

Acre Letter - against REDD and the commodification of nature

by
Thursday, 03 November 2011

Letter from the State of Acre

In defence of life and the integrity of the peoples and their territories against REDD and the commodification of nature

We gathered in Rio Branco, in the State of Acre, on 3-7 October 2011 for the workshop “Serviços Ambientais, REDD e Fundos Verdes do BNDES: Salvação da Amazônia ou Armadilha do Capitalismo Verde?” (Environmental Services, REDD and BNDES Green Funds: The Amazon’s Salvation or a Green Capitalism Trap?)

The participants included socio-environmental organizations, family agriculture associations, Extractive Reserve (RESEX) and Extractive Settlement organizations, human rights organizations (national and international), social pastoral organizations, professors, students, and members of civil society committed to the struggle of the underdogs.

We saw the emergence of a consensus around the belief that, since 1999 and the election of the Popular Front of Acre (FPA) government, initiatives have been adopted to establish a “new model” of development in the state. Since then, this model has been praised as a prime example of harmony between economic development and the preservation of forests, their natural resources and the way of life of their inhabitants. With strong support from the media, trade unions, NGOs that promote green capitalism in the Amazon region, multilateral banks, local oligarchies and international organizations, it is presented as a “successful model” to be emulated by other regions of Brazil and the world.

Over these past few days we have had the opportunity to learn first hand, in the field, about some of the initiatives in Acre that are considered as exemplary. We saw for ourselves the social and environmental impacts of the “sustainable development” underway in the state. We visited the Chico Mendes Agro-Extractive Settlement Project, the NATEX condom factory, and the Fazendas Ranch I and II Sustainable Forest Management Project in Seringal São Bernardo (the São Bernardo rubber plantation). These field visits presented us with a reality that is rather far removed from the image portrayed nationally and internationally.

In Seringal São Bernardo, we were able to observe the priority placed on the interests of timber companies, to the detriment of the interests of local communities and nature conservation. Even the questionable rules of the forest management plans are not respected, and according to the local inhabitants, these violations are committed in collusion with the responsible state authorities. In the case of the Chico Mendes Agro-Extractive Settlement Project in Xapuri, we saw that the local population remains subjugated to monopoly control: they currently sell their timber to the company Laminados Triunfo at a rate of R\$90 per cubic metre, when this same amount of wood can be sold for as much as R\$1200 in the city. This is why we support the demands of various communities for the suspension of these famous forest management projects. We call for the investigation of all of the irregularities revealed, and we demand punishment for those guilty of the criminal destruction of natural resources.

During the course of the workshop we also analyzed the issues of environmental services, REDD and the BNDES (Brazilian Development Bank) Green Funds. We gained a greater understanding of the role of banks (World Bank, IMF, IDB and BNDES), of NGOs that promote green capitalism (e.g. WWF, TNC and CI) and other institutions such as the ITTO, FSC and USAID, and also sectors of civil society and the state and federal governments who have allied with international capital for the commodification of the natural heritage of the Amazon region.

It was stressed that, in addition to being anti-constitutional, Law Nº 2.308 of 22 October 2010, which regulates the State System of Incentives for Environmental Services, was created without the due debate with sectors of society directly impacted by the law, that is, the men and women of the countryside and forests. Slavishly repeating the arguments of the powerful countries, local state authorities present it as an effective means of contributing to climate equilibrium,

protecting the forests and improving the quality of life of those who live in the forests. It should be noted, however, that this legislation generates "environmental assets" in order to negotiate natural resources on the "environmental service" market, such as the carbon market. It represents a reinforcement of the current phase of capitalism, whose defenders, in order to ensure its widespread expansion, utilize an environmental discourse to commodify life, privatize nature and plunder the inhabitants of the countryside and the cities. Under this law, the beauty of nature, pollination by insects, regulation of rainfall, culture, spiritual values, traditional knowledge, water, plants and even popular imagery are converted into merchandise. The current proposal to reform the Forest Code complements this new strategy of capital accumulation by authorizing the negotiation of forests on the financial market, through the issuing of "green bonds", or so-called "Environmental Reserve Quota Certificates" (CCRAs). In this way, everything is placed in the sphere of the market, to be administered by banks and private corporations.

Although it is presented as a solution for global warming and climate change, the REDD proposal allows the powerful capitalist countries to maintain their current levels of production, consumption and, therefore, pollution. They will continue to consume energy generated by sources that produce more and more carbon emissions. Historically responsible for the creation of the problem, they now propose a "solution" that primarily serves their own interests. While making it possible to purchase the "right to pollute", mechanisms like REDD strip "traditional" communities (riverine, indigenous and Afro communities, rubber tappers, women coconut gatherers, etc.) of their autonomy in the management of their territories.

