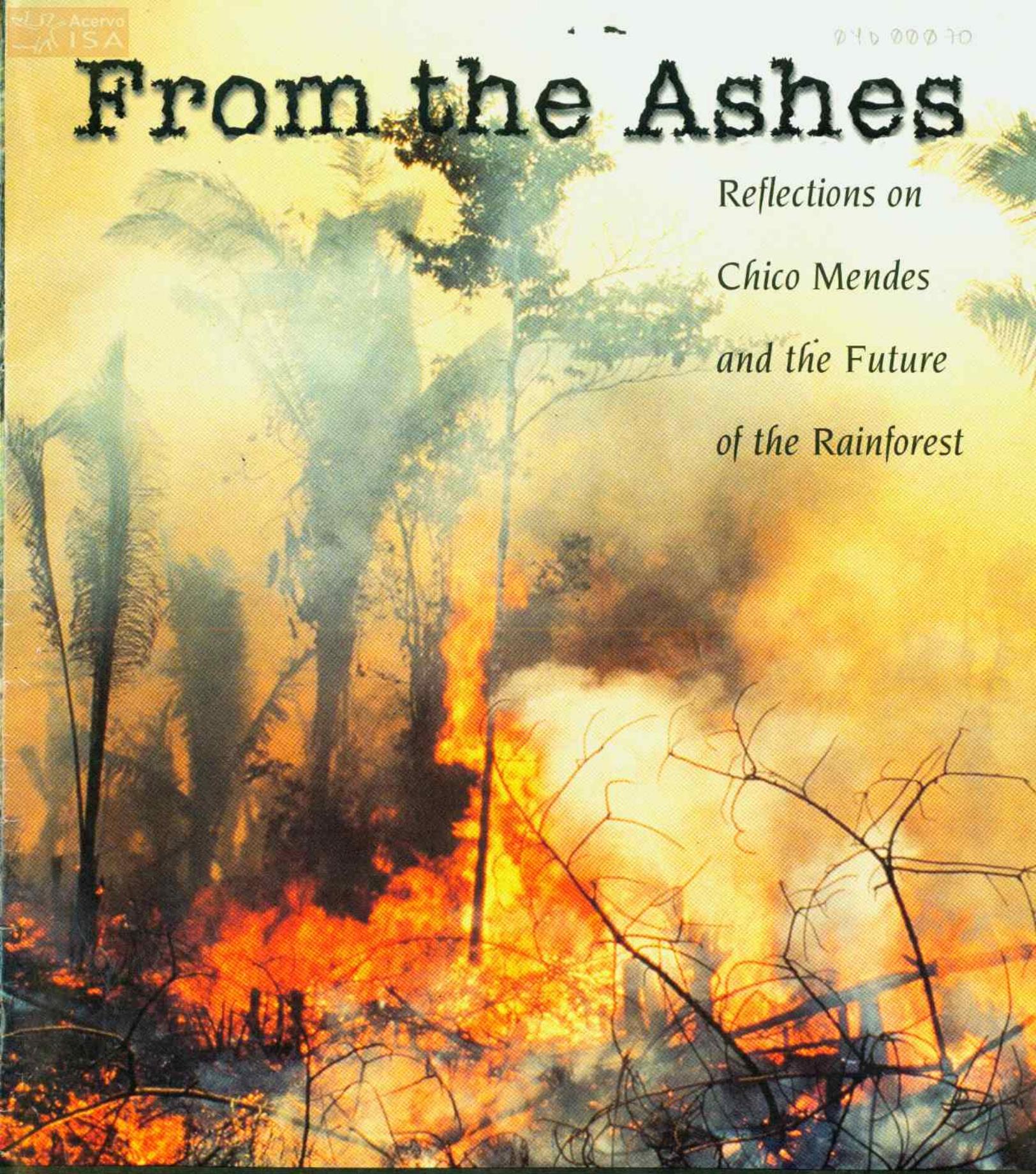


From the Ashes

*Reflections on
Chico Mendes
and the Future
of the Rainforest*



This publication is a cooperative effort of



FOREWORD

This collection of essays commemorates the life and accomplishments of Chico Mendes, environmentalist, rubber tapper, and union leader — on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of his assassination. His struggle for the Brazilian rainforest, the rights of forest peoples, and his ultimate assassination because of his efforts drew global attention to the destruction of the Amazon and tropical rainforests. Publication of this collection of essays reflects our conviction that the example of Chico Mendes, as a leader and as a citizen, continues to set an important model for us today. It also reflects our understanding that the old growth forests of the world are central to the ecological integrity of our planet and the equilibrium of its climate in the next century and the next millennium.

The Environmental Defense Fund and the National Wildlife Federation are publishing this volume because our organizations worked closely with Chico Mendes. The list of contributors to this volume is one indication of the range of people he touched with his ideas. It includes a number of the world's foremost biologists and authorities on tropical forests, some of Brazil's preeminent environmentalists and political leaders, an internationally renowned artist, and — of critical importance — representatives of the people of the Amazon. This list of distinguished contributors is a demonstration of how far Chico's star cast its light.

This publication is also a reaffirmation of perhaps the most important lesson we and our organizations learned from Chico Mendes: in collaboration and partnership with the peoples of forest and their representatives lies the hope for a sustainable future for the forest. To this end, we are launching, in conjunction with the National Council of Rubber Tappers of Brazil, the Chico Mendes Sustainable Forest Campaign to promote the creation of new "extractive reserves" — forest reserves managed by forest communities. Chico Mendes said, "It is not through funerals thronged by the masses, that the Amazon will be saved..." The essays that follow demonstrate Chico Mendes' key insight — that the peoples of the forest can protect it and benefit from its real value.



Fred Krupp, Executive Director
Environmental Defense Fund



Mark Van Putten, President
National Wildlife Federation

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Stephan Schwartzman,
Environmental Defense Fund, Editor

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Ten Years *after the Death of* Chico Mendes:

The Amazon in the Next Millennium

Stephan Schwartzman
Environmental Defense Fund

The Amazon is the greatest of the remaining tropical forests in the world, and one of the last frontiers of modern industrial development on the planet. It contains a forest half the size of the United States, a fifth or sixth of all the fresh water in the world¹, and about a third of all of the plant and animals species on the planet². The great majority of this astonishing wealth is in Brazil, which has more total forest cover than any other country in the world except Russia³. More than four-fifths of the Amazon is still intact wilderness.

No other nation in the world has reached the end of the 20th century with a natural patrimony anything like this, in expanse, diversity, ecological richness. But it is being dissipated faster than we can concretely imagine — 13,000 acres a day, about 8 football fields a minute, over the last decade. And these alarming statistics may be far too conservative. Recent reports show that the official calculations underestimate the devastation, perhaps by a factor of two⁴. Brazil's frontier is expanding aggressively.

And the frontier — the cattle ranches, the gold mining, the soy plantations — has pushed beyond Brazil's borders. The forests of Bolivia, Venezuela, Guyana already feel it. Whether 5% or 50% or more of the species of this planet that pass the turn of this century will still exist by the turn of the next has a great deal to do with the fate of this particular forest.

The fires that consume those eight football fields a minute over the last decade are also adding quickly to global warming. There is enough

carbon in this forest — 90 billion tons⁵ — to surpass a dozen years' worth of world total CO₂ emissions were it all to burn at once. The carbon of the Amazon is not the only, or even the principal, cause of global warming.

But whether or not the carbon of the Amazon goes up in smoke will profoundly affect the terms of our children's adulthood. What is happening on the Amazon frontier today is very likely more important for the ecology of the planet our grandchildren will inherit than anything that happens in any other single ecosystem, or group of ecosystems, in the world. The story of Chico Mendes, perhaps the best known Amazonian today, is then, worth remembering.

Chico Mendes was born in 1944 in Xapuri, Acre in the western Brazilian Amazon. His father, poor and illiterate, tapped rubber trees in the forest for a living, in a sharecropping-like arrangement, and ended every year owing more to his landlord than he made. By sheer luck, Chico learned to read. As a result, liberals and leftists in the Catholic Church recruited him to begin a community organizing effort among the rubber tappers.

In the 1970s, Brazil's military government built new roads in Acre and cattle ranchers sent hired guns to drive the rubber tappers out of the forest so they could cut it down for pasture. Chico became a leader of a spontaneous, non-violent resistance movement, who then organized actions called *empates*, or "stalemates". Rubber tappers would band together from their widely scattered

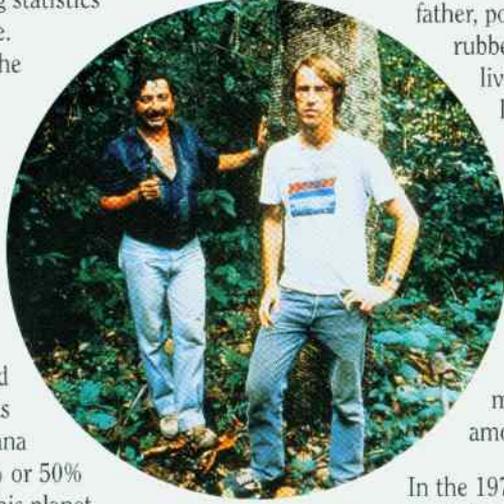


Photo: The author with Chico Mendes, Nova Esperança rubber estate, Xapuri Acre, 1987. Photo by J.B. Forbes





holdings, and march down forest trails, at times for days, to converge on the forest clearance crews. By force of numbers and persuasion, they disarmed gunmen and convinced the ranchers' workers to stop the clearing. Often, they succeeded in defending their homes and the forest from which they lived. Chico was a founder of the union movement in Acre in the mid-1970s, and was elected to the town council of Xapuri. In the late 1970s he helped found the leftist Workers Party.

In 1985 Chico, with the support of his closest and most trusted advisor, anthropologist Mary Helena Allegretti, organized the first national meeting of rubber tappers in Brasilia and founded the National Council of Rubber Tappers. It was there that I had the privilege of bringing to Chico's attention the existence of the international environmental movement, and the global importance of tropical forests.

