Brazil: While the people are roused to indignation, Aracruz celebrates

It is amazing the way in which Aracruz Celulose S.A. is facing the situation in which it is placed, affected by the numerous negative impacts arising from its activities in Espirito Santo and Bahia. At present, the company is finishing the construction of a private airport, sufficiently large for the presidential plane carrying Fernando Henrique Cardoso to land on 2nd August when their third factory will be officially opened, increasing annual eucalyptus cellulose production from 1.3 to 2 million tons.

On the opening day, the highest representatives of the Municipal, State and National governments, faithful allies of the company throughout the whole of its existence in Brazil, will gather around the Brazilian President. The press from that State will be present. It has already begun to disseminate information on the event, praising as ever, the company's contribution to the State's economic development. NGOs such as the "Instituto Terra da Gente," financed by Aracruz itself will also be there. This NGO gave Aracruz, the "Mata Atlântica (Atlantic Forest) Trophy" a joke in bad taste, as this is a company which felled thousands of hectares of the Mata Atlântica. No doubt other associations and societies of forestry engineers, more enthusiastic over the millions of identical, cloned, highly productive eucalyptus, than with the task of understanding the fascinating complexity of a natural forest, will come. Certainly, the National Economic and Social Development Bank will not miss the party, as it has invested thousands of Brazilian Reales in the project for the 3rd factory, instead of investing equivalent amounts in strengthening the State's damaged family agriculture.

It is worthwhile remembering that the 630 million US dollars invested in the new factory were practically all used to purchase machinery made in Europe, which were insured with credits guaranteeing their exports. What remains in Brazil are solely 172 permanent jobs in the new industrial unit. Even so, at the cost of a debt of the State of Espirito Santo with Aracruz of nearly 100 million Reales, referring to credit accumulated by the company as the productive chain for manufacturing cellulose for export does not have taxes levied on it.

The environment prevailing among the company's managers and directors has become even more festive with the news at the beginning of June that the Supreme Federal Tribunal has decided to consider as unconstitutional the State law prohibiting the plantation of eucalyptus for cellulose until an agro-ecological map is made of the State, defining where eucalyptus can be planted. It is certain that the ministers of the Tribunal, on taking this decision, did not consider the desperate situation of over 100 families in the municipality of Vila Valerio who were evicted from their lands, purchased by Aracruz Celulose. Neither did they consider the 230 million US dollars that the company has to purchase new land, 200 times more money than the amount estimated annually in the state for the agrarian reform, an unsatisfied need that the 50 thousand families in the State have been waiting for. And neither did the Tribunal consider the positive results of the regional public audiences on agro-ecological mapping, which managed to restore to the people a little awareness, a small right to voice an opinion on the future of their children and of their region.

It is also worthwhile remembering that Aracruz had the audacity to state that it will consider whether it is going to launch action against the State for the damage this mapping law has caused them. And

the newspaper A Gazeta did what no decent newspaper would ever do: it published on its first page that the authorisation to plant eucalyptus would generate 25 thousand jobs, an unfounded figure, without an argument, without the least veracity.

Later, when Deputy Nasser, author of the agro-ecological mapping law prepared a similar law, adopted by the Legislative Assembly on 26 June, his party, the same party as that of President Fernando Henrique, decided to leave him out of their ranks at the next elections. Once more, it is evident that any action against Aracruz Celulose has high costs.

It is in this climate that the opening day for the new factory approaches. On the one hand a mega-company

that wants to celebrate, that denies any impact and does not admit criticism or any type of control over its actions by the civil society of which it is part. On the other hand, the great majority of the people of Espirito Santo, and mainly the rural population, increasingly indignant over the way Aracruz operates, conscious that it needs to resist if it wants to have the slightest chance of a decent future.

This is the message that the Movimento Alerta contra o Deserto Verde (Movement to Alert against the Green Desert), congregating sectors representing the rural and urban population, will try to transmit to the whole of society during the First Fortnight of Resistance to the Green Desert. These will be 15 days of activities in parallel to the opening of Aracruz Celulose's new factory and the declaration by Erling Lorentzen, the Norwegian president of the company, to the Parliamentary Commission investigating the long list of irregularities practised by the company. It should be remembered that, as was to be expected, the press is completely boycotting this important and unusual investigation.

During these 15 days, the Fortnight for Resistance will show public opinion that society will continue offering resistance to a model that excludes the majority of the population, although such a model is imposed and dominates public and non-public spheres that, first of all, should defend the people's interests.

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