Brazil: The pulp and paper companies' "green international quality standard labels"

Approximately five years ago, Aracruz obtained a "green" quality label for its plantations in the extreme south of Bahia. This is a very important conquest for the Company as this certification implies, among other things, that the Company is working in an ecologically and socially correct manner, respecting all municipal, state and federal environmental laws. Such a label is essential for the Company's exports because with it, it gains enormous prestige abroad.

Basically the certification process takes place as follows: an internationally renowned and qualified company, in this case "Bureau Veritas," checks whether a specific company, in our case "Aracruz" deserves or not certification under the "CERFLOR" scheme. The first time, five years ago, we submitted our numerous criticisms; however Aracruz received certification all the same. Now the time has come for renewal.

In four cities in the Extreme South of Bahia, public meetings were arranged, during which interested parties could express their observations, complaints, questions and doubts, both on the Company to be certified and on the certifying company. The locations for these meetings were: Posto de Mata, Caravelas, Alcobaça and Ibirapuã. The questions, doubts, observations on the certifying company were to be answered immediately by representatives of the certifying company and questions on the company to be certified were to be answered in the final report to be published 40 days afterwards on the certifying company's website.

I was present at the Posto de Mata and Caravelas meetings and discovered that all this was no more than a great farce and just a shameful trick to conquer the world market. Let us look into some aspects.

Some 20 people were present at Posto de Mata, of which more than half belonged to the company. Following the initial explanations by the representatives of Bureau Veritas – the company responsible for certification – the time came for questions and observations.

I took the floor and said that for the past five years, we members of the local community had observed various environmental and labour-related irregularities. Our duty is to denounce and record such irregularities to the public municipal, state and federal bodies such as IBAMA, IMA (formerly CRA), the Public Regulatory Agency and the Ministry of Labour. We did this over the five-year period on several occasions. We played our part. So I asked the certifying company to contact those public bodies where various illegal and irregular events had been registered. It would be an easier way to assess and inspect Aracruz' operation and practices over the period. The reply by the representative of the Bureau Veritas was: "We are not inspectors of public bodies, that is not our role."

I almost fell over backwards, but thought that I had not understood the reply and insisted "I am denouncing the irregular and illegal actions committed by Aracruz over these past 5 years and according to our obligation, these were duly registered by the public state and federal bodies." Once again the representative stated that Bureau Veritas is not an inspector for public bodies. However if

we heard of irregularities or illegal actions now, indicating the location, a representative of Bureau Veritas would visit the place either today or tomorrow to verify the complaint.

Thus, the environmental and/or labour-related crimes committed over the past five years and duly registered by the public bodies – which probably do not even exist anymore because they have either been “solved or manipulated” – have no value.

The following day, at Caravelas, in a room full of school children, who do not understand or who know very little about this subject, I asked if the work carried out by the certifying company was considered to be research. The representative of Bureau Veritas replied that it was not. So I ask myself: a company that does not inspect the governmental bodies to check whether Aracruz committed irregularities, or did not respect environmental and labour laws and that does not carry out research ... what morals, what ethics does it have in granting international certification valid all over the world, expecting it to be proof that all Aracruz’ activities are ecologically and socially appropriate, and that they are complying with all existing laws?

After all this I no longer felt like going to the meetings in Alcobaça and Ibirapuã, because it was very evident that all this is a great farce. It was clear to me that these certifications are not granted because they are warranted but because they are purchased. That is the way this certification system works here.

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