He and the Council (CNS) proposed a new idea — the extractive reserve. Forest land where rubber tappers, or other similar "extractivists" lived should be transformed into reserves, for the local communities to manage. The rubber tappers and the forest could both benefit. With Mary and a small group of advisors, the CNS created legal and institutional means for establishing these reserves. Chico traveled to Washington and Miami at the invitation of the Environmental Defense Fund and National Wildlife Federation. His mission was to caution the Inter-American Development Bank that its road project in Acre threatened disaster unless it could be reformulated to protect the forest and its inhabitants before the road work was completed. The loan was suspended for a time and later re-negotiated, with his participation. He won two international environmental awards.

In 1988 Chico began what was to be his last battle. He led the Xapuri Rural Workers Union in an effort to stop cattle rancher Darly Alves from deforesting an area the rubber tappers wanted to make a reserve. They stopped Darly and got the reserve; Chico also got a warrant for Darly's arrest for a murder committed in another state. He delivered the warrant to the federal police in Acre, but they never arrested Alves, who publicly and repeatedly swore to kill Chico. On December 22nd, Alves' son killed Chico in back of his house in Xapuri.

Chico was someone who, against the evidence and weight of a 100 year tradition of ruthless exploitation and institutionalized injustice, believed in citizenship, in the value and efficacy of principled, individual citizens' action, on behalf of social justice, workers' rights, and the forest. He believed in it strongly enough to die for it. His fight was apparently hopelessly unequal. As a rancher once told him, "You against us is like a mosquito against a lion."

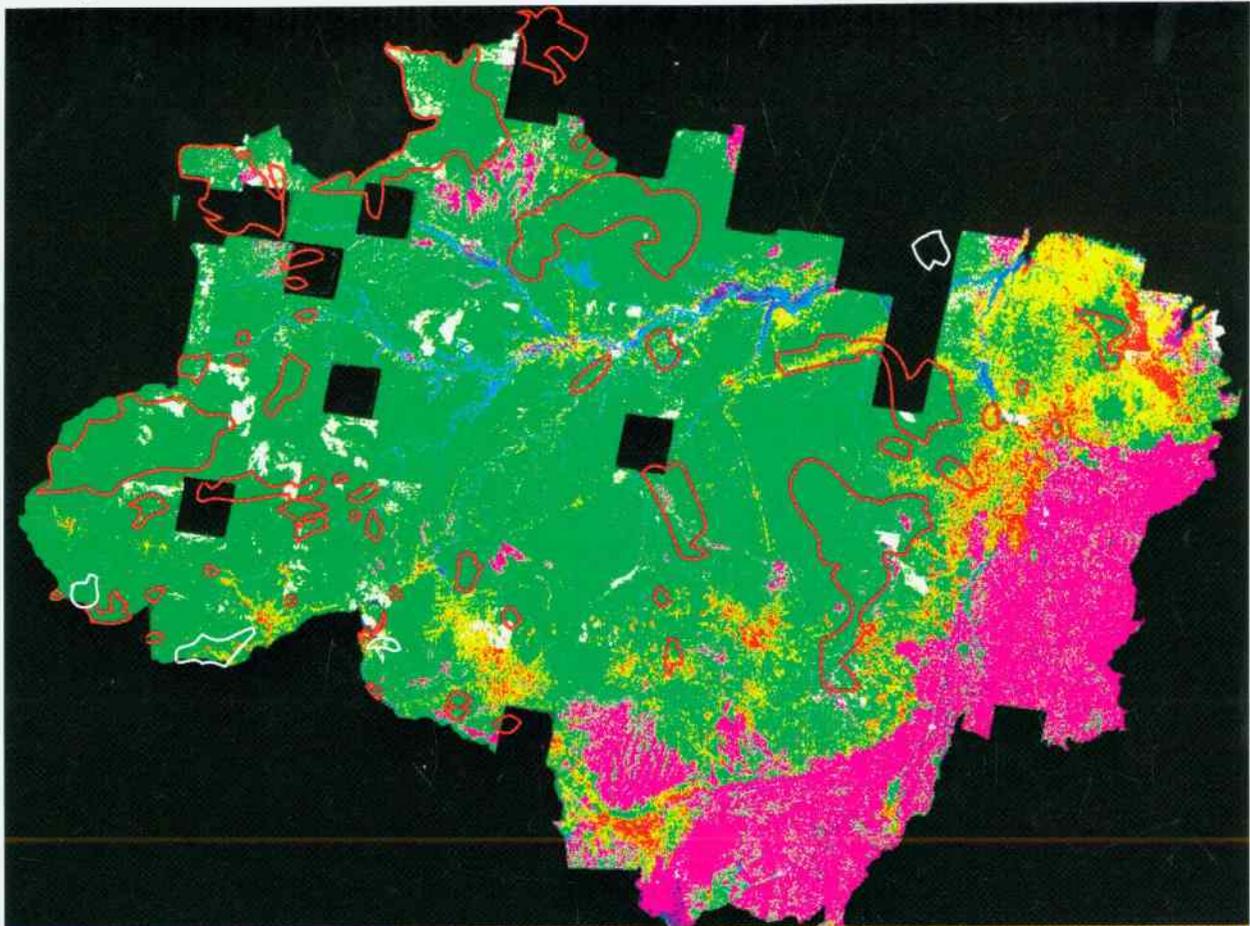
Since Chico was already known to the international press through his environmental connections, the story of his death went around the world. For the first time after some 1,500 assassinations over land conflicts in the interior of Brazil in the 1980s, the perpetrators were tried, convicted and jailed. Darly and his son walked away from prison in 1993, but Darly was recaptured and is serving his sentence. The land and forest for which Chico lived and died is now the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve, and it is one of 21' covering more than 8 million acres that have been declared over the last decade.

Chico Mendes, rubber tapper, union leader, environmentalist and citizen, was a butterfly flapping his wings over the forest. He started a storm that is still rising over the Amazon and may yet reach around the world in unpredictable ways. Chico was the vector of changes, profoundly rooted in a specific local reality, which for that very reason, have global implications. His trips to Washington catalyzed the far-reaching environmental reform of the IDB, the largest international development institution in the hemisphere. His assassination, and the attention it generated, were important considerations in Brazil's decision to host the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the largest intergovernmental environmental meeting ever held. His story moved unionists in the Amazon and São Paulo to think about the environment, and environmentalists in the US and Europe to think

Chico Mendes at ceremony where he received Ted Turner's Better World Society award, Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York, NY Oct, 1987



NASA Landsat Brazilian Amazon Landcover Map, Early 1990s, with Indigenous Areas and Extractive Reserves



Green = Forest Red = Deforested Yellow = Regrowing Forest White = Cloud Blue = Water Purple = Cerrado
 Red Outline = Indigenous Areas White Outline = Extractive Reserves Black = No Data

(From Prof. David Skole, Michigan State University, TRFIC)

about human rights. His colleagues in Acre, co-organizer of the *empates* Marina Silva, and Jorge Viana, his former advisor, are today Senator and Governor-elect of the state respectively.

Chico, if he were watching now, would likely find it most important that leaders identified with him, and his ideas, are winning elections in the Amazon where none would have thought it possible. Many people in the Amazon now share his belief that the key to a better future lies in the forest, not in its ashes.

Before Chico Mendes, environmentalists mostly saw the people of the Amazon only as a problem — as the slash and burn farmers who were

destroying the forest. Chico, and the rubber tappers of Acre showed that to the contrary the people of the forest were central to the solution. Chico helped to show us that any long term prospect for the sustainability of the Amazon — and other forests — depends on designing effective means for the people in the forest to benefit from the ecosystem services the forest provides for everyone — preservation of biological diversity, soil and watershed conservation, water cycling, stabilization of regional and global climate. This is what Chico Mendes' key proposal — the extractive reserves — seeks to do. Those that have been created have secured the forest peoples' land rights and they have helped to



forestall deforestation, to buy time for sustainability. But many more, with much better opportunities for their inhabitants, are needed.

Nothing remotely suggested that Chico Mendes, born in the time and place he was, could come to accomplish even a fraction of what he did. The rancher who, with all certainty, told Chico he was a mosquito fighting a lion will be forever forgotten to history. Chico will not.

But homage and memory are not enough. There is no fitting memorial for a person of Chico Mendes' stature but principled action. There is no lack of the injustice, environmental destruction, waste and ignorance against which Chico struggled. If he, who began with so little, against such great odds, could do so much, how can any of us despair or decline to act?

Notes

1 *Amazonia without myths*. Commission on Development and Environment for Amazonia. Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Development Program, Amazon Cooperation Treaty, Washington D.C. *World Resources 1996-99 — A Guide to the Global Environment*. The World Resources Institute, The United Nations Development Programme, The World Bank. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

2 Wilson, E.O. 1992. *The Diversity of Life*. Norton, New York, NY. *Global Biodiversity*. 1992. World Conservation Monitoring Center, Chapman and Hall, London. D. Nepstad and P. Moutinho, 1996. "The role of Brazilian Amazonia in global climate change and biodiversity losses." The Woods Hole Research Center and The Institute for Environmental Research in the Amazon. Brasilia. *Amazonia without myths*. 1992. Commission on Development and Environment for Amazonia. Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Development Program, Amazon Cooperation Pact, Washington D.C.

3 *State of the World's Forests 1997*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.

4 Cochrane, M.A. and M.D. Schulze. In press. Fires as a recurrent event in tropical forests of the eastern Amazon: effects on forest structure, biomass, and species. *Biotropica* Schwartzman, S. 1997. Fires in the Amazon: An analysis of NDAM-12 satellite data 1995-1997. Environmental Defense Fund, Washington DC.

5 Feinside, P. 1997. Monitoring needs to transform Amazonian forest maintenance into a global-warming mitigation option. *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change*. 2 (2-3): 285-302.

