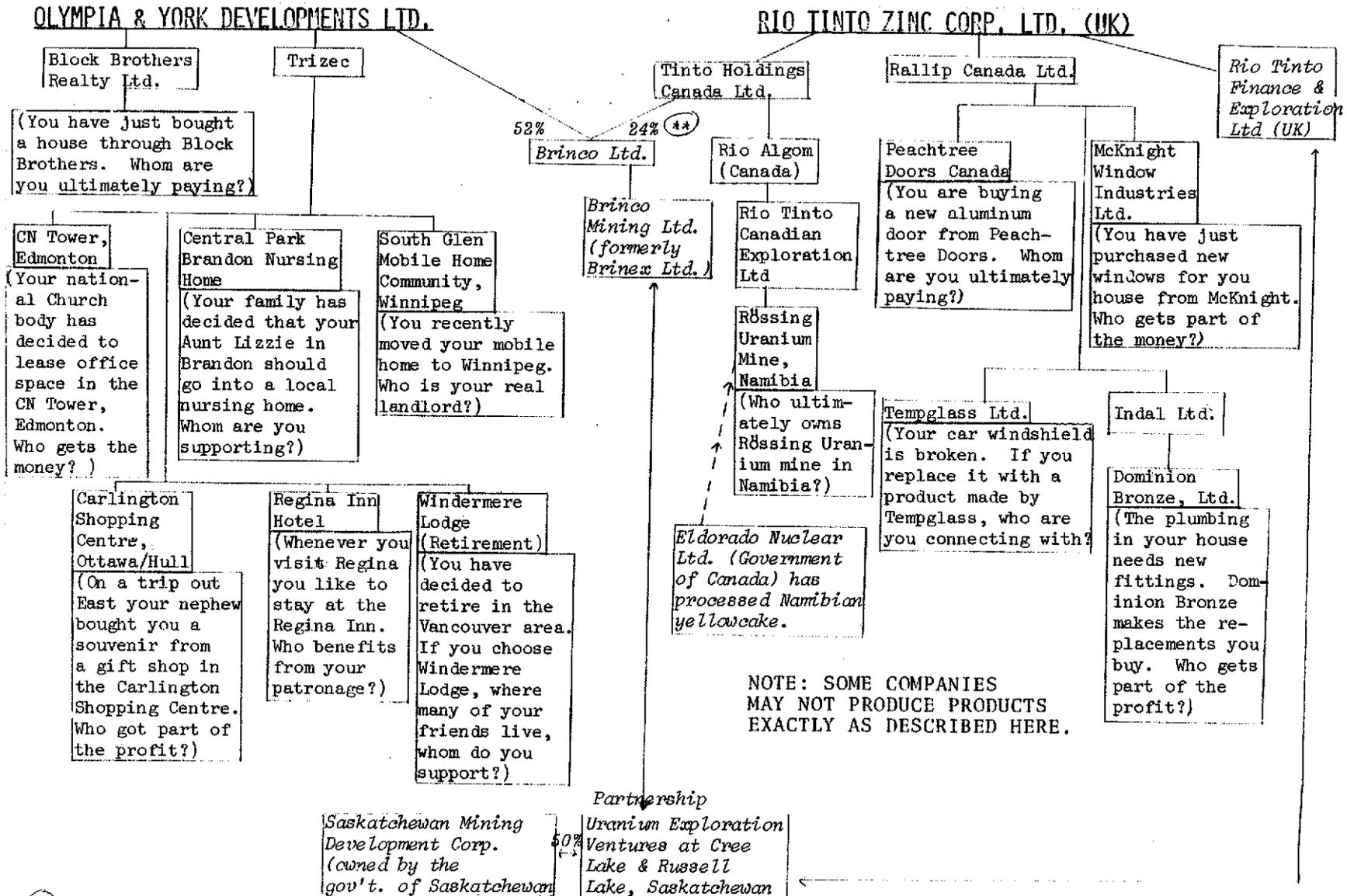
"The Corporate Web"

This game is designed to show people that they cannot say that they "don't want to get involved" in the Namibian situation, because they are already involved. Even everyday activities connect them with Trans-National Corporations which are connected to Namibia and are hindering Namibian independence.

The game is played with a large wall chart (more spacious and easier to use than the accompanying diagram on the next page) and a deck of small cards (about 3½ x 5 inches). All of the boxes and lines shown in the diagram are included on the chart but are empty of information. Only the companies Olympia & York and Rio Tinto Zinc are listed.

The small cards contain either a) the name of a product or service and the name of the company providing it, or b) the name of a corporation and its parent company. These cards are shuffled and handed out to the workshop participants (NOTE: the cards with the information given in *italics* in the diagram are retained by the game director.) The people are then invited to glue their cards to the appropriate spots on the chart in order to discover the answers to the questions of ownership printed on the product or service cards. This process usually takes 5 - 15 minutes. The game director then leads a debriefing which includes placing the rest of the cards (the ones shown in *italics*) in the correct spots. As he does this he describes the "uranium connection."

The reaction of workshop participants has been awe and despair as they discover the degree to which North Americans are trapped and oppressed by their own economic system. It is the task of the game director, during the debriefing and discussion, to channel the despair into constructive brainstorming rather than allowing the people to reject or ignore the information because it is so threatening. Some groups are willing to discuss the largely symbolic action of living more simply. Some are willing to discuss the concept of "development" and the purely economic or materialistic sense that we have given that word.



**Brinco and RTZ share common directors, notably AG Frame and Anthony Tuke
 Concept and design by Rev. James R. Halmarson of I.L.C.N.R. Research by Halmarson and S. Bforndahl