

Multinational Company Executive

T. J. Edwards, president of New Futures International Mines

My name is T. J. Edwards. I am the president of New Futures International Mines. My company's home office is in Canada, but we are a multinational company—we have operations in many countries. As opportunities arose around the world, we bought existing companies and built new ones. We now have large gold and iron mining operations in a dozen countries, including South Africa and Brazil. Some people say that we are, like other multinational companies, too big and powerful. Yes we are a big company, but international business is very competitive. We have to be big in order to compete in global markets.

Our recent discoveries of large deposits of gold and iron in Brazil will benefit both our company and the people of Brazil. With these mines, we will be able to employ many people and give the country more income. This would have economic benefits for our employees as well as other people. For example, our operations would encourage other businesses in the area, such as grocery stores and gas stations. If our company is successful, many in Brazil will benefit as well. However, we must decide if we should open the mines in Brazil or focus instead on the many other places in the world that offer opportunity. We will only get involved in Brazil if it is profitable for us.

One positive sign is that, presently, there are not as many labour unions in Brazil in this industry. In other countries where we have had to deal with labour unions, there has been conflict with our company. We need to compete on world markets which means we must keep our costs down. Unions want too many things for their workers, such as higher salaries, guaranteed holidays and benefits. It is easier for us to operate where we do not have to deal with them. The government of Brazil does not have strong rules or enforcement about paying for benefits such as health. This would allow us to keep our costs down and invest more in the mine itself. In this way, we could offer jobs to the many people who are unemployed in this area whether they be the Yanomami, landless peasants or other workers.

There is much the Brazil government can do to encourage us. We expect that the Brazilian government will give us tax breaks, such as lower tax rates on our profits, for investing in the country and build roads for us to haul our products. Another factor is the cost of electrical power in Brazil. We are very pleased that the government is considering building more dams along the Amazon River to produce power. This will keep our energy costs down. But the government will benefit too. It will earn money from the taxes that we will pay. As well, more workers will have incomes that they will spend in their communities and the government will get more taxes. This will help the government pay its international debt, which costs the country a lot of money each year.

Despite the encouraging signs I have just described, we are concerned about a number of things. First, we have to be able to own and control the land on which we build our mines. If there is disagreement with Indigenous groups about ownership, then we will not feel secure setting up the mines. The world is changing and people like the Yanomami will have to change with it. A second concern is environmental groups. In some countries where we have operated, environmental groups have pressured governments to bring in strict laws. The government must put economic concerns ahead of the cries of outside protestors. We, too, are concerned about the safety of our workers. We realize the needs for safer working conditions, such as better controls on the use of dangerous chemicals in the processing of gold. We are willing to make some changes. However, if we don't operate the mine, the workers won't have jobs and they will be worse off.

Brazil has much to gain by having our company operate mines in the Amazon region. The government and people of Brazil, as well as environmental groups and individuals all over the world, must allow our company to continue to build this poor country. If we are to help Brazilian people find employment and bring money into the economy, we must be encouraged to develop our mines.

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