6 "Extractivism", the translation of the Portuguese "extrativismo", is used here to signify forest extraction activities such as collecting native rubber latex, Brazil nuts, palm nuts, and oil, or fishing, which are sustainable. That is, they are in principle indefinitely renewable. Mining, logging, and commercial hunting for example also involve resource extraction, but the rubber tappers use the term "extractivism" only to refer to sustainable extraction, and this is part of the legal definition of the extractive reserve. Most rubber tapper communities hunt for subsistence, and historically have done so over long periods without depleting game populations. There is currently debate within the CNS about whether or not to allow "sustained yield" logging in extractive reserves.

7 There are two legal instruments for the creation of extractive reserves: the "extractive settlement project" dating from 1987 and under the authority of the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA); and the "extractive reserve", dating from 1989 and under the authority of the Brazilian Institute for Environment (IBAMA). Eleven reserves have been created by IBAMA since 1990. INCRA has created ten "extractive settlement" projects. The National Center for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Populations (CNPPT) exists within IBAMA to support and develop the reserves.

About the Author:

Stephan Schwartzman, anthropologist and Senior Scientist, Environmental Defense Fund



Extractive Reserves:

An Initiative of Great Social and Environmental Importance

Paulo Nogueira Neto
Professor Emeritus, University of São Paulo

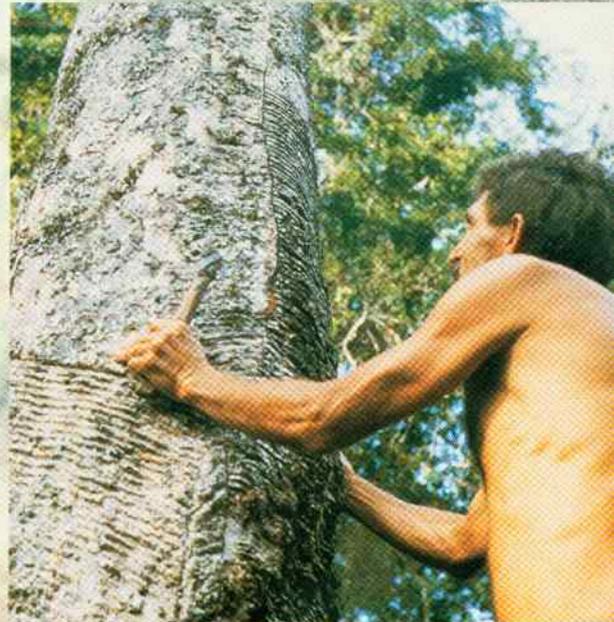
The extractive reserve concept, pioneered by Chico Mendes and Mary Helena Allegretti, was a new and very creative idea for protecting the Amazon forest and at the same time resolving a serious social problem. In the 1980s, conflicts between cattle ranchers who wanted to cut down the forest to create pasture, and the populations who live from the forests and collect their products, became acute. The *empates* (rubber tappers' direct actions against deforestation) that non-violently halted the clear cutting won the support of public opinion. The courageous leadership of Chico Mendes and the persistence of his companions of the forest constituted a new and unique initiative in the panorama of environmental movements.

It was however necessary to create and implement a definitive, institutional solution to the problem. The *empates* were victories of the greatest importance, but it was then necessary to definitively occupy the terrain. In this context, Mary Allegretti and the National Council of Rubber Tappers proposed a new category of ecologically protected area, the Extractive Reserves. I was pleased to support the initiative. I had, as President of the Special Secretariat for the Environment (SEMA), already created the new categories of protected areas "Ecological Stations" and "Environmentally Protected Areas". The extractive reserves were a brilliant idea in the context of the other conservation units, since they explicitly made the peoples of the forest the guardians of the extremely valuable ecological patrimony of the areas they inhabit, with the support of non-governmental organizations and the Environmental Ministry.

What I could not have imagined in the 1980s was that I would become a direct participant in this initiative. Today I own a house and raise indigenous bees in Xapuri. I have, with the

support of the Brazilian Environmental Institute (IBAMA) and the Ministry of the Environment, sought the creation and implementation of the Nova Esperança Extractive Reserve at the highest levels of government.

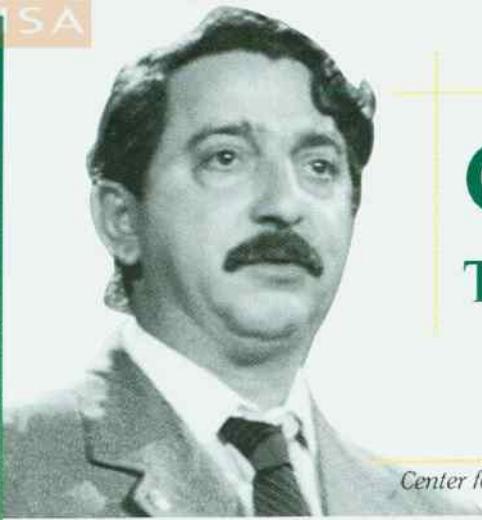
It is a work in progress. But the seeds planted by Chico Mendes and Mary Allegretti, associations of rubber tappers, and those who, in the forests, in government and in environmental organizations, seek to make a better world — with great biodiversity and without poverty — continue to grow.



Rubber tapper in what is now the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve, declared in 1990 and covering about 2.5 million acres of forest in Acre. Photo by Barbara Bramble.

About the Author:

Paulo Nogueira Neto, biologist, founder of modern official environmental protection in Brazil, creator in 1973, and first Secretary of Brazil's Special Secretariat for Environment (SEMA)



Chico Mendes

Ten Years Before

Mary Helena Allegretti

Center for Sustainable Development, University of Brasilia

On December 22 1998, ten years will have passed since the assassination of Chico Mendes. He made history in many important ways. His assassins were tried and jailed, unlike the murderers of thousands of other rural leaders and organizers before him. The struggle of the rubber tappers became known around the world. Extractive Reserves were created, resolving land conflicts and preventing deforestation in various parts of the Amazon, and resources were allocated to sustainable development.

The idea that improving the well-being of local populations should go with environmental protection has become unanimous. And principles that Chico defended as alternatives for the Amazon — adequately valuing the forest and the knowledge of its peoples — are inscribed in international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

All of these victories occurred after Chico's assassination, but they were constructed at least ten years before. It was the attention that international scientists and media had already given these initiatives that caused the repercussions of his death in Brazil.

It is only possible to understand the Chico Mendes phenomenon, in my opinion, by examining three facets of Brazil's reality that gave rise to his particular social identity — as a person seeking redress for injustices committed against his people; as a union leader defending rights to possession of land threatened by deforestation; and as a legitimate

international defender of the interests of local Amazonian populations.

FROM SLAVERY TO NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE¹ AGAINST DEFORESTATION

The impoverished northeastern Brazilians who migrated across the continent to the Amazon at the end of the last century and during World War II to work on the rubber estates imagined that, within a few years, they would make their fortunes and return to their home states. They instead became prisoners to what they came to

call "captivity" — the permanent indebtedness that resulted from the exchange of rubber for manufactured goods, in the oppressive "company store" system of the rubber estates.

In the 1960s, the landowners abandoned the rubber estates of the Acre river valley because rubber prices collapsed.

Seemingly "free", the rubber tappers began to sell to the

highest bidder. Chico lived through

this process in his youth and adolescence and developed an acute sense of outrage against injustice, especially injustice against the defenseless, as were the rubber tappers. But the first years of the 1970's dispelled this dream of liberty. The rubber estates were sold to ranchers from southern Brazil, with the rubber tappers still living on them, and the conflicts began.

In 1973, the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers² (Contag) began union organizing in Acre and established new rules: the "free" rubber tappers were classified as *posseiros*



(occupants without land title)³, with rights to indemnification for the improvements they had made to their holdings, when the estates were sold. The second phase of the conflicts was characterized by legal agreements, and some rubber tappers left the forest for the city with a little money.

The union leaders, Wilson Pinheiro (assassinated in 1980) and Chico Mendes, soon saw the dilemma: the rubber tappers who received compensation for their holdings could not survive in the urban slums. Worse, with forest clearing, they permanently lost their source of income, the stands of rubber and Brazil nut trees. They decided to resist and defined a strategy: to stop forest clearing and continue living in the forest.

In 1976, the rubber tappers tested the new tactics for the first time — in the county of Brasileia, they carried out the first “*empate* against deforestation”, bringing together about 100 workers and throwing out the peons hired by the rancher. Nine years later, in 1985, following the first National Meeting of Rubber Tappers and the creation of the National Council of Rubber Tappers (CNS) in Brasília, this history of struggle became known outside of the state. The proposal for extractive reserves represented a new means of resolving conflicts over land and natural resources protection.

