

The Agitator

A Bulletin for the Student Left

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UOTTAWA'S BLOOD MONEY?

What's in a name? The name 'Desmarais' represents much more than the \$15m contribution from Paul G. Desmarais Sr. for UOttawa's 'Campaign for Canada's university.' For the human rights community, Paul G. Desmarais' name carries a significance much greater than the university's new 12-storey "Desmarais" building at the corner of Laurier Avenue and Waller Street.

Who is Paul G. Desmarais Sr., and how did he obtain the money he has donated to this institution? Desmarais is one of Canada's richest people and is worth over \$4 billion. He is chairman of the executive committee and his son the co-CEO of PowerCorp, a massive Canadian corporation implicated in the UN oil-for-food scandal. He also served on the board of the French oil conglomerate Total during the mid-1990s, and has since given his seat on the board to his son Paul Desmarais Junior.

Given the recent events in Burma, naming a building after an individual affiliated with Total is outrageous. The human rights violations committed by Total in Burma, violations that the name 'Desmarais' is affiliated with, undermines everything a progressive academic institution should represent. Total's pledge to uphold 'corporate social responsibility' is meaningless lip service to the international community from a company that will greedily spit on the dignity of human beings in order to achieve the bottom line.

Total's record in Burma

In Burma, companies Total, California oil company UNOCAL, and British company Premier Oil, were contracted to construct the \$70 million Yadana gas pipeline. Earthrights International (ERI) has released a 180 page report that compiles first-hand testimonies of human rights abuses from several hundred villagers: abuses performed by Burma's military junta that are evidently a result of the pipeline's construction. Hundreds of civilians have suffered from forced labour, rape, execution, and forced confiscation of property. Total's company documents reveal that they were aware forced labour was being used throughout construction, according to the ERI report.

Furthermore, many allege the company directly funded the Burmese military, in order to protect the pipeline construction. Villagers claim the land was never heavily militarized prior to construction. Total's complicity in these abuses is evident, and Paul Desmarais Sr, and now his son, have sat on the corporation's board of directors. Yet, University of Ottawa President Gilles Patry audaciously asserts that, "We are proud to recognize the contributions of Mr. Paul G. Desmarais and Mrs. Jacqueline Desmarais to the University and to Canada in this very tangible way."

Telfer School of Management

UOttawa's business school has recently been renamed the Telfer School of

Management, as a result of a twenty-five million dollar donation from Ian Telfer, current Chairman of GoldCorp Inc., and former President and CEO of the company until its merger with Glamis Gold in November, 2006. Goldcorp, the second largest gold mining company in Canada, has numerous projects in Central America infamous for ongoing human rights abuses, the displacement of indigenous peoples, and environmental degradation. The Glamis Gold Marlin mine project in Guatemala has proceeded without the approval of the indigenous population. Communities have been evicted and relocated, and their dwindling water supplies are being contaminated with cyanide from the gold mines. Similarly, GoldCorp's San Martin mining project in Honduras has caused water and soil contamination, and has violated Honduran environmental laws by polluting community water supplies with cyanide and arsenic. The company has faced modest fines by the Honduran government, but the project remains socially and environmentally damaging.

Change the names

We demand that the place of such individuals and corporations on campus be the subject of consultation with the whole university community and abide by clear ethical standards. In addition, the names of the "Desmerais" bulding and the "Telfer" School of Management must be changed if human rights are to mean anything on this campus.

About the Agitator

The Agitator is an initiative of the International Socialists on several university and college campuses. It was created to offer a forum for the student left, and act as a collective organizer to help build a stronger student movement against neo-liberalism, war and oppression. Anyone can contribute and readers are encouraged to get involved, and help distribute the paper. If you are interested in writing, editing or distributing *The Agitator*, please get in touch with us:

socialist.ca/agitator

We can be found at the following campuses: Carleton, UOttawa, UofT, Ryerson, Trent, UVic, Langara, Camsoun
Help build the network!