
[En souvenir de Ricardo Carrere...](#)

Ricardo Carrere passed away in the early morning of August 16, 2011. He had been suffering from lung cancer for some time but wished to remain as discreet as possible about the evolution of the sickness. Everything accelerated in a few days and the sad news took us completely by surprise.

We believe Ricardo Carrere will let an indelible stamp. First of all, for those of us who had the privilege of having met him, he embodied a rare combination of humility, generosity and kindheartedness. From him emanated a kind of juvenile freshness and an ability to listen to others. Two very rare qualities. He also always kept intact a form of contagious fervor about the worth of being an activist and a capacity to get indignant in front of any injustices.

Then, from a political viewpoint, the life of Ricardo Carrere was extraordinary. Its importance, perhaps without himself noticing it, will be seen as essential in the history of global environmentalism.

Early in his life, Ricardo was interested in politics. In the late '50s, Uruguayans suffered from a severe drop in the standard of living which led to student militancy, labor unrest and the emergence of the Tupamaros. As the police forces became more oppressive, social conflicts increased, and in 1973 the army took control over the congress and established a military regime. It is in this context that Ricardo was arrested and kept in jail for seven years, due to its membership of the communist party (Maoist). He didn't like to talk about this experience, but we've always thought that his extraordinary passion for life and justice was a result of these years spent in prison. After his release, he joined his daughter in London where he lived for a while.

Ricardo Carrere embodies this generation of socialist activists who discovered the environmental critique of capitalism and who, since then, couldn't act anymore as if they didn't know. We think Ricardo never lost the radicalism of his youth. He found in Southern socio-ecological movements a broad and neglected arena of contemporary struggles to which he decided to dedicate a lifelong support.

While he never sought to push himself to the fore, Ricardo is indeed best known for being the 'charismatic leader' of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM), although he was not its founder. Under his impulsion, the WRM arguably became the world's most influential activist network specialized on tropical forests. Created in 1986 and based in Montevideo, it developed into an international NGO with many ramifications and was involved in defending the world's tropical forests, securing the lands and livelihoods of forest-dwelling peoples, and promoting community-based forest management. The WRM is particularly well-known for denouncing – especially in his monthly bulletin – the impacts of commercial logging, dams, mining, plantations, shrimp farms, and other projects that destroy forests worldwide. The bulletin, in four languages, is a tool to give a voice to communities and groups suffering from these impacts, while at the same time disseminating in an understandable language information on forest and forest-related issues. Following this, Joan Martinez-Alier has suggested that Ricardo Carrere counts among the founders of the Global Environmental Justice Movement.

Ricardo was indeed an internationalist. He never limited himself to national borders. Although he studied conventional forestry in Southern France, he became one of the fiercest opponents to 'green revolution' forestry characterized by the industrial tree plantation model. Expanding worldwide and particularly in the South, these plantations, promoted as 'planted forests' by the FAO, result in numerous negative social and environmental impacts on local communities. His critique of industrial tree plantations became world-famous.

Incidentally, the social conflicts generated by these plantations also became a topic of doctoral dissertation for one of us (J.-F. G.). In 2006, while we were carrying out research in Southern Cameroon on local resistance to oil palm and rubber monocultures, Ricardo wrote to J.-F. G. saying he wanted to have a closer look at what was going on there as he didn't have much experience of Central Africa he said. We thus organized a five-day trip for him in the area. This was the first time we met him. For us, a rich and unforgettable encounter. At the airport, he came with his little suitcase, a third of its volume being allocated to mate material (a traditional South American infused drink). His bright and soulful eyes stroke us.

During the day, we discussed with Bantu peasants, plantation workers and Bagyeli hunters-gatherers, and during the long evenings in Kribi, the three of us talked about politics, research and personal experiences. His humanity and ability to create a contact with persons from different backgrounds was unusual.

Ricardo was always quite skeptical about the value of science without any direct political involvement of the researcher. He told us he became aware of the impacts of industrial tree monocultures by reading Vandana Shiva's books at the end of the '80s. Together with Larry Lohmann, he then published a landmark book, 'Pulping the South' (1996), that turned into a classic of the environmentalist literature. This book contains the theoretical premises of the 'environmentalism of the poor', includes well-documented case studies from all over the world, and also displays a very practical-political side directly helpful to activists.

Two years after this publication, the WRM launched its campaign against industrial tree monocultures. This campaign aims at generating conscience on and organizing opposition to this type of forestry development worldwide. It also demands from the FAO to change its forest definition that considers industrial tree plantations as forests, with a very strong and, since the start of the campaign, widespread slogan: 'Tree plantations are not forests'. It urges governments not to include tree plantations as carbon sinks in the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol. The campaign is also very critical of market-based certification, carbon markets and agro-fuels. Because this position is coherent, ethically solid, and based on first-hand local activist knowledge, several major international organizations such as the FSC, CIFOR or FAO cannot afford to ignore it. In that sense, the WRM's impact is surprisingly important in view of its 'anti-capitalist' political line. During the campaign, Ricardo wrote some memorable articles, notably his 'Ten replies to ten lies' (1999).

Since this field visit in Cameroon, Ricardo returned several times to Africa. We have constantly exchanged emails and texts and we met again in Johannesburg and Quito. He never lost his enthusiasm. He wrote to J.-F. G. last year how much he was learning from speaking to people about oil palm in rural Central Africa. To us, Ricardo exemplified the lucidity and humanity of 'activist knowledge'. He was one of the world's best political ecologists. His radical spirit will remain alive.

By: Julien-Francois Gerber & Sandra Veuthey