THE RUBBER TAPPERS AND THE FOREST

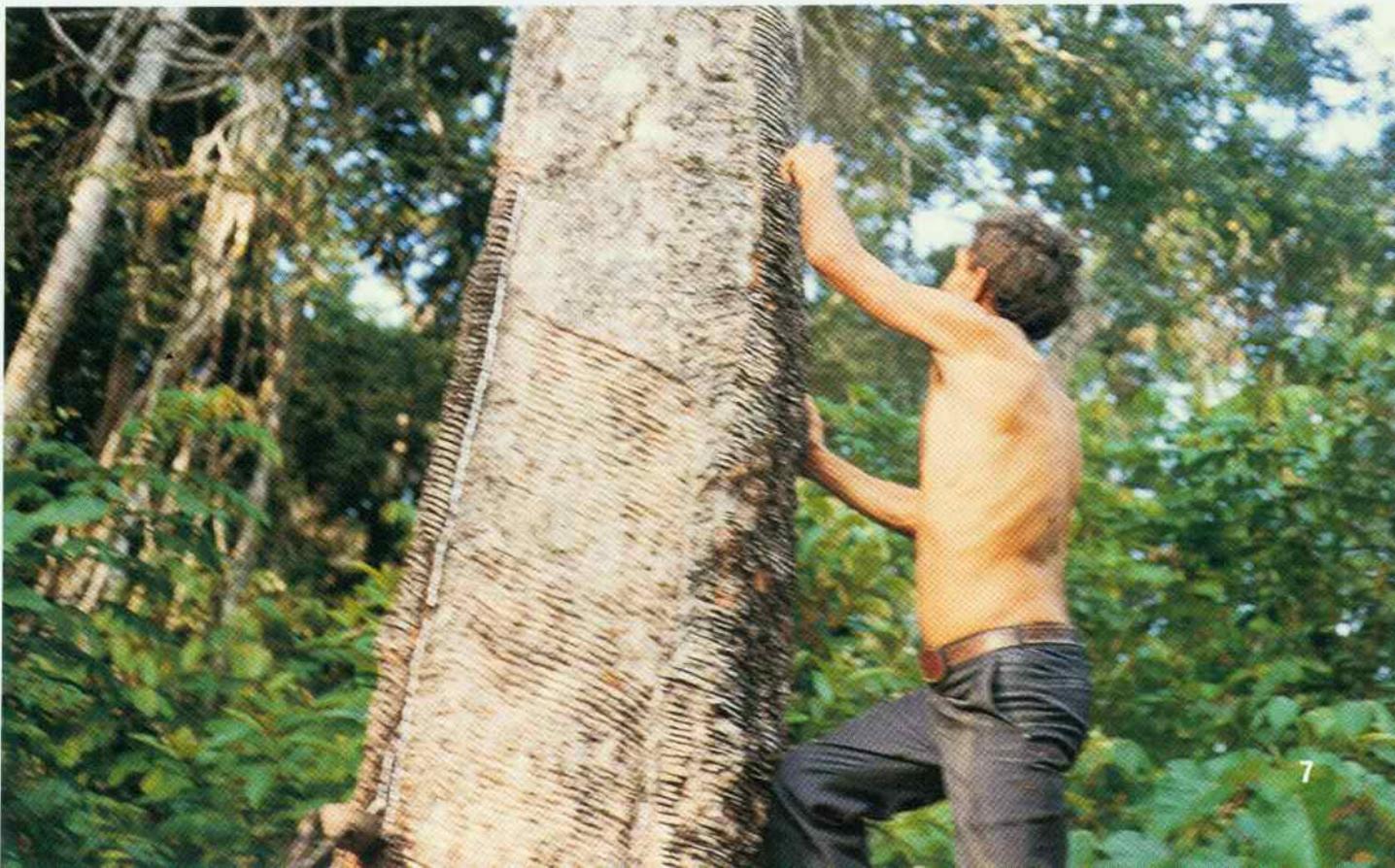
In spite of having very clear ideas about questions that, years later, came to be seen as “environmental”, Chico had had no contact before 1985 with any environmental movement. His vision of the forest, like that of all of the rubber tappers, had been formed in a daily life of relying on forest extraction for survival. This was specialized knowledge they inherited from their fathers and grandfathers:

You have to see the rubber tappers! ... they have a love for the rubber tree, the Brazil nut tree, since ... that is what they and their families survived from for the last century ... For them, to stop deforestation is to defend the rubber tree and the Brazil nut tree. They also consider that the only source of wealth of the state, in spite of all the destruction, is still rubber and Brazil nuts ... When they go out to stop deforestation, really they are defending the life of the rubber tree and the Brazil nut tree, which for them is everything.

This is how Chico spoke about the relationship of the rubber tappers to the forest when I first interviewed him in April of 1981. What moved him to the defense of the forest was the rubber

The truth is that Chico Mendes was the first phenomenon of a certain type of globalization: a simple rubber tapper, he came to be recognized ... by the world because of his ideas about the Amazon. His assassination took his own country by surprise.

Tapping native rubber — Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve, Xapuri, Acre. Each day during the tapping season, the tapper scores each tree once. Latex flows from the groove. Photo by Barbara Bramble



tappers' loss of their subsistence base, and the loss of resources for the state. The defense of the *posseiros* (untitled occupants) he saw as a question of land rights they had historically conquered.

"... the previous governments said that Acre had abundant, cheap land ... but they didn't say that there were workers on it, who lived on that land, and that it was they who actually had conquered that land for Brazil."

"It was the north-easterners, the rubber tappers, who, from one day to the next, became soldiers to take, to conquer this land, which belonged to the Bolivians. For this reason they consider themselves the owners of the land, because their ancestors fought for it."

"... sometimes they would go to the courts ... in the meanwhile, the forest went on being cleared anyway. So there was no advantage at all to this for the workers, because they were losing ground every day. So they thought about it in another way. Not in terms of wanting to be agitators, as they are frequently accused of being, of agitating and of being manipulated, never. But as being the only way out for them, to defend their rights, their very survival as far as they were concerned ... Many

workers, incredibly enough, don't realize that ... in this way they are supporting Brazil's national security."

When they mobilized a demonstration and tried to stop the rubber and Brazil nut trees from being cut down, the rubber tappers were reacting against the breaking of a peculiar tie between a tree and the collector of its product, created and developed in the immensity and silent isolation of the forest, respect for and terror of which had been transmitted from one generation to another for one hundred years.



CHICO MENDES IN THE LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Starting with the National Meeting in October, 1985, Chico Mendes' life changed radically, because of the alliance he constructed with the international environmental movement, and English documentarian Adrian Cowell's decision to film his activities in Xapuri.

In an interview in the newspaper *O Rio Branco*⁵ in June of 1987, he affirmed that he wanted to distance himself from party politics, because he had found in the National Council of Rubber Tappers a base of support for the defense of the living and working conditions of the peoples of the forest (Indians and rubber tappers):

"I believe that the rubber tappers have advanced much farther with the issue of the extractive reserves, and this has had an impact in Brazil and abroad. I can affirm that what the unions have not done in 12 years, the National Council of Rubber Tappers has achieved in less than two." (*O Rio Branco*, 13.06.87:13)

But Chico received the greatest support for his ideas from international journalists and scientists. The first article on the rubber tappers' movement and the extractive reserves proposal was in the January/March 1986 edition of the *IUCN⁶ Bulletin*. The second appeared in the May issue of the *Economist Development Report*. On November 18th, an article by Erik Eckholm in the *New*

"Union leader, defender of life. They killed Chico Mendes" painted on a wall in Acre state capital, Rio Branco. Photo by Barbara Bramble



York Times mentioned extractive reserves as a new mode of reconciling social and conservation objectives.

In 1987, some 25 articles were published in widely circulated periodicals around the world, half of which cited Chico Mendes as the leader of a movement in defense of the forest. Also that year one of the films in the *Decade of Destruction* series, about Chico, was released and seen across the US and Europe. In 1988, various journalists went to Xapuri and published stories on the threats to the rubber tappers, the destruction of forests of Acre and Rondonia states and interviews with Chico. In the last of these, in the *Boston Globe*, he stated:

"The Banks' need a serious environmental policy and it appears that they are moving in that direction. But people like me need international support just to stay alive."

The truth is that Chico Mendes was the first phenomenon of a certain type of globalization: a simple rubber tapper, he came to be recognized by environmental and political leaders and development officials of the planet because of his ideas about the Amazon. His assassination took his own country by surprise. Might things have turned out differently, had he received

more attention from the Brazilian press? We can only speculate. But this signals the importance of an independent press in the consolidation of a democracy. How many Chico Mendeses are there, struggling for just causes in Brazil today, without anyone taking the trouble to know?

Notes

1 The rubber tappers' non-violent demonstrations against deforestation were known as empates (literally, "stalemates") (see Schwartzman, this volume.)

2 Part of the official, government-sponsored union system.

3 Under Brazil's 1964 Land Statute, occupants of land without title (posseiros) had specified rights: they could not be summarily evicted, had rights to receive compensation for any improvements they had made and after five years residence had the right to receive land title, in a homestead-like provision intended to encourage small scale farming.

4 Acre was annexed to Brazil in 1903 following the rising led by Plácido de Castro, in which Brazilian rubber tappers seized the territory from Bolivian forces.

5 A local paper in Acre state capital, Rio Branco.

6 The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, a large international umbrella group.

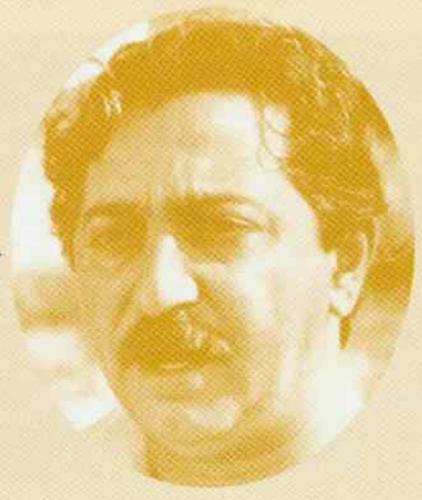
7 The World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Chico went twice to the US in 1987 to debate the IDB's road project in Acre and the banks' environmental policy. In 1988 he sent a letter to the World Bank about a planned project in Rondonia state, arguing that the project would only repeat previous failures if the local organizations were not consulted.

About the Author:

Mary Helena Allegretti, anthropologist, former President of the Institute for Amazon Studies and Secretary of Planning of the state of Amapá.



The Ideas of Chico Mendes and the National Council of Rubber Tappers



Atanagildo de Deus Matos
National Council of Rubber Tappers

We the rubber tappers of Amazonia continue the struggle that Chico Mendes started. His ideas, formulated in Xapuri, Acre, today belong to all of the extractivist¹ populations of Amazonia. The struggle started by the rubber tappers is today also the struggle of the women who gather babaçu palm-nuts, of Brazil nut gatherers, and many others. Today the National Council of Rubber Tappers is in practice the National Council of the Extractivist Populations of the Amazon.

We continue the struggle of Wilson Pinheiro, Chico Mendes, Arnaldo Ferreira and many other companions who have fallen, assassinated by those who think that by killing an individual one kills an idea. We know that others will fall, but we have absolute certainty that many others will take their places.

