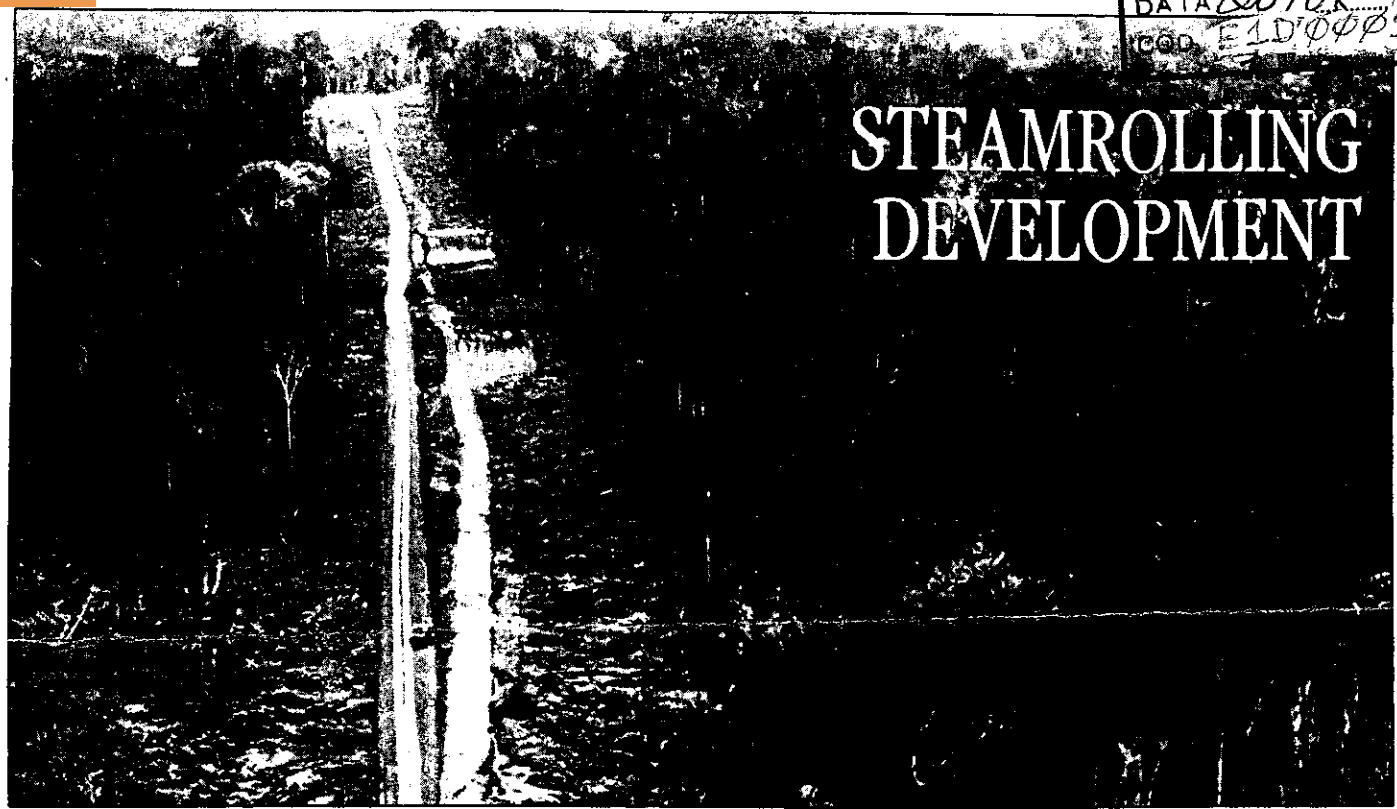


ART. P. 11



# STEAMROLLING DEVELOPMENT

The Polonoroeste highway.

## CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT FAILS TO PROTECT AMAZON INDIANS

BY KENNETH I. TAYLOR

**M**ore than a year after the installation of Brazil's first civilian government since 1964, Brazilian Indians still face severe repression. In spite of promises made by the new government, the Indians' plight is now perhaps even worse than it was during the last years of the military regime.

