

Baie du Cap: Part II:

When IRS MonRoze Closes off A Water Source

The planned *Integrated Resort Scheme* (IRS) MonRoze that is separating the people of Baie du Cap into two parts has already, before even beginning, not only gouged out the mountain, but has gone one step further in its destruction: The so-called “developers” have cordoned off the village spring, the river used by inhabitants, and installed a private pump on it. *See photo*. Notices threatening trespassers with prosecution if they go on to the “Private Property” of the planned IRS now prevent people from collecting water there.



What kind of an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is it that allows for private expropriation of water sources like this? What kind of a control is the CWA assuring on water *patrimoine*?

Are these real estate promoters what the Government considers “developers”? People who come and cut a village in two, cut its inhabitants in two, gouge a hole in a mountain, rip apart *patrimoine* of very old buildings, and steal a water source? Or are they destroyers? Of the environment, of human society and culture, of memory and history?

The villagers know that they will soon be accused by the promoters of the IRS of “being against development projects”. The answer is simple. They are against *this* project. And they have a very clear idea of what kind of development they *do* want. They demand jobs. St Felix and Bel Ombre have closed down. VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme) has put paid to secure labouring jobs. The textile factories in the vicinity where many people worked have closed down. Fishermen’s catches have fallen. It is the duty of Government to force the sugar estates in the area to come up with proper development, and not this kind of land speculation and invasion. It is the duty of government to force the sugar estates to diversify their land use away from cane. The price of sugar has fallen and is due, in 2017, to fall further, making sugar non-viable. So, why remain stuck, stubborn as donkeys in diversifying within cane? Why expect the taxpayers to prop up the sugar estate bosses with subsidies? Even the price of oil has fallen, making ethanol plans more tendentious still. Why does the Government not realize that those who own the land must plant food crops, and bosses must set up food preservation and transformation plants, so that there is appropriate employment for the people whose jobs have been destroyed, and so that food security is assured, and so that, by exporting to the region, Mauritius gets foreign exchange.

What people in Baie du Cap demand is clear-cut and has been set out in a petition sent on Saturday 26 March to Minister Alain Wong who is in charge of the Ministry of Environment after the resignation of Minister Raj Dayal. I quote from their petition:

“1. Put an immediate halt to the project.

“2. Find ways of forcing the two sugar estates that have closed down, and where so many people in Baie du Cap worked, that is to say Bel Ombre and St. Felix, to diversify their agriculture, take on workers, and assure them good conditions. They cannot just control Mauritian land as “*real estate*”, and have Government allowing them to fatten themselves on the increase in the value of their land. They have a responsibility to use the land to create work. Simultaneously, these two sugar estates must be made to set up factories for preservation of food products that are planted. This way further work will be created. So many textile factories in the south have sacked people and shut down.

“3. Develop fishing outside the lagoon and repopulate the fish inside the lagoon, along the lines begun in Rodrigues. The sea no longer provides a livelihood for us, due to over-fishing.

“4. Return us our source and river, build access roads for all of us, put in drains, build a social centre and set up a children’s playground. But not just these things.”

If the Government, or its supposed “strategy for development”, cannot provide this kind of future for people, then it is time for people to build a new future, starting from the obvious place: the need of the people, instead of starting from the greed of the sugar estate bosses. The villagers of Baie du Cap are leading us all in the fight against the ruination of the country by real estate projects that represent a new kind of colonization. It is a type of colonization not dissimilar to Israel’s colonization of Palestine. Just simply going and inserting colonizers within existing social reality, as if the people already living there are a nuisance to be pacified, and if not, removed. It is quite frightening.

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for LALIT
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