For us the objectives of the struggle are simple — we fight for rights to the land, to work, for health and education for our children, and to keep our forests standing, since we depend on them to live.

This is why it is so difficult for us to understand why those who have political and economic power, who can and should offer solutions, instead pass their time in meetings and abstract discussions. As international assistance for environmental projects in the Amazon has increased, the destruction of the forest has also increased and the peoples of the Amazon have become poorer.

It has not been easy to spread Chico's ideas — to make people aware that in the Amazon, man and nature are one, that there is no real chance to maintain the enormous Amazon forest except with the peoples that are its traditional inhabitants. To think that the Amazon forest can be conserved with parks, sanctuaries, forest guards and helicopters is simply to be unacquainted with our reality, or often worse: to be acquainted with it, without understanding it.

Worse still, there are also dramatic inconsistencies between national public policies and the policies of the Multilateral Agencies², which are not only ideological but result in laws, investments, works, projects, which in our understanding are contradictory and cancel one another out.

Today the G7³, the World Bank, the European Community, the Inter American Development Bank, KfW⁴, and other agencies have considerable investments in projects for the protection of the Amazon forest, some of which have involved forest peoples. At the same time our government has opened the doors to international market competition without any sort of protection for the products on which we rely to remain in the forest and defend it.

Extractive products such as native rubber that we collect in the forest cannot compete in the international market with cultivated Asian plantation rubber. But our government has

Rubber tapper and union leaders Julio Barbosa (in profile) and Raimundo de Barros (arms up), at Chico Mendes' funeral, December 25, 1988, Xapuri, Acre. In 1996, Julio Barbosa was elected mayor of Xapuri. Photo by Adrian Cowell



allowed unlimited rubber imports to increase the competitiveness of the multinational tire oligopoly in Brazil: Pirelli, Firestone, Good Year, and Michelin. In other words, the poor in the middle of the Amazon who are struggling to survive and to maintain their forest standing, are supposed to compete in the global marketplace in order to improve the position of multinational tire companies.

This means in practice that Amazon rubber production has never been lower, and the standard of living of the rubber tappers has never been worse.

It is difficult to understand why we, among the poorest of the poor, are left at the mercy of the global marketplace, when at the same time the agricultural populations of the developed countries are protected. How are we to explain to our companions that while Japan subsidizes its rice, and Portugal protects its olive oil, in Brazil, we must demonstrate to the national and international technocracy that Amazonian extractivism is economically viable on the open market and that we have the capacity, coming from a primitive economy, to compete in the international market?

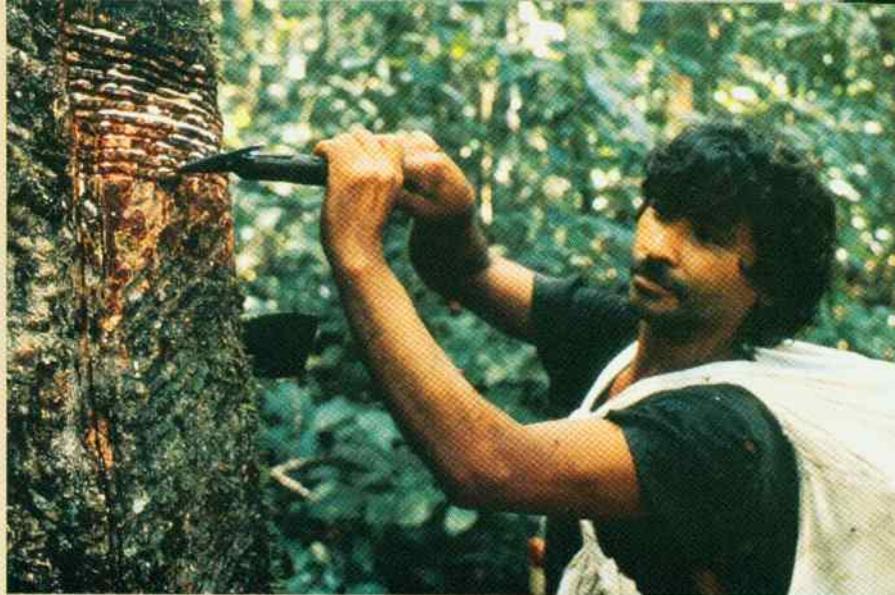
Some specialists claim that we are only looking for handouts. Perhaps our proposals are too simple to be understood by the Professors in Brasilia, Washington, Brussels and Bonn.

We call for a direct subsidy for Amazon native rubber. With what the National Highway Department spends in a year on the upkeep of 100 miles of road in the Amazon, we can support all the rubber tappers in the Amazon, and bring back those who were forced to migrate to Bolivia.

We call for Ecological Land Reform — to transform 10% of the Amazon into Extractive Reserves by the year 2002. This will allow us to defend 50 million hectares of forest, secure the land rights and improve the living conditions of tens of thousands of families.

The costs of this would be trivial if we were to put it in the context of even 5% of Brazil's international debt.

The truth is that the biggest projects and investments work against the continued presence of extractivist populations in the Amazon. On one hand, there are infrastructure investments that only accelerate deforestation, and on the other the people are driven out of the forest, since they lack the minimal conditions to remain there. We



understand by minimal conditions an economic activity that brings them \$100 a month, and that they have access to health care and education.

Out of due regard for the truth we should allow that when the rubber tappers mobilized in March 1997 and put these same points to the President, he heard us and ordered action to solve the problems. But nothing happened, just as when the President announced the creation of new extractive reserves, and fifth or sixth level bureaucrats paralyzed their creation. There is an institutionalized environmental anarchy in the Federal Government, which always works against the interests of the extractivist workers of the Amazon.

Faced with these contradictions, perhaps the best summary of the situation are the words of a friend of mine who lives on a rubber estate in Xapuri in the interior of Acre:

"Nothing's so easy that it can't get harder."

Notes

1 [Editor's Note] The National Council of Rubber Tappers uses the term "extractivist" (extrativista) to refer to people and communities that typically make a living from small scale subsistence agriculture, hunting, collecting, and make their income from gathering forest products, such as rubber or Brazil nuts, whose extraction is environmentally sustainable over time.

2 [Editor's Note] The World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank are public multilateral development institutions made up of member countries. The World Bank in particular has had various projects in the Amazon, with a total investment of about \$900 million since 1992.

3 [Editor's Note] The Group of Seven industrialized nations, which in the Houston Summit of 1990 resolved to fund a pilot program for conservation of the Amazon to be administered by the World Bank and the European Commission. Since 1992, several of the G7 nations have committed \$250 million to the Pilot Program for Conservation of Brazilian Tropical Forest.

4 [Editor's Note] Kredit für Wiederaufbau, or KiW is the German government agency for international technical cooperation.

To think that the Amazon forest can be conserved with parks, sanctuaries, forest guards and helicopters is simply to be unacquainted with our reality, or often worse: to be acquainted with it, without understanding it.

About the Author:

Atanagildo de Deus Matos (Gatão), founder of the rural union movement in the Amazon state of Pará; President of the National Council of Rubber Tappers



Diversity, Destruction, or Extraction

Sir Ghilleen Prance
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Since humans first arrived in the Amazon rainforest some ten thousand years ago they have faced the dilemma of how to cope with and how to use the tremendous biological diversity that surrounded them. Forest which can contain up to 300 species of trees per hectare and numerous other species of herbs, shrubs, lianas, epiphytes as well as a multitude of insects and other animals is not easy to use or to understand.

The early indigenous settlers, through several thousand years of experience, adapted to this diversity through a great amount of experimentation and trial and error. Studies of Quantative ethnobotany amongst various tribal peoples of Amazonia have shown the enormous extent to which they use the plant species in the forest for such things as construction of houses, crafts, foods, medicines, fish poisons and weapons. In some surveys it has been shown that these

peoples have a use for every species of tree growing on a sample hectare, for example, for the Ka'apor and the Tembe Indians studied by William Balée. Studies of soil samples and archaeology show that many sites now covered by dense pristine rainforest were formerly occupied by Indians. A surprising amount of what we would call virgin forest in Amazonia has actually been disturbed by humans at one stage or another. In spite of this, the amazing biological diversity of the region has remained, and in fact human disturbance has probably contributed to the maintenance of diversity. In other words humans and a diversity of biological organisms can live together in relative harmony when the appropriate system is used.

In marked contrast to the adaptation to diversity worked out by indigenous peoples, more recent settlers and immigrants to Amazonia from the industrialised western society seem to have been unable to cope with the biodiversity they have found in the region. Their methodology has been to clear the forest or any other natural ecosystem and replace it with a much simpler, species poor alternative such as cattle pasture, a single timber species or a food crop. There are many reasons why this has generally not worked well and modern society has left behind a chapter of disastrous failures in Amazonia such as Fordlândia, the rubber project of Henry Ford that was a fiasco, or the Jari forestry project of Daniel Ludwig in which he lost hundreds of millions of dollars. Much of the soil of Amazonia is inappropriate for conventional agriculture and monocultures are particularly prone to attack by insect, pest or disease.

These more recent developments soon began to invade the territories of both indigenous peoples and the caboclo rubber tappers and to destroy the forests upon which their livelihood

Rubber tapper's garden includes diverse plants and crops, Madeira River, Amazonas state. Photo by Stephan Schwartzman



depended. These people seemed helpless in light of the power and resources of the new wave of colonisers. The battle between the conflicting interests of the original local peoples and the large scale ranchers has been well chronicled elsewhere and so details are not necessary here.

One of the most exciting responses to this conflict has been the move to establish extractive reserves where local people may use the forest but not clear cut it. Why this movement is so important is that it was initially the idea of the local peoples and not something that was imposed upon them by some government authority or development project. The local rubber tappers and Brazil nut gatherers demanded the right to keep areas of the forest from which they gained their living and thereby maintain much of the biological diversity.

