

CEDI

Povos Indígenas no Brasil

Fonte Times Class.: 188

Data 09/04/89 Pg.: _____

**Amazon
hero's
widows
at war**

by Michael Kepp
Rio de Janeiro

A LEGAL battle between rival widows of Chico Mendes, the Amazon rubber tappers' leader who has been canonised by the international ecological movement since he was murdered last December, is jeopardising Hollywood's plans to film his life.

A woman who says she is his first wife has emerged from the rain forest to claim the rights to his life story. Brazilian ecologists say film producers fear her legal challenge may make the project impossible.

Mendes, who fought the deforestation of huge tracts of jungle in the western Amazon state of Acre, had become an internationally recognised figure before he was murdered, allegedly by the son of a local rancher who is one of the many landowners responsible for burning down the rain forest to make pasture.

Ecologists in Acre, who have set up a Chico Mendes foundation, said last week that Twentieth Century Fox, represented by Robert Redford, Warners, represented by David Puttnam, the British producer, United Artists and various Brazilian film makers were all bidding for film rights.

The ecologists say that landowners are behind the sudden emergence of a woman called Eunice Feitosa de Menezes, who claims to be Mendes's abandoned first wife. She has petitioned a local court to validate her marriage to him, the first step in challenging his second wife's claim to her husband's authorial rights.

They accused Menezes's lawyer of working for the Rural Democratic Union (UDR), a landowners' organisation, which, ecologists say, is trying to scupper the film.

"There is no doubt that Menezes's UDR-backed lawyer has convinced her to wage a court battle to smear Chico Mendes's name by labelling him a bigamist," said Gilson Pescador, for the ecologists.

The UDR denies the charges — just as it denied it was behind the murder of Mendes.