

BWI BRIEFING ON QUEBEC GOVERNMENT PROPOSED \$58 MILLION SUBSIDY FOR ASBESTOS EXPORT. December 2010

- The Jeffrey mine in Asbestos, Québec is thought to be the largest open-pit asbestos mine in the world. It was previously owned by Johns Manville and has exported huge amounts of asbestos all over the world in the past century. Now, the open-pit mine has exhausted its supply of asbestos. The present owner, Jeffrey Mine Inc., has asked the Québec government for a \$58 million loan guarantee to enable the company to open up a new, underground asbestos mine, tapping into a large new asbestos deposit.

-In the BWI, we understand that people need jobs and that the Jeffrey mine region is an economically depressed region. But the government should not finance jobs that create suffering and death overseas. **The BWI calls on the Quebec government not to support the production and export of chrysotile asbestos, and instead to invest the \$58 million in helping the Jeffrey mine region with healthy, sustainable development.**

- The company already went under bankruptcy protection in 2004 and still owes \$50 million to the Quebec Pension Fund, for the money that the Pension Fund invested in this underground mine project. Now Jeffrey Mine Inc. wants a \$58 million government subsidy to save the company from declaring bankruptcy and finally closing down.

- Québec and the rest of Canada refuse to use asbestos, in spite of heavy lobbying by the Québec asbestos industry. Instead, it exports over 95% of its asbestos to the developing world. Jeffrey Mine Inc. therefore plans to export 200,000 tonnes of asbestos a year from the new underground mine to developing countries for the next 25 to 50 years.

- The Québec government's own health authority (the National Public Health Institute of Québec), as well as Québec health experts, all oppose the Québec government's policy of increased use of chrysotile asbestos. (Chrysotile asbestos represents 100% of the world asbestos trade and represents 95% of all asbestos every sold.) Instead of supporting its own health experts, the Québec government, like the federal government, supports the asbestos industry.

- The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Public Health Association, as well as the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation, have all called for the use of chrysotile asbestos to end as the only way to eliminate asbestos-related diseases. The Québec government and the Canadian government refuse to listen.

- In Québec the government's Occupational Health & Safety Commission (CSST) has a policy of "zero exposure" to chrysotile asbestos for Québec workers. However, the Québec government says that exposure to high levels of asbestos (1 f/cc, which is a ten times greater exposure level than permitted by provinces across Canada, by the US and by industrialized countries and a hundred times higher than that permitted by a number of countries) is perfectly safe for people overseas.

- Québec itself, like the rest of Canada, is experiencing an epidemic of asbestos-related disease. A conservative estimate gives 612 new cases of asbestos-related disease in Quebec in 2004. Figures for 2009 from the Quebec Workers' Compensation Board show 60% of occupational deaths were caused by asbestos. (See letter to Premier Charest from health experts http://www.sfu.ca/pamr/files/spring2010/PDF/IJOEH_Letter.pdf)

- Workers in India have written to Premier Charest saying that his government's double standard seems to be an example of racism.

- The Québec government has published a report by its own health authorities on a two-year investigation on use of asbestos in Québec. The report found that asbestos is virtually no longer

being used in Québec, but that in the tiny number of workplaces where it was still being used, there was a 100% failure rate to practise “safe use” standards.

- Québec and Canada are leading propagandists for the global asbestos industry through the Quebec based Chrysotile Institute. This presents one of the greatest public health obstacles to making progress in eliminating asbestos-related diseases in the world.

- Publications, funded by the Québec and Canadian governments and bearing the Québec and Canadian flags, to promote use of asbestos overseas, state that in India, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Taiwan, a 99.8% success rate has been achieved in meeting “safe use” standards and that it is easy for developing countries to use asbestos safely. These statements are false and misleading. This is government-funded misinformation that harms and kills people.

- The president of the Jeffrey mine, Bernard Coulombe, who has asked for the \$58 million subsidy, denies the indisputable scientific evidence that chrysotile asbestos is extremely hazardous and causes mesothelioma, other cancers and asbestosis. Mr Coulombe denies that chrysotile asbestos causes mesothelioma and says chrysotile asbestos is an excellent product that can easily be safely used.

-The Government of Quebec is due to take the decision of whether to provide the \$58 million loan guarantee on December 20th 2010.

The BWI urges the government of Quebec to refuse the loan guarantee, and instead to invest funds in a just transition programme to provide the affected communities with safe, healthy, sustainable employment.