

THE FUTURE

As Sierra Leone approached her Independence in 1961, there was no doubt that the Diamond, Chrome, Platinum, Iron Ore and Gold mines had created a new class during the previous period of some twenty years. Amongst the changes arising from this activity, an important factor was the obvious beginnings of an industrial proletariat. This new social group was considered to be a more desirable status by many young men, than that of being a farmer and tilling the land.

The organisation and work practice experienced on the mines was changing the pattern of normal African life. It was the case that the discipline of regular shift work was as foreign to Sierra Leoneans as it had been to the English factory worker in the 1820s. It was to have some significant effects on mental attitudes and aptitudes locally; living on a strictly cash basis was new and so was the concept of Union Comradeship.

Moreover the prospects for expansion of this new way of life were seemingly good at that time. The British Iron and Steel industry, when not on strike, was in urgent need to smelt more and more iron ore. Above all, it was inconceivable that British

capital should pour into the development of iron ore deposits in Conakry, French Guinea, to the distinct disadvantage of Sierra Leone, a British Colony about to become a full member of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

As the Country moved steadily towards Independence the future of mining was real and optimistic. It seemed reasonably certain that Sierra Leone would be an exporter of Iron Ore for many years to come. The Diamond fields were so extensive that it was unlikely they would be worked out in the immediate future, even at the prevailing rate of exploitation, but some falling-off in production was considered likely. The view was that there were good chances that one or other of the known Gold prospects could prove to be exploitable.

The Consolidated Zinc Corporation Ltd, in partnership with Columbia Southern Chemical Corporation Inc. had proved reserves of alluvial Rutile in excess of the Imperi Chiefdom of Bonthe District and it was likely that these would be mined should the world-wide demand for this mineral improve. Of note, the Geological Survey had discovered and prospected a deposit of Bauxite in the Mokanji Hills in the Banta and Dasse Chiefdoms of Moyamba District over which Aluminium-Industrie-Aktien-Gesellschaft of Zurich, Switzerland had applied for the mineral rights and were making plans for the early mining of the deposit.

It was hoped that several other mineral discoveries recorded by the Geological Survey in recent years might become exploitable

in the course of time. Also that the regional geo-chemical prospecting surveys, which were to be carried out over selected areas of Sierra Leone during the early years of Independence might lead to the discovery of other mineral prospects. In the meantime the Geological Survey was to continue into detailed mapping of the Schist areas paying particular attention to the search for minerals of economic interest.

After Independence, mining continued to develop in Sierra Leone during the intervening 30 years, leading on to the recent period of conflict that was to last for some 10 years or so. In particular Diamond, Rutile and Bauxite became the principal extractions from our soil, but this has not been examined in any detail in this book. As the conflict took hold, Diamonds were to once again occupy centre stage and the endemic problem of illicit mining and illegal export of stones, mainly through Monrovia, Liberia returned to threaten the economical stability and well being of the Country. So a situation arose where all other forms of mining virtually stopped, opposing combatants ransacked other mines and brought all production to a standstill except for the ruthless and indiscriminate extraction of stones within the main Diamond areas. Most of the areas in Kono with Diamonds were captured and held by the opposing forces to the exclusion of Government and private agencies, and all commercial activity was to cease. Because of logistical difficulties, very little became known of the actual diamond mining activity. There was no question, though, that using whatever means individuals were ruthlessly digging up that area in a frenzied alluvial effort and that the stones were leaving the country via Liberia. The disaster

was that the proceeds of these significant illegal sales was being spent on funding the war effort, which received support from external countries.

The world watched almost in a state of helplessness, as diamond mines haemorrhaged and the natural wealth of the country was grossly misused. Against this wanting waste, the status of being one of the poorest countries in the world order of battling emerged and in many ways seemed irreconcilable with the mineral wealth of Sierra Leone. Pressure eventually started to mount, mainly overseas for a stop to be put to the use of diamonds in this way to prosecute war and the Kimberly discussions became part of that wider process including the United Nations Organisation.

However, a coalition of seven international organisations and human rights groups issued a report card on the Kimberly Process in February 2002. It gave Governments and Diamond Industry groups high marks for good intentions but an overall failing grade for their lack of progress in curbing the trade in illicit “conflict diamonds”. Since May 2000, officials from diamond producing and importing nations, together with representatives of the diamond industry had held a series of meetings begun in South Africa to become known as the “Kimberly Process”, aimed at designing a global certificate system, which would bring under control the illegal diamond trade.

This new trade of stones for arms was widespread and was blamed for fuelling wars not only in Sierra Leone but also in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The proposed system, was debated at the twelfth and last Kimberly Process meeting in Ottawa in March 2002, under the chairmanship of Abbey Chikane of South Africa. Canada noted 4 issues left unresolved at the previous November 2001 Kimberly Process meeting in Botswana. One of them was statistics, another was very weak provision for monitoring, another was a co-ordination mechanism and some governments were concerned about the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and whether or not any new scheme would be in contravention with the WTO. What was clear to all parties was that as long as conflict diamonds continued to infect the legitimate diamond business, the whole industry could be in jeopardy. Simply, any business where part of the operations was involved in fuelling wars, could not survive for long; the diamond industry should be concerned about that.

