

Irish Times 12.03.10

**Everyone's a winner, but what will happen after the gold rush?
Lorraine Mallinder**

It's boom time in Malartic, a one-horse town in north-western Quebec, Canada. Located on the edge of the country's frozen wastes, this tiny community of 4,000 inhabitants is witnessing a gold rush of almighty proportions. The streets are literally paved with the stuff.

The Osisko Mining Corporation is racing to dig the biggest open-pit gold mine in the country. Time is of the essence if investors are to ride the wave of rising gold prices, which have almost quadrupled over the past decade, a trend accelerated by the global stampede to safety in the recent economic crisis.

A sizeable chunk of the community has been hastily relocated to a new part of town to make way for the pit. It's a "win-win" situation, says H  l  ne Thibault, spokesperson for Osisko. The corporation has shifted homes and built high-tech schools, a medical centre and low-cost housing to accommodate uprooted residents.

There's everything to play for, it seems. But, one man stands in the way of the onward march of progress. Ken Mass  's house stands defiantly on an empty blanket of white littered with red danger signs. The project cannot go forth while his family of four children is still living in the middle of the site. The corporation has negotiated in vain and is ready to launch legal proceedings to seize the land.

The former town councillor is nowhere to be found. He has fled to the urban refuge of Montreal, 500 odd kilometres south. But, everyone has something to say about him. Osisko believes it's only a matter of time before a financial settlement is reached. Many locals say he is a loose cannon. But, a lady in the post office betrays a sneaking admiration: "He's right to stick to his guns," she says.

In his conspicuous absence, the boom continues apace. The mayor says that "everyone is smiling". But walking through the desolate streets of Malartic, there's a persistent sense that something isn't quite right. Utilitarian buildings with corrugated iron facades look morosely onto the shabby streets. The local bar – Chateau Malartic- is devoid of atmosphere, the beer and the offerings at the salad bar half frozen.

In the Kool Caf  , local residents nurse polystyrene cups of coffee. "I've been sitting on gold all my life," says an old boy called Laurien Boissonneau. "Yes, but you're none the richer for it," snaps a beady-eyed lady in an electric blue jacket. It turns out that residents were given CA\$5,000 (  UR 3,000) each to relinquish their land ... and their memories. Locals feel they have been raided.

Dissatisfaction lurks in every corner of town. Jacques Saucier, of the local "vigilance committee" set up to monitor the mine, believes that "those who made the most noise" were able to get more money, a state of affairs which has created an environment of "silence and jealousy". He attributes residents' inability to negotiate collectively to a subservient mentality forged through decades of Anglophone dominance.

The corporation was given carte blanche by the authorities, he says. Like many, he is sceptical about the investments made to compensate for community losses. "If you were to break a

window, your community service wouldn't be considered a gift," he says. He worries about what will happen when Osisko completes its heavy-duty extraction in twelve years time, leaving a gaping hole - environmental and economic.

Yet, he doesn't support Massé, claiming he fell in with a bad crowd. It's a story worthy of a western. Locals speak of a "blue eyed Indian", who rode into town, scenting financial opportunity. Réjean Aucoin, who is half Abenaki Indian, contacted Massé after his resignation from public office – over the mining project - in the aim of mounting a class action that would net him millions as a middle man.

We arrange a rendez-vous at the World Trade Centre in Montreal. Aucoin and Massé are polar opposites, the former red-faced and choleric, the latter porcelain-skinned and placid. Aucoin claims to be a multi-billionaire, by his own estimation a "capitalist shark, just like Osisko", who allegedly made his fortune from the assertion of aboriginal land rights.

Massé, who seems more of a socialist by nature, is happy to align himself with Aucoin for the cause. "I'm doing it out of principle," he says. "You need to have the guts to stand up for yourself. The company has come to take everything. They will leave us nothing." He seems determined, but there's a lack of support in town, even among the most disgruntled residents.

The thorn in the side of Osisko isn't sure when he will return home. His house stands cold and empty, watched by a lone sign on the wire fence surrounding the mine, a hopeful attempt at community spirit from the corporation: "Thank you for your collaboration," it says.

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