

The Surui

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The approximately 300 Surui Indians of Rondonia (speak Tupi-Monde and) live in two villages, 7 de setembro and Linha, (surrounded by) about 220,000 hectares in the Aripuana Park. The villages are about 50 kilometers from Cacoal, which lies on the BR-364 highway between Cuiaba and Porto Velho. The Surui were first contacted in 1969, the year that the park was demarcated. At that time, ^{the Surui numbered approximately 600.} (there were an estimated 600 Surui). Between 1971 and 1974, half of the group died, mostly from influenza and measles.

Even^{all} though Surui territory was demarcated in 1976, their biggest problem ^{to have} (is) the invasion of their land by colonists. Beginning in 1971, the Itaporanga Company, clandestinely sold off plots of Indian lands. The number of colonists continued to increase. Despite armed conflict with the Indians, some land occupied by colonists was excluded from consideration, ^{during the demarcation process} and the colonists were not removed. Their number increased. The Minister of Interior, Rangel Reis, finally went to the area, promising a permanent solution. However, ^{late in} (toward the end of) 1979, there were about 160 families occupying plots of 100 hectares each in an extension of INCRA's Ji-Parana colonization project. In order to transport the coffee, rice, beans, maize, and manioc which they produced, the colonists constructed a 20-kilometer road within the Indian area. In 1979 INCRA promised to remove the colonists and to transfer them to another colonization project in Rondonia in April 1980. During the 1980 dry season, some families left and received new land. About 80 families remained; some of them claim ~~not~~ to be clearing lands on the new plots and say that they will leave after the 1981 harvest. Others ^{said} (claimed) that they would leave the area only ^{when} (if) they ^{are} (were) dead.

Impatient with the delays and endless promises, and having discovered recently-cleared plots on their land, the Surui, in September 1980, drove out forty new invaders, leaving them naked and weaponless. Alarmed about the possibility of increased violence, such as occurred among the Kaiapo and several other Indian groups, INCRA promised to ^{remove} (remove) the colonists before the 1981 dry season, either peacefully or by force. The Surui warned that, next time, they will kill

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the colonists rather than just send them away.

The case of the Surui is typical of that of ^{many tribes} (a tribe) confronting capitalist expansion in the Brazilian frontier. They previously lived by farming, hunting, fishing, and collecting; their work force was ^{based on kinship} (organized on the basis of kinship); they maintained traditions and customs which antedated white contact; and they were familiar with the forest, nature, the supernatural, and death. Then they ~~WERE~~ suddenly found themselves in intimate contact with intense migration and capitalist economic transformation. They easily travel, by foot, the 50 kilometers which separate them from Cacoal, a settlement of 10 houses in 1974 which today has 70,000 inhabitants (in the municipio). The colonists ^{who} were are invading their territory come mostly from Parana, Espirito Santo, and Minas Gerais, part of the immense mass of Brazilian unemployed who are attracted to Rondonia, fascinated by INCRA's promises of land.

Every year at least 60,000 people enter Rondonia. As a result, the population of Rondonia tripled between 1970 and 1976; by 1979 it was estimated at 517,000. The colonization projects for small landholders cannot absorb this population, largely because the government has set aside ten times more land for large-scale development projects ^{than} for the colonization programs. In addition large private enterprises are beginning to occupy the land in the area. ^{The} (There large-scale development projects benefit a few landowners and the private enterprises while forcing colonists onto ^{Indian lands.} (the lands of the Indians). Thus, even if colonization were permitted in these areas, it would in no way alter the social problems of the territory. ^R The Surui face other great changes. They are passing from an abundant tribal existence into poverty which has intensified over the last year. The desire for the white man's objects--money, clothing, guns, ammunition, fishing lines, fish hooks, soap, flashlights, batteries, pots, and other items, ^{has} has grown such that they are now considered to be indispensable. No Surui earn wages, and hardly anyone lives outside the tribal area. However, they are beginning to dedicate more time to commercial activities. The challenge to FUNAI,

(one) for which it can hardly be expected to be prepared ^{is how} to delay
introduction of the sort of capitalist ^{systems} (relations) of production which will
undermine tribal organization; ^{and} while at the same time, attending or moderating
^{dependent +} ^{vegetation.} the Indians' desire for consumer goods. FUNAI will have a difficult time
stimulating such capitalist economic activities as the production of rubber or
coffee while also encouraging the maintenance of the tribal economic life.

The Surui today have better medical and dental attention than the
regional population as a whole. Routine vaccinations have been given, the
birth rate is high, and the diet is good. Still there is a high infant mortality
rate ^{during the} (for children in their) first year. There is much influenza, pneumonia, and
skin disease, and cases of tuberculosis and worms. Nearby colonization and
related deforestation have precipitated some of the problems. Diseases have
been introduced, game is scarce, and the basic diet has been changed.

^{No change} The future of the Surui is uncertain. Presently united and revitalized
by the land disputes, they are ^{reinstating} festivals and traditions which had
been abandoned during the years of disease which followed their initial contact.
The question is how they will organize themselves so as to avoid being swallowed
up by the expanding Brazilian society.