The demarcation of Indian lands is at a standstill, illegal mining on Indian lands continues in several parts of the country, and a number of Indians have been killed.

The latest news of dispossession and killing of Indians comes from the Polonoroeste region in the west-central part of Brazil, where the World Bank is again disbursing funds for the infamous Polonoroeste Regional Development Project. (See *Multinational Monitor*, Banking on Disaster, June 15, 1985.)

Although the World Bank has consistently claimed that the Polonoroeste project, begun in 1981 as a highway development program, provides adequate protection for the Indians in the region, it has watched the Brazilian government delay implementation of basic protective measures since the project's inception.

The World Bank briefly suspended disbursements of loans for the Polonoroeste project in March 1985 after reports by the World Bank and Brazilian anthropologists and environmentalists showed that demarcation of Indian land was not being carried out as planned and that the program was causing massive environmental destruction.

The interruption of World Bank funds produced some improvements for the Indians. The government established a large reserve for the Uru-ue-wau-wau Indians, and officially recognized the lands of the Zoro and the

Nambiquara of the Sarare area and the Guapore Valley, in Mato Grosso State.

After minimal improvements by the Brazilian government however, the World Bank resumed its assistance for the Polonoroeste project in mid-1985, even though serious problems remained in other parts of the Polonoroeste region. Indian lands have not been demarcated, nor are Indians being protected from the depredations of neighboring landowners.

### ATTACK ON THE NAMBIQUARA

Most seriously affected in recent months has been a small group of Nambiquara who live in the southeast part of Rondonia State, some 75 miles southwest of Vilhena. Vilhena lies along the route of the BR-364 highway which links Cuiaba in Mato Grosso with Porto Velho in Rondonia State. Formerly a sleepy little town in one of the most remote parts of Brazil, it recently became one of the country's regional centers for agricultural colonization.

Last October, although it was obvious that Indians were in the area, hundreds of armed men working for the Fazenda Yvypitanga began rapidly cutting the forest near the Nambiquara community for pasture land. By late November, the Indians' houses and fields had been destroyed, and several Indians had been killed. The remaining Indians were forced to flee further into the forest. Local agents of the Federal Indian agency (FUNAI), charged with responsibility for Indian affairs, were denied access to the area by Fazenda gunmen, even though they were accompanied by a unit of the Federal Police.

By the end of May 1986, the situation had become so dangerous that a Federal Supreme Court ordered the Fazenda to allow FUNAI agents into the area to investigate the incident.

## MINING CRISIS IN UPPER RIO NEGRO REGION

In the far northwest of Brazilian Amazonia, on the border with Colombia, some 15,000 Baniwa, Tukano and Maku Indians inhabit the Vaupes network of northern tributaries of the Reio Negro. Since late 1982, their territories have been massively invaded by prospectors, miners, and mining corporations searching for gold.

Cash payment has replaced a traditional economic system based on mutual aid within the community. The spiritual work of the shamans is now remunerated with money, forests have been destroyed, and sacred areas have been desecrated.

The invasion of the miners and the ensuing collapse of traditional social structures have had the effect of weakening the Indians' resolve to stand up for their rights to the land. Moreover, with government officials closely involved in the mining, the Indians' legitimate claims have been ignored. Even FUNAI has taken no action to enforce definition of Indian lands and prevent the invasion.

The gold boom has drawn the attention of large mining corporations intent on staking major claims to the area for mechanized mining operations.

The two principal corporations concerned are Gold Amazon Mineracao Da Amazonia Ltd., and Taboca Mineracao, which belongs to the Paranapanema Group. Paranapanema is already notorious for its aggressive attempts to mine Indian lands, including the territory of the Waimiri-Atroari Indians and of the Karina Indians of Guyana. A third company, Continental, is also involved. Recently, the National Department of Mineral production (DNPM) granted the companies concessions totalling over 200,000 hectares, most of which overlap areas presently being exploited by surface miners.

In order to ensure their takeover of the area, the mining companies have engaged the services of a private "security firm" called Sacopa, dedicated to "rural security activities." The firm, acting as a private army, has been used previously by Paranapanema to expel thousands of gold miners from lands containing minerals.

