

Povos Indígenas no Brasil

Fonte Times Class.: Chico Mendes
 Data 10/01/89 Pg.: 185

Police display rare efficiency in Amazon manhunt

From Mac Margolis ^{Times}
 Rio de Janeiro ^{10 Jan 89}

When a fugitive Brazilian landowner emerged, wounded and famished, from his Amazon forest hideout and surrendered to a battalion of federal and local police in the state of Acre last Saturday, one of this country's most extensive manhunts ended.

Some 60 agents of the federal police and dozens more from the civil and military police forces had mounted a huge search for Senhor Darli Alves da Silva, the Acre rancher who allegedly plotted the death of the renowned Amazonian ecologist, Francisco ("Chico") Mendes, who was murdered at his home on December 22.

Federal agents in neighbouring states, and even officials in Bolivia, had been on the look-out for Senhor



Senhor Alves: Flushed out from forest haven by intensive search.

Alves. The searchers, supported by police dogs and armed with high-calibre rifles, machineguns, and

even tear gas, made an impressive and telegenic spectacle as they combed the countryside for Senhor Alves and his accomplices.

It was a demonstration of police efficiency as remarkable as it was rare. Murder with impunity has become an almost daily event in Brazil's Amazonian backlands, where "death lists" are notorious and "a large-calibre revolver is worth more than the penal code or the Constitution", as one prominent Brazilian industrialist, Senhor Mario Amato, recently wrote in the *Folha de São Paulo*.

Indeed, the murder was especially sad, both because of its cold-blooded execution — by a man lying in ambush in Mendes's own backyard — and because it was so predictable.

The ecologist, who won an

environmental prize from the United Nations, was praised abroad but reviled by many at home. He had not only survived half a dozen death threats, but even named his killers only days before in an interview with the Brazilian and international press.

Senhor Darli Alves and his brother, Alvarino, were already on the police wanted list for at least two other murders in southern Brazil. Police knew of the Alves brothers' criminal past not because of their own investigative diligence, but because Mendes himself had ferreted out the outstanding murder charges and informed the authorities in his home state. But police in Acre sat on the information for more than two weeks.

Some observers have sought to

salvage some hope in the aftermath of the murder. "Chico Mendes taught the world an important lesson," said Mr Stephen Schwartzman, an anthropologist with the Environmental Defence Fund. "In the Amazon, and throughout the developing world, environmental protection cannot be separated from social justice."

Evidence suggests, however, that there is little of either in Brazil's surly Amazon frontier region. The Land Pastoral Commission, connected with Brazil's activist Catholic Church, reports that 93 people were killed in disputes over land last year alone. Amnesty International reported last September that 1,000 people had been killed in land-related conflicts in the Brazilian Amazon since 1980.