
Brazil: “We want orchards, not eucalyptus plantations”

After a long struggle started in 1995, Brazilian NGOs and peasant organizations, with support from representatives of the Catholic church, succeeded in halting a megaproject of eucalyptus plantation in the state of Amapa in northern Brazil. The plan of Champion Paper and Cellulose. and its subsidiary Chamflora Amapa Agroflorestral Ltda to set up 100,000 hectares of eucalyptus, would have affected the lands and livelihoods of the peasants of the region. Local people joined in the Organized Civil Society Forum (Forum da Sociedade Civil Organizada), which, with the support of the Pastoral Commission for Land (Comissao Pastoral da Terra) carried out a complete study to demonstrate that the company had illegally occupied the peasants' lands. They had to face a powerful opponent, with much influence on the media and specialised in showing a “green image”. In spite of that, they managed to stop both the first project based on eucalyptus and a second one, started in 1996, when Champion bought AMCEL (Amapa Celulose), a company installed in Amapa since 1974, and whose pine plantations occupy 93,000 hectares.

In 1998 Champion had to recognize the irregularities committed during the purchase and occupation of lands: some 140,000 hectares had to be given back to their legitimate owners, the peasants of Amapa. This victory is celebrated every July 25 --Rural Workers Day-- by peasant organizations, whose slogan is : “We want orchards, not eucalyptus plantations.”

Nevertheless, globalization of the economy implies new threats for the Brazilian people. Since the international cellulose and paper markets have been affected by the Asian crisis and environmental pressures to stop the exploitation of forests in Southern Asia are increasing, projects to produce nearly 10 million tonnes of those products were abandoned in that region, and part of them could be transferred to Brazil.

One example is the association between two of the largest paper producers in the world (Stora from Sweden and ENSO from Finland), with the Odebrecht Group in Brazil, to invest 1.6 billion dollars in a cellulose plant in the state of Bahia. Another example is the association between the US Kimberly-Clark and the Brazilian Klabin Group, to invest in Brazil and Argentina. Chilean paper producers are also interested in investing in Brazil. One of them has already purchased a factory in Santa Catarina. The Celmar project, which includes the recently privatized Rio Doce Valley Company, involves a possible association with several international companies to produce cellulose in the state of Maranhao. The Rio Doce Valley is negotiating an association between giant pulp producers CENIBRA and Bahia Sul, seeking more profitability and more competitive prices on the international market.

Sources: Sandro Gallazzi (CPT-Amapa) and Rosa Roldan (IBASE), September 1998