One of the leaders of this movement was Francisco (Chico) Alves Mendes Filho who was gunned down so tragically exactly ten years ago. Chico is the best known of the many rubber tappers that lost their lives in this conflict. There is no doubt that Chico Mendes' death helped the cause of extractive reserves to gain momentum and in addition to the one which bears his name several others have been



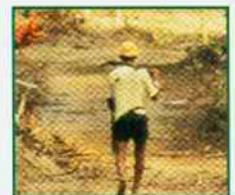
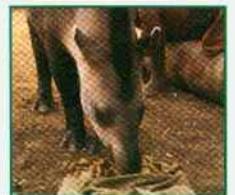
Amazon Indians depend on the forests and rivers. Panará Indians, Mato Grasso state. Chico understood the common interests of Indians and rubber tappers and helped form an Alliance of the Peoples of the Forest. Photo by Stephan Schwartzman

established in the States of Acre, Amazonas, Amapá and Rondônia. This has slowed down the onslaught of deforestation, especially in Chico's native state of Acre.

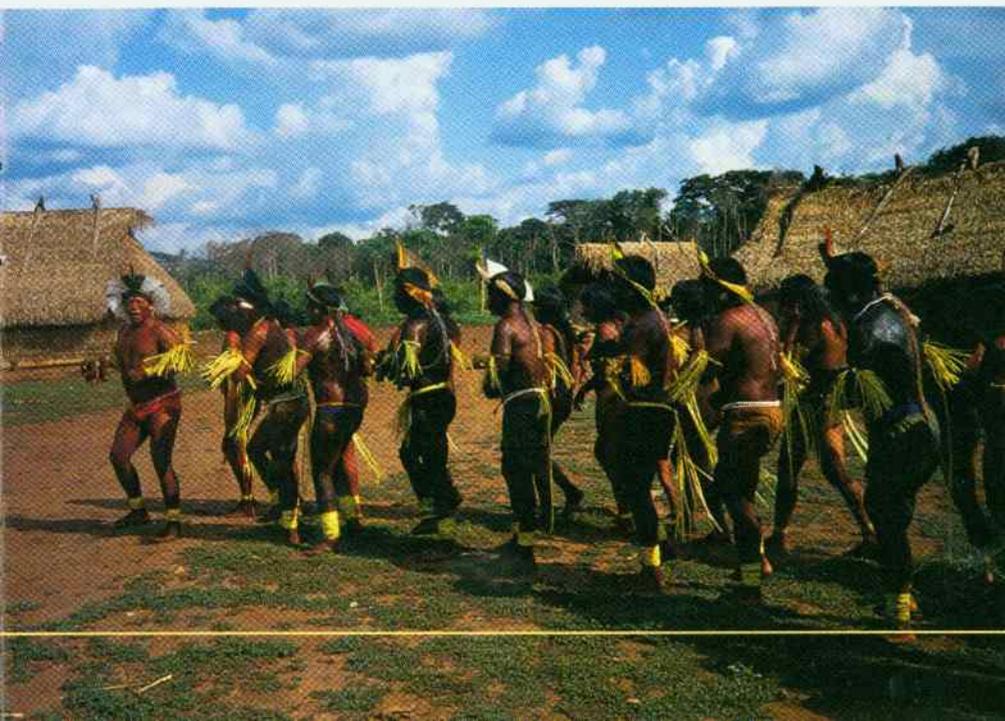
Extractive reserves are not a panacea that will save all the Amazon rainforest, and the families that live in them still eke out a meagre existence, but they have made a difference and have successfully challenged those that would cut down all the forest. Chico Mendes certainly did not die in vain. The challenge for the future is to develop more extraction products from the forest to use more of its diversity as do the Indians. This would make the extractive reserves a much more economically viable solution for the conservation of diversity and the sustainable use of the forest.

About the Author:

Sir Ghillelan Prance, botanist, director of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, United Kingdom



Many Amazonian Indians maintain traditional cultures. Photo by Stephan Schwartzman



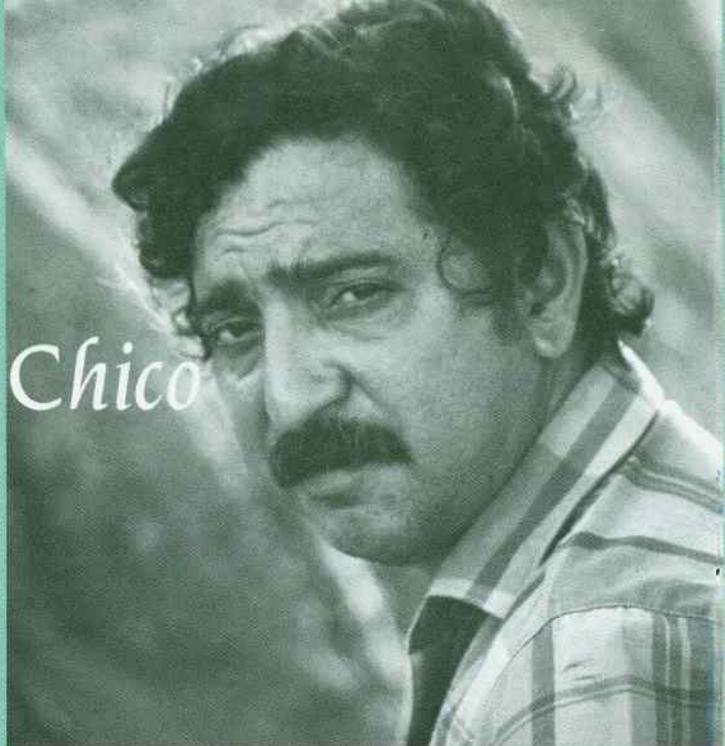
Ten Years

without Chico

Ricardo Arnt
Author and Journalist

In June of 1987, after returning from the United States, where he had gone to pressure the Inter American Development Bank (IDB) to halt loans for environmentally destructive development projects in the Amazon, Chico Mendes was called to Brasilia by General Bayma Denys, the powerful Minister of the Military Cabinet of the Presidency. The two knew one another from afar. The general knew all about Chico's former activities as a militant of the clandestine Communist party and as a rural unionist interested in environmentalism. Chico knew that he knew. And he knew about the General's role during the military dictatorship and his influence over the intelligence agencies.

Many union leaders would have refused the invitation, but Chico didn't hesitate. Unbeknownst to the press — this is the first time this story has been told — the meeting took place in Brasilia in June of 1987. It lasted an hour and was very cordial. Chico was favorably surprised and, presumably, so was the General. Denys opened the conversation by recognizing the historic contribution the rubber tappers of Acre had made to the defense of Brazil's Amazon borders. And he asked how the government could help the National Council of Rubber Tappers, which Chico had organized. Chico didn't say yes and he didn't say no. He



avoided committing himself. He preached sustainable development and the creation of the Extractive Reserves. And he said goodbye, promising to send the General proposals.

It was a perfect charade. In fact, Denys knew that Chico was engaged in blocking international loans to Brazil. And the union leader knew that his steps, in Acre as well as in Washington were being watched. For just this reason, he thought they should meet and talk.

I recall this meeting, ten years later, to highlight one of Chico Mendes' personality traits that impressed me: his intuition. Like many other popular leaders in the Amazon, Chico could have parked in an obscure Latin American Marxism, consumed by the class struggle against the *latifundia* and revolutionary delirium. But his intuition projected him forward. Without ceasing to be what he was, he perceived that in a country like Brazil, "revolutionary" would be to link rural unionism with environmentalism, a task still today not entirely understood by other rural unionists — those in Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement, for example.

Without being intimidated, he accepted unforeseen partnerships, absorbed new concepts, broadened his vision of the world and established innovative alliances with urban unionists, with middle class environmentalists — even with foreign "gringos", whose influence on public opinion he immediately understood. He actively manipulated images and discourse. He was never the passive object of others' interests. To the contrary, he pursued, persistently, his own

Chico Mendes on the BR 364 Highway. The Inter-American Development Bank financed the paving — Chico's trip to Washington and Miami halted the funds until the project was changed to protect forest peoples' lands first. Photo by Adrian Cowell

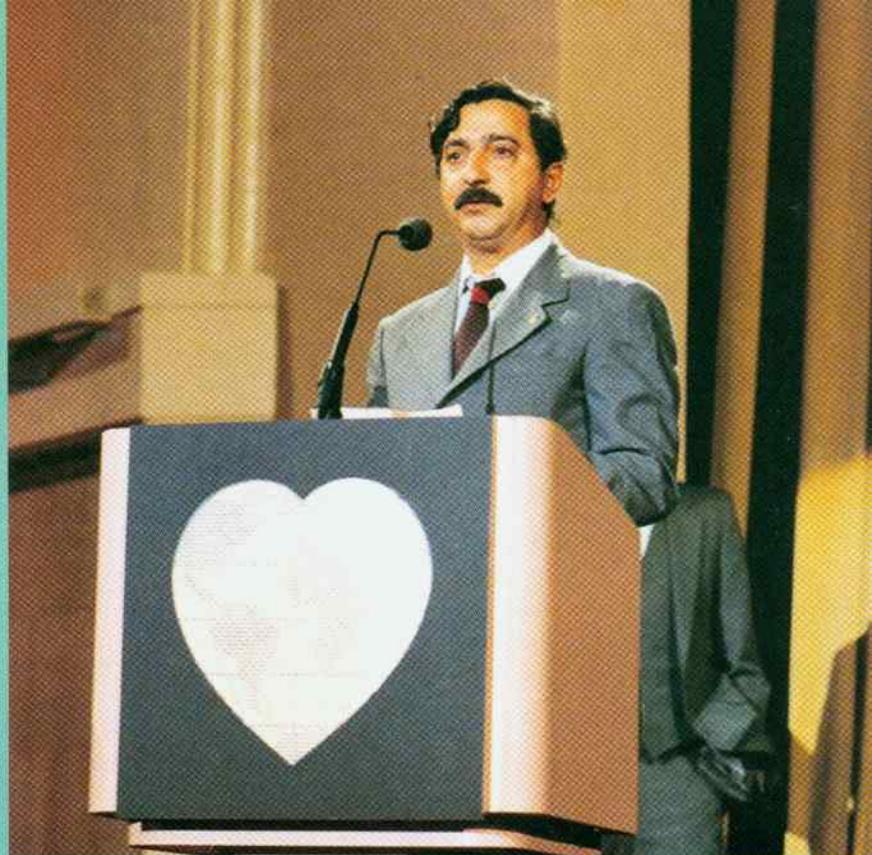


objectives and succeeded in projecting his struggle, the socio-environmental drama of Acre, into the center of Brazilian concerns, under the lens of world public opinion.