However, the conclusion at Ottawa was that a certificate of origin system would be in place by the end of the year. The question of whether the proposed system would be in conflict with WTO rules was also resolved. Notwithstanding, Human Rights groups and non-governmental organisations believed that the planned monitoring mechanisms would prove too weak to ensure that countries comply with a new certification system. Only time will tell how effective the “Kimberly Process” had been in bringing order to diamond mining across the African Continent.

Nonetheless, with the return to peace and constructive governance it would seem sensible to again engage in a holistic review of mining in Sierra Leone. World demand for minerals is

traditionally governed by an evolving technology and it would be sensible to first conduct another comprehensive geological survey of the country. On the one hand, this would serve to confirm the continued availability of those minerals in current world demand and the feasibility of introducing mining operations to mine and market these deposits. More importantly, Sierra Leone would be able to determine and assess any new mineral resources, including offshore oil to complete its mining profile. The task of any future Minister and Government would then be to develop policies that would ensure that maximum benefit was derived from our natural resources. This would be in the form of fiscal gain from taxes, training and employment of Sierra Leoneans, including job opportunities both on the mines and in general employment. In addition, there should be a corresponding development of the infrastructure and services of the Country and the essential improvement of the fortunes and well being of the majority of its people. This has never before been effectively achieved in the history of mining in Sierra Leone.

The immediate developments in this respect concern Iron Ore, and Oil:

A Revival in Iron Ore

The London Mining company undertook an extended drilling programme at its flagship Marampa project in the Port Loko District of Sierra Leone, and has uncovered two structures with an estimated inferred resource of 111 million tonnes of 33% pure iron. As a result, the Company is now targeting an

annual output of some 9 million tonnes, and mining operations could well last for longer than the next 20 years. The newly discovered Campbell Town ridge, and Hospital ridge structures are connected to Marampa's Massaboin Hill, and Ghafal Hill Zones so, once again, Sierra Leone is poised to deliver iron ore of a high grade fraction to China and the rest of the World with the real prospects of associated economic development to the distinct benefit of the country and its people. The ideal outcome would be the development of relevant industries that would serve to provide jobs, and wealth for the poor people of this mineral-rich small country

The arrival of Oil in Sierra Leone

The story of oil had a very unclear beginning since Sierra Leone gained its Independence from Great Britain in April 1961. There was a general tentative awareness that there were deposits of black gold—oil—in the country, but a marked official secrecy prevailed until 1963. A Report of the Mines Division of the Ministry of Land, Mines and Labour, 1962 was submitted to Government on 25 May 1963. Essentially, it was acknowledged that an Oil Agreement between the Government and Tennessee (Sierra Leone) Inc. was in place, and preparations were being made to start a marine seismic survey within the company's Oil Exploration Licences.

For the next few years the hunt for oil was conducted in earnest with varying Political interest, or support, but with little success. Indeed, until 1967 Governments were interested more in the

exploitation of diamonds, bauxite, rutile and iron ore. However, even when Iron Ore production ceased in 1975, Government did not pursue the country's oil potential as a new means of wealth creation, and the huge capital investments required in oil were never attempted.

Nevertheless, outside interest in this potential resource continued, and some activity took place with Businesses in the United states of America, and also British companies. It is reported that two particular major setbacks were encountered: first, the rock formations in overwhelming parts of the prospective areas were such that the available drills proved ineffective for penetration; more than that, the world economy was enjoying an all-time oil glut, and it was uneconomical for Sierra Leone to conduct any further oil exploration against the advantages enjoyed by long-established Arab and Middle Eastern oil producing countries. As a result, all whispers, and rumours about oil in Sierra Leone suddenly died out, right up until the NPRC Coup in 1992.

However, less than a decade later, things changed when on 19 September 2009 the first find of oil was announced by a consortium led by United States firm Anadarko, with Australia's Woodside Petroleum Ltd, Spain's Repsol YPF, and Britain's Tullow Oil PLC as partners. Anadarko were also prospecting off the coast of Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Ghana.

Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, an Oil and natural gas exploration and production company announced that its

exploration well, Mercury 1, had discovered oil in offshore Sierra Leone. The exploration wells were drilled in an off-shore basin with Liberia, at a total depth of approximately 15, 950 feet in about 5, 250 feet of water, and Anadarko predicts a well with 135 net feet of oil pay in two Cretaceous-age fan systems.

In the wake of the birth of oil production in Ghana towards the end of 2010, the prospects of oil coming on stream in Sierra Leone soon are more promising. This phase of the story in Oil ends with a quote provided by Sierra Leone's Information Minister, the Honorable Ibrahim Ben Kargbo—

“President Ernest Koroma is extremely happy about the discovery, but has advised that we must all be cautious, and watch further developments.

It is good news indeed! Let's pray the oil will become a blessing to the country. If the oil becomes a flourishing industry, all Sierra Leoneans will benefit, particularly the younger generation.”

And, that's a BIG “if”!!