

Brazil rejects foreign bid to grab Amazon

by Luis Barbosa

The burning each year of an area of the Amazon River basin equal to the size of Belgium is a real environmental problem, which requires real solutions. The problem, however, has provided the pretext for an assault on Brazilian sovereignty by supranational financial and environmentalist institutions.

In its Feb. 3 editorial, "Brazil's Debt Can Save the Amazon," the *New York Times* ranted against President José Sarney for "standing in the way of . . . a grand debt-for-nature swap that would ease Brazil's burden of foreign borrowing and preserve the Amazon." What Sarney rejected, the *Times* wrote, was a proposal that Brazil convert \$8 billion worth of foreign debt that it could never repay, into local currency to endow an international environmental institute to police its rain forests.

This debt-for-nature swindle was shoved into Brasilia during a mid-January visit by U.S. Senators Timothy Wirth (D-Colo., a former World Wildlife Fund director), Al Gore, Jr. (D-Tenn.), John Heinz (R-Pa.), and the *Washington Post's* Ben Bradlee and Peter "Jaws" Benchley. Sarney shot it down, retorting, "We don't want the Amazon to become a green Persian Gulf."

In an interview with the daily *Folha de São Paulo* published Feb. 10, Sarney insisted, "One thing we cannot accept—and no Brazilian would accept—is exchanging our sovereignty, a piece of our territory, for any kind of foreign aid or for foreign debt. That would be abdicating our sovereignty. . . . No, we will never allow the Amazon to be restricted or our sovereignty over the Amazon to be abdicated for any interests. All the money in the world could not buy a single meter of Brazilian Amazon soil."

The *Times* editorialized, "Mr. Sarney's notion of foreigners taking possession of the Amazon is a groundless fear concocted by his military advisers." The military veto was certainly evident in Army Minister Gen. Leônidas Pires Gonçalves's assertion, "There are undisclosed interests behind this boring hurdy-gurdy song" about internationalizing the Amazon.

Are military fears "groundless"? Imperial powers have been trying to grab pieces of the Amazon since at least the days to Theodore Roosevelt. Even the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) now admits that the pioneer debt-for-nature deal made with Bolivia in 1987 grants foreigners control in perpetuity over a big piece of Bolivian national territory. Debt-for-nature swaps are also openings for commercial debt-for-equity grabs and for world government bodies dictating all

sorts of policies, including population reduction.

The *Financial Times* reported Feb. 7 that UNICEF adviser Stephany Griffith-Jones of the University of Sussex "believes debt-for-development [!] swaps are likely to grow in popularity because they add an important element of conditionality to debt relief."

Internal pressures

Debt-for-nature supporters inside Brazil have grown louder, in tandem with the international news media and politicians. Maria Tereza Pádua of the Brasilia-based Fundação Pronatura recently proposed that a \$3 billion parcel of Brazilian debt be translated into control over 30% of the Amazon. With her is São Paulo University President José Goldemberg, once Finance Minister Delfim Netto's liaison with Moscow and now a director of a new Soviet-based international environmentalist organization.

There is also social democrat Fábio Feldmann, potential Green Party vice presidential candidate, and Victor Civita, a World Wildlife Fund board member. Civita's 800,000-circulation *Veja* magazine campaigns for the debt-for-nature deals.

The clamor increased when rubber-tapper workers leader Chico Mendes was murdered on Dec. 22, 1988. The *Times* dubbed him "the martyr of the Amazonian holocaust" and urged the World Bank to reduce its loans to Brazil. Brazilian Ambassador to the United States Marcilio Marques Moreira and many congressmen attended a mass for him in Washington, D.C., at which the National Wildlife Federation's Jay Hare incredibly compared him to Martin Luther King!

Yet it was the "environmentalist" bankers behind the campaign who *caused much of today's jungle burning*. They did so by blocking Brazilian plans to settle 1 million people on efficient capital-intensive agro-industrial projects around the Carajás mines. In October 1982, a WWF director from Henry Kissinger's American Express corporation told a reporter, "Those big development projects in the Amazon and other places in Latin America are going to be cut. Now that might nicely save our forest. But that's not where it starts. It starts because we're just not going to lend them any more money." Also in 1982, Ana Marie Jul, who would soon become infamous as IMF representative—and potentate—in Brazil, said, "If the international banks decide not to finance the projects, then they will all just have to shut down. They will die a natural death."

Those who died "natural" deaths were among the hundreds of thousands of the colonists left to starve in the jungle by the funding cut for the Northwest Pole Project, and the millions of poor forced into the jungle by the International Monetary Fund-ordered shutdown of agro-industrial development. It is precisely the forest burning by these miserable migrants that the WWF is now using as a pretext for abrogating Brazilian sovereignty.