Some analysts claimed, after his death, that he had suppressed his "red" commitments by emphasis on "green" discourse. If this criticism were true, Chico would never have been murdered.

The greatness of this tragic death, born of backwardness and nurtured by the *latifundia*, revealed a whole new political agenda to the Brazilians: Amazonia, environmentalism, conservation, sustainable development and biodiversity. It imposed a concern with the environment in the planning of development. It established, where it had not existed before, environmental authority. It mobilized public opinion for the defense of tropical forests. It brought resources and multiplied capacities.

In 1990, there were 18 people who were capable of dealing with the management of moist tropical forests in Brazil. The largest tropical forest country in the world was about to enter the 21st century as a forest illiterate. Most of the Amazon belonged to foreign universities. And vital Brazilian institutions, such as the National Institute for Amazon Research, the Goeldi Museum or the Agrarian Research Center of the Humid Tropics were reduced to penury. This picture has changed. The number of Brazilian researchers in tropical ecology has grown greatly. The profile of the Amazonian non-governmental organizations has also changed, becoming increasingly more technically and scientifically sound. And forester Jorge Viana, once an advisor of Chico's, was in October elected Governor of the state of Acre — by a landslide.



Not that the environmental scenario in Brazil inspires optimism. Far from it. Hostage to an endless economic crisis, prisoner of enormous deficits, unpayable debts and stratospheric interest rates, the Brazilian State is increasingly losing its "governability", its capacity to govern. Economic policies require austerity, privatization of state enterprises, containment of spending and budget cuts. Recession and unemployment grow and resources for social investments diminish. Even less is left over for defense of the environment.

I find myself imagining Chico Mendes' response to these afflictions. What would he say to us now?

Chico pursued, persistently, his own objectives and succeeded in projecting his struggle, the socio-environmental drama of Acre, into the center of Brazilian concerns, under the lens of world public opinion.



Chico with EDF staffers Stephan Schwartzman and Leri Udall at the Inter-American Development Bank annual meeting, March 1987

About the Author:

Ricardo Arnt, author and journalist, winner of the prestigious Maria Moors Cabot award.

Conservation's Human Face

Thomas E. Lovejoy
Smithsonian Institution

The telephone rang that December morning. It was Kathy Phelps, the ardent Venezuelan conservationist, calling from New York: "I am so sorry about your friend," she said. The death of Chico Mendes was one of those events so powerful that one remembers exactly where one was at the moment of receiving the news.

A lot of people learned about Chico Mendes that holiday morning because Marlise Simons and her editors recognized the event for the historic moment it was, so that the story ran on the front page of the *New York Times* — a long way from Acre. And while in one sense it transformed him from the practical, engaged citizen he was into something bordering on an icon, this event had an impact beyond that of many a well known martyr's death. For it put a human face on what to many had previously been but a distant and abstract subject. As a topic, tropical deforestation changed in that moment from something perceived largely as an environmental issue to something that involved actual flesh and blood people. It became forever an example of the challenge of reconciling human activities and the environment.

Nor did the impact stop there. Chico Mendes not only personified the problem, but he also represented what in many senses is the solution, because of his advocacy for what today we

have come to know as extractive reserves. The concept arose quite naturally out of the lives of the *seringueiros* (the rubber tappers) who knew how to make a living from the forest without destroying it.

The designation of larger areas of forest land for this purpose and creating a new type of conservation unit almost certainly would have come to pass through his activities in any event, but without question came faster because of his untimely end.

Today there are nine extractive reserves in the Brazilian Amazon and two in other threatened ecosystems¹, but the story has scarcely begun. It is one thing to designate some forest for such a purpose, it is another to make it work in a world where markets for wild rubber may turn unfavorable, where satellite dishes can tempt younger generations to leave the forest for false glitter and promise elsewhere, or where tempting offers might be made for resources within a reserve by unscrupulous interests. So what has been going on is literally learning by doing.

Three years ago I had the good fortune to accompany Amapá Governor João Alberto Capiberibe ("Capi") on a visit to the Cajari Extractive Reserve up a tributary of the Jari River. It was of course an episode of extraordinary moment to have a visit from the governor and he lingered over his inspection of their progress in the last year. Their main economic activity was harvesting Brazil nuts and we ended up — just about everybody — in the building for processing the nuts. Capi told the group how impressed he was with their progress and congratulated them warmly. The state government would buy some of their output for school lunches in the city of Macapá. But he said, the lesson of Amazon development was that it was a mistake to depend on a single product, so he had talked with the Jari Corporation about providing them with seedlings of fruit and valuable hardwood trees to provide them an additional source of income.

Also, said Capi, we have to provide education. To the older generation he said don't think of this as overwhelming, you will just be learning to put on paper what you say verbally. That way you will be able to negotiate for yourselves. Don't worry, he said, we will find a way to time schooling so as not to interfere with the season of harvest. And, said Capi, as for your children we will teach them more, but don't be afraid: this is so they will be able to do even more for you and the community.



This is a very particular way of making the point that extractive reserves, while simple in concept, are complex in execution and we still have a lot to learn to make them fulfill their promise.

In the meantime, however, the Amazon scene has not stood still. Millions more have come to the region in the last decade; deforestation has continued reaching unprecedented rates in 1995; and of course the juncture of land use and El Niño produced unprecedented fires last year. "Conservation corridors"² have emerged as a possible alternative, but they run at right angles across "development corridors"³. In many senses environment and development are as far from integrated as ever, yet within the larger matrix there are promising elements such as the extractive reserves.

One logical step, of course, is to create more extractive reserves. In addition, however, it is critical to extend the kind of thinking that lies behind the extractive reserve concept to the Amazon as a whole. This is not a proposal to turn the entire basin into an extractive reserve in the legal sense or even the narrow conceptual sense. Rather it represents a need for a basin-wide approach to integrating environment and development into a sustainable existence for those who live there, and that in turn depends on an overall matrix of forest and woody vegetation, with a range of use of the landscape from intensive use to strict protection. Only then will the legacy of Chico Mendes be truly fulfilled.

Notes

1 In addition to the 11 "extractive reserves" created by the Brazilian Institute for Environment (IBAMA), there are 10 "extractive settlement projects" created by the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA). IBAMA has been more active in the areas it created than has INCRA.

2 "Conservation corridors" are contiguous groups of different kinds of protected areas proposed by the Brazilian Government and the World Bank. It is hoped that by planning such groups of areas together, the conservation of animal and plant species, and effective protection of the forest can be maximized.

3 Development, or export, corridors are the government's attempt to direct development by construction of large scale infrastructure works in zones held to be economically attractive.

The death of Chico Mendes was one of those events so powerful that one remembers exactly where one was at the moment of receiving the news.

About the Author:

Thomas E. Lovejoy, biologist, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; awarded the Brazilian government's highest international decoration, the Order of Rio Branco

The Seed of the Forest Germinates in the Cities

Jaime Lerner
Governor of the State of Paraná

On March 22, 1989, as Mayor of the city of Curitiba, in Paraná state, I inaugurated the Chico Mendes Memorial, the first public space dedicated to the memory of the rubber tapper leader, only three months after his murder.

The Memorial is located in the Gutierrez Woods, an area that had been used by the local community for many years, for drinking water from the natural springs there. This area is 36 thousand square meters, with almost 20 thousand covered by native araucária forest. Our memorial in honor of Chico Mendes reproduced a rubber tapper's homestead, similar

to those in the interior of the Amazonian forest, in the center of the city of Curitiba. Its architecture expresses much of what I think about the environment.

In the entryway, a wall was built with six spigots, from which flow water straight from the spring. In this way we increased people's access to the springs, and reinforced the idea that the best way to protect a natural resource may be to use it. In the center we constructed a house and a school, similar in design and material to those in the forest. There are trails from these, like the paths that the rubber tappers use to collect natural rubber latex.

Chico's funeral drew a throng of rubber tappers and activists from across Brazil. Dec. 25, 1988, Xapuri, Acre. Photo by Adrian Cowell





Chico Mendes with NWF International Program Director Barbara Bramble, in the Nova Esperança rubber estate, Xapuri, Acre, 1987. Photo by Stephani Schwartzman

One of these paths, covered with planks made from wooden lighting poles formerly used in the city, leads to the Memorial. A white marble plaque is set into an old retaining wall. On it are sculptured passages of the letter that Chico Mendes sent to the judge in Xapuri 54 days before being assassinated, calling attention to the death threats that he was receiving. This plaque is permanently washed by the abundant water that springs from the woods and symbolizes the hope that the national shame that surrounded the episode of the murder of the rubber tapper leader can be washed away.

To multiply the example of Chico Mendes — so that the seed he planted in the forest grows in our cities. This was the purpose of the Memorial: to show that people can conserve nature by using it, an idea that I have always defended, which was consecrated by the Rio Earth Summit, some years later.

Ten years later, the world has changed. Environmental consequences are increasingly entwined in the country's economic problems, leading in most cases to irreversible damages. But it is in this interdependence between economy and environment that the positive perspectives for the future reside.

Brazil needs to incorporate the principle of sustainability into its development model. We need not continue to live with high social deficits if we have at our disposal a natural capital that

is increasingly valuable for the planet. In this regard, we need to conquer a position of greater respect and autonomy in the globalized world.

