

PRESS RELEASE 17 August 2005

We who have been protesting against heavy industry and the devastating destruction of Iceland's natural environment at Kárahnjúkar in the Eastern highlands of Iceland and in other parts of the country in recent months would like to take the opportunity to make the following statement:

During our protest we have used methods which may not have a long tradition in Iceland but which do not constitute a breach of the law. We are an broad-based group of Icelanders and people of many other nationalities united by our respect for the natural environment and our intolerance of repression, the misuse of power and the violation of human rights. We have expressed our opposition to the large-scale destruction of areas of outstanding natural beauty in the Icelandic highlands in the following ways:

- by disseminating information about the heavy-industry madness of the Icelandic government, which is reflected in the proposed construction of hydroelectric plants by the National Power Company (Landsvirkjun) and other power companies at sites such as Thjórsárver, Langisjór, Skjálfafljót and Skagafjörður.
- by hanging a banner displaying a crack on the Kárahnjúkar dam.
- by locking ourselves on to construction machinery and climbing up cranes.
- by writing slogans on workmen's huts at the Kárahnjúkar dam construction site by holding protest walks at the Kárahnjúkar dam site.

The destruction of property that has been attributed to us, such as the spraying of slogans on public buildings in Reykjavík, is not part of our protest, and none of us were involved in vandalizing cars or an electric cable belonging to RARIK or other private property, despite this being widely reported in the press. People from Impregilo, the Italian construction group building dams and tunnels at Kárahnjúkar, have on the other hand displayed threatening behavior such as driving motorcycles through the protest camp at night (with children in the tents) and by vandalizing the property of the camp.

Sabotage of machinery by disaffected Impregilo workers has been frequent at the Kárahnjúkar dam site. The workers of Impregilo live under squalid conditions, have been put in life threatening situations and violated in various other ways. Icelandic unionists have repeatedly complained that Impregilo have been allowed to break laws, for months at a time. G. Gunnarsson, leader of the Icelandic Electrician's Union has pointed out in the Icelandic press that neither the police nor the government act when worker's rights are violated but resources are always on hand during protests against dam. Impregilo has got away with repeatedly breaking the law which the government has chosen to ignore.

By encouraging the use of cheap international migratory labour for

building the dams and building and working in the Alcoa aluminium smelter the Icelandic authorities are deliberately trying to break down the achievements of a century long struggle for the rights of Icelandic workers. This also exposes as completely false the claims of the Icelandic government that the Kárahnjúkar project is to create jobs for the Icelandic people of the East.

We consider our protest as being clearly within Icelandic law and so regard as illegal the deportation of people who have taken part in our protest, given that no charges have been brought against them. Deporting people from Iceland and barring them from returning to the country simply because they have expressed their opposition to the hydroelectric developments at Kárahnjúkar, which is a very controversial decision by the Icelandic government, is not in accordance with the democratic rule of law due to the undeniable fact that so much of the information to push this through parliament was systematically falsified. We would also like to point out that some of the people on the Directorate of Immigration's list for deportation have already left the country and most of the rest will have left by the time the decision about their deportation is obtained. Their deportation therefore has no other purpose than to exclude foreign environmentalists from Iceland in the coming years, thereby isolating Icelandic protesters from the outside world. There is no question that we will test the legality of deporting foreign nationals simply for expressing their opinion of the government's hydroelectric policy.

Those of us who have organized the protests have experienced treatment at the hands of the Icelandic police that is wholly inconsistent with a democratic society that should respect human rights. We have been treated as if we were terrorists. Many of us have been followed by uniformed and plainclothes police officers for up to twenty-four hours a day. The police have broken into our homes without search warrants, on the pretext of serving us with papers from the Directorate of Immigration, laid hands on those of us who were at home and treated us in a degrading manner. Our cars have been impounded without authority. Some of us have been arrested on no charge by plainclothes officers and taken to police cells where we have been detained without food or water. The Icelandic police have repeatedly abused their power by violating our fundamental rights such as the right to enjoy our homes in peace. We will be lodging a complaint with the State Prosecutor in which we will demand that the actions of the police are subjected to a public inquiry.

The reason for the presence in Iceland this summer of a large group of protesters from the international community should be obvious in the light of globalisation. After all, the government has invited multinational corporations to the country to take part in the frenzy of heavy industry that now has Icelandic society and nature in its grip.

Companies like Alcoa, Bechtel and Impregilo have a long history of convictions for crimes against nature and still have judgments pending

on charges of serious environmental damage or corruption. In addition, as mentioned above, they currently have a large number of foreign nationals working for them in Iceland.

This attack on Icelandic nature is not a private affair for the Icelanders; pollution knows no national borders. Ironically, the Icelanders boast of living in an unspoilt land and promote the country on this basis in the international marketplace. If the government's policy of heavy industrialization is not stopped, such a promotion of Icelandic nature will cease to have any basis in truth.

We have not given up our opposition and will continue our battle as is our legal right. Our protest will take diverse forms, ranging from books, films, music, picnics, lectures, information booths, banners, placards, words and festivals to climbing construction cranes. We will continue our protest summer after summer, winter after winter, until we have achieved our goal which is to galvanize the Icelandic people to take action against the destruction of their land and the curtailment of their freedom of speech.

Stop the outrage, stand up for our natural environment!

The protesters

For further info please see:

www.savingiceland.org