
Chile: a severely questioned model

Nowadays pulp plantations in Chile cover more than 2.1 million hectares, 75% of a single species - radiata pine- and the rest mainly composed of eucalyptus.

The Chilean forestry model, that originated during the military dictatorship and has been trumpeted as an example of modern forestry development and exported as such to the countries of the region, is in big trouble. Land concentration in the hands of a few logging and plantation companies (such as Forestal Arauco, Forestal Mininco and CMPP), the forced displacement of thousands of peasants and indigenous people, poverty in communities dependent on forestry activities, the destruction of the Southern natural forests replaced by plantations, and the negative impacts on water sources and biodiversity resulting from this model are being severely questioned. Virtues of the model are just myths that companies and the government use as propaganda.

In February 1998 the fishing community of Mehuin in the southern X Region opposed the project of Celulosa Arauco y Constitucion -a huge pulp and paper company- to build a pulp mill coupled with a pipeline that would discharge toxic pollutants resulting from the production process in the bay where they live. The mobilization involved the whole population of Mehuin and resulted in the rejection of the project.

The strong opposition to the expansion of plantations in their traditional lands is at the core of the defense of the environment undertaken by the Mapuche indigenous communities in Arauco, Malleco and Cautin Provinces in southern Chile. During 1998 and 1999 they have carried out a number of actions. The Mapuche have to face not only powerful forestry companies but also the Chilean State which has subsidised the model -and continues to do so- and at the same time denies in fact indigenous peoples' rights to their land and culture and is using the police and the military to repress them. During the recent months, actions against plantation companies have dramatically increased both in number and intensity, including the occupation by indigenous peoples of lands which belong to them but that are currently in the hands of plantation companies, the destruction of forestry machinery, the organization of a march to the capital city and many others. Companies and the state are becoming increasingly nervous and isolated, while the Mapuche are gaining strength and support.