
Brazil: The rights of Aracruz and the rights of the people

The growing consolidation of land by Aracruz Celulose in Espirito Santo and in the extreme south of Bahia, followed by plantation of eucalyptus monocrops, is generating increasing opposition. A sign of this was the International Seminar on eucalyptus and its impacts organized last August by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Espirito Santo (see WRM Bulletin 49). However the responsible State bodies do not seem to be willing to undertake the studies necessary to regulate this activity.

In view of this lack of action on the part of the competent bodies, the Movement Alert Against the Green Desert, decided to document the environmental impacts caused by eucalyptus plantations, carrying out a photographic survey of the rural properties belonging to the Aracruz Celulose company in the extreme south of the State of Bahia, covering over 4 thousand kilometres in the municipalities of Prado, Alcobaça, Caravelas, Teixeira de Freitas, Mucuri and Nova Viçosa. Following this, three experts, members of the Movement, analysed this information and concluded that, in addition to the fact that Brazilian environmental law is not being complied with, no adequate follow-up is being made by the competent environmental bodies. This would fully justify an exhaustive investigation on the basis of documented proof. This survey is available (in Portuguese) at:
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Cepedes.html>

But monocrop tree plantations implemented by transnational companies not only cause environmental impacts; they also cause social ones, as a result of the increasing consolidation of lands in a context in which thousands of peasants are demanding land. A specific case is that of the hacienda Barba Negra in Espirito Santo, recently acquired by Aracruz Celulose. On this 400 hectare plot of land live 12 families and they were given until 5 September by the company to vacate it.

Here again, in view of the lack of action by the responsible bodies vis-à-vis the company, civil society has taken a hand in the matter and on 4 September a group of 200 families of landless rural workers occupied the Barba Negra hacienda. José Brito, State Coordinator for the Movement of the Landless Peasants (MST), states that "those occupying the lands must remain there to vindicate the right to the agrarian reform."

What it sums up to is that the region is living out a contradiction between two types of rights. On the one hand, the right of a company to acquire lands to be used for the plantation of eucalyptus, and on the other, the rights of the local people to a decent life and to the conservation of their natural environment. The Espirito Santo Legislative Assembly now has the opportunity to intercede in favour of the local population and lift the veto imposed by the Governor on the law seeking to regulate the planting of eucalyptus in the State. On its part, the central government has the opportunity, through its National Institute for Colonisation and Agrarian Reform, to allocate resources and provide land to thousands of families that are demanding it to be able to work on it. In the near future we will see which of the rights --those of the company or those of the local population-- take priority over the other.

Article based on information from: Geise Pereira da Silva, e-mail: geiseps@terra.com.br, "Sem-Terra ocupam fazenda da Aracruz Celulose" - Secretaria do MST; "Levantamento iconográfico em

