
[Brazil: Historic victory to save the forests](#)

The National Agricultural Council (NAC) -representing the interests of big landowners in Brazil- had been trying by all means to oppose any legal initiative to protect the country's forests, which they would systematically consider a limitation to their power on people and land. In fact, about 50% of the land in Brazil is in the hands of just 1% of the population. Last month, two projects of Forest Code were confronted in the Brazilian parliament: that of the CONAMA (National Environmental Council), which resulted from an open discussion among stakeholders (the NAC included) and provided for the protection of extensive areas of the different forest biomes existing in that country, and that of the NAC caucus -the so-called "ruralists" in the parliament- which favoured big land owners' interests, disregarding nature protection (see WRM Bulletins 29 and 34).

A strong campaign at the national and the international levels took place to avoid that the rural oligarchy's manoeuvre could prosper. Brazilian environmental and social organizations, together with representatives of the opposition party, and counting on the solidarity of thousands of tokens of support coming from all around the world, denounced the project as contrary to nature and to the national interests. On May 14th, the Brazilian Congress shelved the proposal of the NAC caucus, handing the ruralists a historic defeat, since for the first time the Brazilian peoples' movement has prevailed over the ranchers' powerful lobby.

The contradiction between nature conservation and economic development is an argument frequently used by the Brazilian successive governments from the 1960s military era until the present time. Under the motto: Forward, Brazil! ("Pra frente, Brasil!") the unbridled destruction of the Amazon forest, the Atlantic forest, the "cerrado", and other valuable ecosystems took place. Paradoxically, nowadays Brazil is a rich country full of poor and marginalized people, showing one of the most regressive income distributions in the world, and with entire regions completely devastated. More than "forward", the country seems to have gone backward.

Fortunately things are changing in Brazilian people's minds. According to a national opinion poll focusing on proposed changes to the Forest Code, carried out between May 20 and 21 by the Vox Populi Institute, 88% of the 503 people interviewed by telephone all over the country believe that the protection of Brazil's forests should increase and not decrease, as was being proposed by the ruralist caucus in Congress. Other results are equally promising: 93% of those interviewed believe that conservation does not impair Brazil's development; 90% answered that increasing deforestation in the Amazon for the establishment of agricultural lands will probably not reduce hunger; 87% expressed that property owners who deforest should be fined, and 88% of those interviewed said they would not vote for a congressional representative who favoured increased clearcutting of Brazilian forests.

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