
Chile: Forestry companies and security firms accused of terrorism

Last February deputy Eugenio Tuma denounced that several terrorist attacks against tree plantations in the southern 9th Region, which took place during the last months, could have been carried out by employees of security firms hired by the forestry companies to guard their properties, with the aim of blaming the Mapuche indigenous peoples and thus justifying the need for their presence in the region. Some time ago Leonardo Espinoza, an ex-employee of Osepar -one of such security firms- who was dismissed for setting ablaze a property of a forest company- could not stand the burden of guilt and committed suicide.

Forestry companies themselves are considered responsible for similar kind of actions. Seven employees of Forestal Mininco are ready to testify with detail on terrorist attacks that they performed -following the company's orders- against plantations and Mapuche villages. In September 1999 a worker of Mininco had already admitted that he had been bribed to falsely accuse a group of Mapuche of committing vandalic acts against the company's property (see WRM Bulletin 27). In spite of the evidence, Pedro Schlack Harnecker, President of CORMA (Wood Producers Corporation) in the 8th Region has quickly tried to counter these arguments by calling them groundless, although his colleague Emilio Guerra, of Temuco, considers that such possibility cannot be dismissed.

The above mentioned facts can be relevant to the case that is being followed in court to clarify the circumstances in which three guards of Forestal Mininco got seriously injured when on the night of February 19th they were victims of the flames resulting from a criminal action that took place at the estate Aruacanía de Collipuli in the 9th Region. The Mapuche were blamed for this crime. "They always put the blame on us" stated José Huenchunao, spokesperson of the Mapuche Arauco-Malleco Coordination, and he added: "there are ex-security guards willing to confess", but "the problem is that there is much fear because of the power of the forestry companies."

The issue of security is now at the centre of controversy in southern Chile. It is a good opportunity to reflect on the insecurity that the Mapuche people -traditional dwellers of the southern region, whose ancestral territories are invaded by huge tree monocultures, with the explicit support of the authorities- have been suffering for decades. For sure the Chilean forestry model has provided them neither with security nor with prosperity.

Sources: <http://linux.soc.uu.se/mapuche/lumaco/dsur000225.html> ; La Nación, 24/2/2000