The directors of Sacopa include active and retired army colonels and military police commandants. Similarly, 90 percent of the company's employees have served in the Armed Forces, and the firm has the authorization of the Amazonian Military Command to maintain armed personnel and munitions. The security forces have, with the open support of the army and the police, conducted operations to flush the gold miners out of the region. The miners have desperately resisted the takeover.

Reports of killings have emerged from the area since April 1985—at least six Indians were killed in April last year and three Indians died in fighting in September.

## PATAXO EVICTED

The Pataxo Indians in Bahia State were first evicted from their traditional lands in 1936. Their struggle to recover at least part of these lands continues and has entered a brutal new phase. Frustrated by the lack of progress in the Federal Supreme Court, the Indians took matters into their own hands in late 1985. Between November 18-22, 1985, they peacefully occupied four cacao fazendas with a total area of 1730 hectares.

The response from the landowners and their political allies was swift and brutal. On orders from the Governor of Bahia (who claimed that the Indians were armed with

machine guns), a detachment of 130 military police used rifles, machine guns and tear gas to forcibly evict the Pataxo in the early hours of November 22, 1985. They were backed up by armed Fazenda employees in military uniforms.

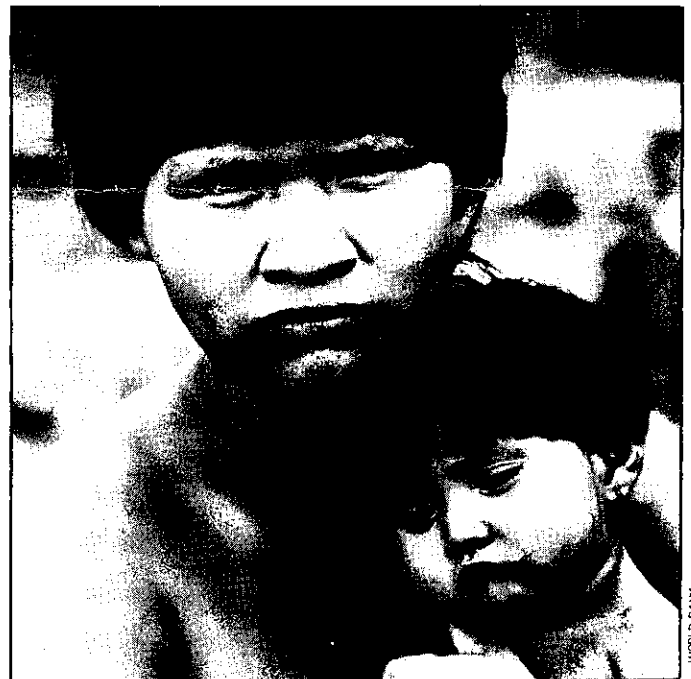
The eviction went on for seven hours, and left behind a scene of devastation which Indian and Church leaders described as a 'battlefield.' The Indians were rounded up and threatened with execution; they were robbed of personal possessions, including money, food and clothing. Many, including women and children, were physically abused; seven had to be hospitalized. Since the inauguration of the new government, demarcation of Indian lands has been at a virtual standstill, blocked by elements within the Ministry of the Interior and the National Security Council.

But while the government has been inactive on matters of land demarcation, it has taken the extraordinary step of completely restructuring its Indian agency, FUNAI, by vastly down-scaling the head office in Brasilia and setting up regional offices in six centers throughout the country.

The military regime had considered adopting a similar regionalization plan in 1979, but backed down after a national and international outcry. Advocates for Indian rights argue that only by keeping the Indian agency as strong as possible at the federal level can Indian affairs be satisfactorily handled in present day Brazil.

More than a year after the new civilian government of Jose Sarney came to power, violations of Indian rights continue unchecked. The only significant action taken by the government thus far has been the ill-advised regionalization of what was already a weak and largely ineffective Indian agency. The civilian government has failed completely to live up to its promise to bring greater justice and equity to the Indians of Brazil. □

*Kenneth Taylor is executive director of Survival International U.S.A.*



*Mother and child living near Polonoroeste lands under development.*