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The Tupiniquim vs. ARACRUZ Celulose Company

(from: Suzanne Williams, "Development as Weapon: New Directions in Official Indian Policy in Brazil." pp. 20-22. Paper Given at the Annual Development Studies Association Conference in Oxford, 10-12, Sept., 1981)

"The Tupiniquim have traditionally occupied the coast of Espirito Santo north of the modern city of Vitoria (northeastern Brazil), and in 1610 were given legal title to a part of their territory by the governor of the captaincy of Espirito Santo. By 1940 the Governor of the state had sold off 10,000 hectares of this land to a private company ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ for the production of charcoal. In the 1960's, a company called ARACRUZ Cellulose, whose controlling interest is held by the Brazilian government but whose largest private shareholder is the British-based multinational company British American Tobacco, through its Brazilian subsidiary, Souza Cruz, negotiated the 10,000 hectares and occupied a further 30,000 hectares of Tupiniquim territory, expelling the Indians and using them as labour to cut down the forest on their own land for the planting of eucalyptus for the cellulose factory.

In 1979, the Tupiniquim re-occupied a small part of their original land and in November of that year, FUNAI issued a document recognizing their right to three small areas, totalling 8,500 hectares, but did not demarcate them. The Indians began the demarcation themselves, but FUNAI subsequently redemarcated the areas reducing them by more than half. During this time, the Tupiniquim of Pau Brasil, only 3 kilometers from the factory, suffered continual harrassment and intimidation from the guards of ARACRUZ who threatened to burn down their houses. The area all around this village is totally devastated, and the air is seriously polluted. ARACRUZ funded the demarcation of the land around Pau Brasil, which was reduced from 1,500 hectares to only 400 hectares.

At the beginning of 1981, there were several meetings between ARACRUZ, FUNAI, and some of the Tupiniquim leaders. Jose Sizenando, Tupiniquim chief at Caieiras Velhas, stated that at the beginning, ARACRUZ tried to persuade the Indians to give up all their land, remaining only with their village sites (which means the Indians' only options would be to work as cheap labour for the factory), and no compensation was offered. Finally, by the third meeting, the Indians gave in - as Sizenando said, they were all tired of being harrassed and pressured, and wanted some peace. He accepted, on behalf of his people, an agreement which was really forced upon him. ARACRUZ offered the ridiculous compensation of 5 million cruzeiros for the 3,000 hectares they had robbed from the Indians, will take their eucalyptus from the rest of the land, without paying any compensation whatever to the Indians for it, and for the fact that..

the soil will be left degraded and impoverished. The 3,000 hectares taken from the Tupiniquim is roughly estimated as having a value of 622 million cruzeiros if used only for charcoal (a calculation made in a confidential report): ARACRUZ paid 5 million for it.³⁷

On June 5th, President Nobre da Veiga came to the village of Caeiras Velhas to distribute personally to 50 heads of household the sum of 20,000 cruzeiros (about £100). As he performed this sordid act, he threatened each one (counting out the notes one by one): "No more agitation. ARACRUZ and the government has helped you. Now go and work on your land - if there's any agitation you'll go to jail". He praised ARACRUZ, saying that the multi-national company had made a generous gesture to the Indians, ceding land to them.³⁸ The rest of the 5 million will go towards the purchase of some motorised canoes (the Indians now need to go far up-river to fish, as the polluting effluent from the factory has completely destroyed the marine life in the region, and the Tupiniquim and Guarani fishing grounds), fishing nets, a tractor and soil preparation.

This year ARACRUZ is expected to make a profit of 4 billion cruzeiros, according to a report in the Estado de Sao Paulo. The factory produces 400,000 tons of cellulose a year, 5 times the production permitted by the anti-pollution laws in Europe. The company has appropriated, illegally, the major part of the land of the Tupiniquim, devastated the rest, and horribly polluted their environment in only two years of functioning. Souza Cruz, the BAT subsidiary, is considering buying out the share of BNDE (National Bank of Economic Development), in which case it would own 70% of the company.

Finally, all the pieces fall into place when we consider one further aspect of the case: the Tupiniquim had been in the region since the invasion of Brasil in 1500, and the Guarani since 1963.³⁹ In 1972 ARACRUZ tried to effect the transference of the Guarani to Minas Gerais, as the Guarani are a people who strongly maintain their cultural traditions, do not mix with the surrounding population, and are difficult to "emancipate". FUNAI had issued a "negative certificate"⁴⁰ to ARACRUZ with respect to the Tupiniquim in the region, thinking that, as the Tupiniquim are mixed with the local population, the agency, - and ARACRUZ - could get away with it.

37. Personal communication from Jose Sizenando while the writer was in the village.

38. Witnessed by the writer. Also reported in Estado de Sao Paulo, 6th June 1981.

39. The Guarani are a people for whom land has a very special significance: it should be available to all, at all times. Thus, when land conflicts occur, the Guarani frequently move on, but always within a certain traditional area of Guarani migration.

40. A "negative certificate" is a document declaring an area "free of Indians".

However, in 1974 a Juruna Indian announced the existence of the Tupiniquim to a large scientific congress, and the remaining 611 Tupiniquim were found to be living in absolute penury in the middle of lands devastated by the eucalyptus plantations of ARACRUZ. As FUNAI could no longer claim their inexistence, nor transfer them, there was only one possible measure: and in 1976 the then President of FUNAI announced that the Tupiniquim were "ready for emancipation".

Policy had however not yet caught up with terrorism, and ARACRUZ resorted to the violent measures reported to secure the land and build the factory. Today the climate is more favourable, and with ex-officio emancipation just around the corner, the Tupiniquim may soon be declared non-Indian, and free to give up their remaining hectares to the persuasive multinational company.

The Tupiniquim VS ARACRUZ case exemplifies especially well the direct and indirect exploitation of the Indian by force and by policy since the Portuguese invasion. In 1500 the Tupiniquim numbered 80,000:⁴¹ today they are 611. Changes in governments and policy over the years gave and removed security of tenure of their land, while wars, illness and starvation decimated their population. At last, the economic strategies of the military regime in Brazil installed in 1964 led to the inevitable determination of policy by foreign investors, and the Tupiniquim, like all the Indians of Brazil, poorly-armed with minority legal status and a traitorous Guardian, were an easy and obvious victim.

The Tupiniquim, like many other Indian peoples, have a history of resistance, right up until the blow dealt to them in June this year. The future for them, as for all of the Brazilian Indians, is still an open question, but we can expect resistance to grow and strengthen, as the Indian peoples of other Latin American states begin to form more effective organisations, and assert a Pan-American native identity.

41. Hemming, op. cit. pp.493, 494.