
Mexico: The door is open to "neo-liberal" tree plantations

Mexico has joined a model giving priority to the needs of transnational industrial capital demand, aimed at exportation. The environmental policy and rights of the indigenous and peasant peoples are subordinated to this demand (see WRM Bulletin 14).

Within this scheme, the plantation of thousands of hectares of cellulose trees, such as the eucalyptus, and fast-growing species such as teak, melina, pawlonia and pink cedar is considered. According to the words of the director of the National Forestry Commission (Conafor), Alberto Cárdenas Jiménez, the changes made by Congress to the Forestry Law last December are very "positive" as "the matter of plantations was de-regulated to the utmost." This means that more and more doors will be opened to the mass entry of the eucalyptus, "the perfect neo-liberal tree," according to Jaime Avilés, a columnist for the Mexican newspaper "La Jornada," because it grows quickly, kills everything around it and generates great profit for very few people.

The Puebla Panama Plan (PPP) seeking to turn Mexico and Central America into a major free trade zone, with innumerable "maquiladoras" (sweatshop assembly plants) and "land channels" to increase inter-oceanic trade, includes large-scale monoculture tree plantations of this type of tree as one of its components. Some of these plantations will supply timber and cellulose. Others will serve as "carbon sinks," another one of the transnational companies' tricks to avoid having to reduce contaminating gas emissions from cars and major industries in the so-called "developed countries" which have caused global warming.

As part of the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism, carbon sinks give carte blanche to countries and industries, enabling them to continue contaminating, provided they finance "ecological" projects in the Third World, which supposedly compensate for the contamination they cause. Among these projects is the plantation of trees. Some would think: what is the matter with this? Aren't ecologists badgering for trees to be planted? The WRM has already given lengthy explanations about the major difference between forests and large-scale monoculture tree plantations --which have the same ecological problems as agricultural monoculture plantations.

According to Professor Andrés Barreda, from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, industrial tree plantations "in fact are not the complex ecosystems we generically call forests, but strict monoculture plantations located on gigantic productive areas (of tens of thousands of hectares) that are associated to the necessary eviction of the rural population, unemployment strengthened by the mechanisation of forestry production, the intensive use of fertilisers, pesticides, weed-killers, etc., the development of plagues, the depletion and contamination of water tables, the destruction of biodiversity." With carbon sinks, "transnational companies are directly introduced into community forest management processes. The communities are involved in a major manipulation on a world-wide scale, whereby it is the transnational companies themselves that are contaminating and that most threaten to continue doing so, without solving any of the real causes of global warming, dressing up as fairy god-mothers to support the pauperised peasant communities."

In the present process of privatising biological wealth, transnational companies are dangerously

installing themselves in key biological corridor zones. It is thus that another environmental component of the Puebla Panama Plan is the Central American Biological Corridor, linking hundreds of natural protected areas in the region to form a single conservation zone. Civil society, environmentalists and indigenous groups have denounced the Corridor as a public relations manoeuvre to legitimise the Puebla Panama Plan with the environmentalist sector.

Article based on information from: "Los árboles neoliberales", Carmelo Ruiz Marrero, www.biodiversidadla.org ; "Programas forestales, sin recursos: Alberto Cárdenas", interview with Alberto Cárdenas by Lourdes Edith Rudiño, Mexico.