As a result, roles are turned upside down. Capitalism, the most predatory civilization in the history of humankind, would not pose a danger; on the contrary, it would be the "solution". The "destroyers" would now be those who fight to defend nature. And so those who have historically ensured the preservation of nature are now viewed as predators, and are therefore criminalized. It comes as no surprise then that the state has recently become more open in its repression, persecution and even the expulsion of local populations from their territories "all to ensure the free expansion of the natural resources market."

With undisguised state support, through this and other projects, capital is now promoting and combining two forms of re-territorialization in the Amazon region. On one hand, it is evicting peoples and communities from their territories (as in the case of mega projects like hydroelectric dams), stripping them of their means of survival. On the other hand, it is stripping those who remain on their territories of their relative autonomy, as in the case of environmental conservation areas. These populations may be allowed to remain on their land, but they are no longer able to use it in accordance with their ways of life. Their survival will no longer be guaranteed by subsistence farming "which has been transformed into a "threat" to the earth's climate stability" but rather by a "bolsa verde" or "green allowance", which in addition to being paid in order to maintain the oil civilization.

Because we are fully aware of the risks posed by projects like these, we oppose the REDD agreement between California, Chiapas and Acre, which has already caused serious problems for indigenous and traditional communities such as those in the Amador Hernández region of Chiapas, Mexico. This is why we share our solidarity with the poor communities of California and Chiapas, who have already suffered from its consequences. We also share our solidarity with the indigenous peoples of the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) in Bolivia, who are facing the threat of the violation of their territory by a highway linking Cochabamba and Beni, financed by the BNDES.

We are in a state which, in the 1970s and 1980s, was the stage for historical struggles against the predatory expansion of capital and in defence of territories inhabited by indigenous peoples and peasant communities of the forests. These struggles inspired many others in Brazil and around the world. In the late 1990s, however, Acre was converted into a laboratory for the IDB's and World Bank's experiments in the commodification and privatization of nature, and is now a state "intoxicated" by environmental discourse and victimized by the practice of "green capitalism". Among the mechanisms used to legitimize this state of affairs, one of the most striking is the manipulation of the figure of Chico Mendes. To judge by what they present us with, we would have to consider him the patron saint of green capitalism. The name of this rubber tapper and environmental activist is used to defend oil exploitation, monoculture sugar cane plantations, large-scale logging activity and the sale of the air we breathe.

In view of this situation, we would have to ask if there is anything that could not be made to fit within this "sustainable development" model. Perhaps at no other time have cattle ranchers and logging companies met with a more favourable

scenario. This is why we believe it is necessary and urgent to fight it, because under the guise of something new and virtuous, it merely reproduces the old and perverse strategies of the domination and exploitation of humans and nature.

Finally, we want to express here our support for the following demands: agrarian reform, official demarcation of indigenous lands, investments in agroecology and the solidarity economy, autonomous territorial management, health and education for all, and democratization of the media. In defence of the Amazon, of life, of the integrity of the peoples and their territories, and against REDD and the commodification of nature. Our struggle continues.

Rio Branco, Acre, 7 October 2011

Signed:

Assentamento de Produção Agro-Extrativista Limoeiro-Floresta Pública do Antimary (APAEPL)

Amazonlink

Cãiritas “Manaus

Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos e Educação Popular do Acre (CDDHEP/AC)

Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas para o Desenvolvimento do Extremo Sul da Bahia (CEPEDES)

Comissão Pastoral da Terra “CPT Acre

Conselho Indigenista Missionário “CIMI Regional Amazônia Ocidental

Conselho de Missão entre Índios “COMIN Assessoria Acre e Sul do Amazonas

Coordenação da União dos Povos Indígenas de Rondônia, Sul do Amazonas e Noroeste do Mato Grosso “CUNPIR

FERN

Fórum da Amazônia Ocidental (FAOC)

Global Justice Ecology Project

Grupo de Estudo sobre Fronteira e Identidade – Universidade Federal do Acre

Instituto Madeira Vivo (IMV-Roraima)

Instituto Mais Democracia

Movimento Anticapitalista Amazônico – MACA

Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas (MMC – Roraima)

Nós Existimos – Roraima

Núcleo Amigos da Terra Brasil

Núcleo de Pesquisa Estado, Sociedade e Desenvolvimento na Amazônia Ocidental -Universidade Federal do Acre.

Oposição Sindical do STTR de Brasília

Rede Alerta Contra o Deserto Verde

Rede Brasil sobre Instituições Financeiras Multilaterais

Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais de Bujari- (STTR – Bujari-)

Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais de Xapuri (STTR- Xapuri)

Terra de Direitos

União de Mulheres Indígenas da Amazonia Brasileira

World Rainforest Movement (WRM)