The example of Chico Mendes was etched in the memory of our society as the most eminent Brazilian to defend balance between the use of natural resources and the well-being of human populations. The extractive reserves proposal that he elaborated had a positive effect in preventing migration to Amazonian cities. This is also the axis of development that directs my actions as Governor of Paraná: to maintain agricultural populations where they are, and to extend social benefits to them and

ensure their quality of life. This is one reason why we can affirm that Chico Mendes planted roots in the forest that bore fruit in the cities.

What the city of Curitiba did, on March 22, 1989, far from the forest where he lived, transcended the simplicity of the memorial in keeping alight the principle that Chico Mendes embraced in life, and that in death will forever symbolize him: harmony between people and nature.

The example of Chico Mendes was etched in the memory of our society as the most eminent Brazilian to defend balance between the use of natural resources and the well-being of human populations.

About the Author:

Jaime Lerner, architect, Governor of the State of Paraná, Brazil

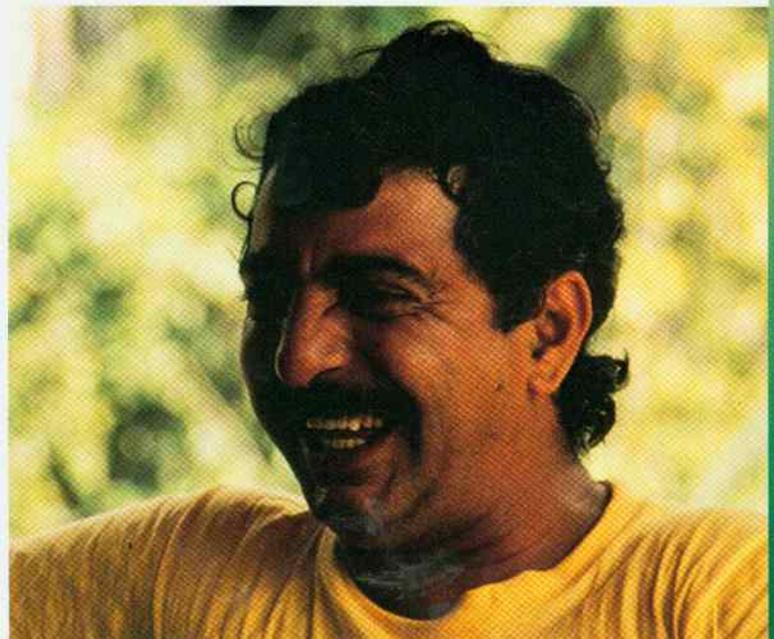


Photo by Adrian Cowell

XIKRIN DO
CATETÉ

KAYAPO
INDIGENOUS
AREA

Landsat pathfinder — 07/1692.
Xikrin do Cateté and Kayapo
Indigenous Areas, and gold
boom town Tucumã, Pará state.
Demarcation of Indian lands halts
the cattle ranching frontier.

KEY:

Light blue = deforestation

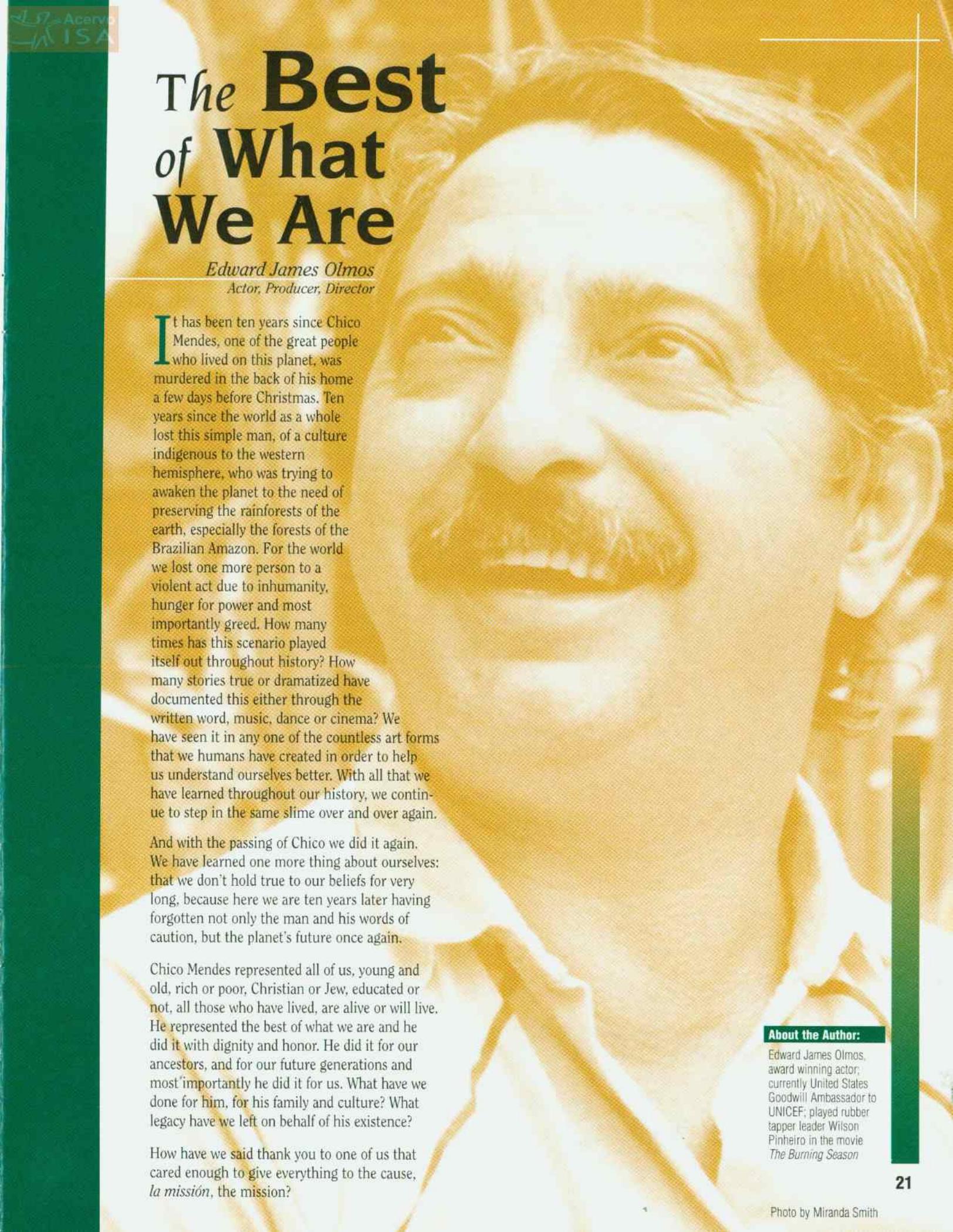
Red = dense forest

Dark blue = rocky outcrops, tropical savanna

(Cattle ranches are rectangular cleared areas. Within the Indigenous Areas, forest cover continues intact, in spite of selective logging and gold mining. The three ranches in the Xikrin area were seized by the Indians and clearing stopped.)

“My dream is to see this entire forest conserved because we know that it can guarantee the future of all the people who live in it ... If a messenger from the sky came down and guaranteed me that my death would strengthen our struggle, it would even be worth it. But experience teaches the contrary. It is not with big funerals and public declarations that the Amazon will be saved. I want to live.”

*— Chico Mendes,
December 9, 1988
(published posthumously,
Jornal do Brasil)*



The Best of What We Are

Edward James Olmos
Actor, Producer, Director

It has been ten years since Chico Mendes, one of the great people who lived on this planet, was murdered in the back of his home a few days before Christmas. Ten years since the world as a whole lost this simple man, of a culture indigenous to the western hemisphere, who was trying to awaken the planet to the need of preserving the rainforests of the earth, especially the forests of the Brazilian Amazon. For the world we lost one more person to a violent act due to inhumanity, hunger for power and most importantly greed. How many times has this scenario played itself out throughout history? How many stories true or dramatized have documented this either through the written word, music, dance or cinema? We have seen it in any one of the countless art forms that we humans have created in order to help us understand ourselves better. With all that we have learned throughout our history, we continue to step in the same slime over and over again.

And with the passing of Chico we did it again. We have learned one more thing about ourselves: that we don't hold true to our beliefs for very long, because here we are ten years later having forgotten not only the man and his words of caution, but the planet's future once again.

Chico Mendes represented all of us, young and old, rich or poor, Christian or Jew, educated or not, all those who have lived, are alive or will live. He represented the best of what we are and he did it with dignity and honor. He did it for our ancestors, and for our future generations and most importantly he did it for us. What have we done for him, for his family and culture? What legacy have we left on behalf of his existence?

How have we said thank you to one of us that cared enough to give everything to the cause, *la misión*, the mission?

About the Author:

Edward James Olmos, award winning actor; currently United States Goodwill Ambassador to UNICEF; played rubber tapper leader Wilson Pinheiro in the movie *The Burning Season*

Amazon Past *and* Future

Marina Silva
Senator (Workers' Party, Acre)

TEN YEARS IN THE AMAZON

In the last ten years, the Amazon has changed in important ways. The consciousness, behavior and commitment to defense of the forest, once restricted to the semi-utopian movement of the rubber tappers, the indigenous communities and the NGOs has become part of the thinking and the desires of ordinary people who live in the Amazon.

In the recent electoral campaign in Acre we did an opinion poll among the poor and very poor. When asked what kind of development people wanted for the state, 75% said that they wanted development without destruction of the forest. Ten years ago, people wanted roads, ranches, progress, anything that looked like São Paulo or Rio Janeiro — anything but the forest.

Peoples' attitudes have changed and this has translated into political action. There is a Governor Capiberibe¹ in Amapá, a mayor of the capital of Pará state², a candidate even in Amazonas state who won a surprisingly large vote³, all of whom are identified with the new thinking. In Acre, where this struggle began, we have the Governor, two senators and thus the possibility of putting our policies into practice.

We also have put environment, and the development of the Amazon without destruction, on the federal government agenda and in national public opinion. The government's discourse on these issues is part of our political capital. This is not just to the credit of the movement in Brazil, but also to the struggle of environmentalists around the world.

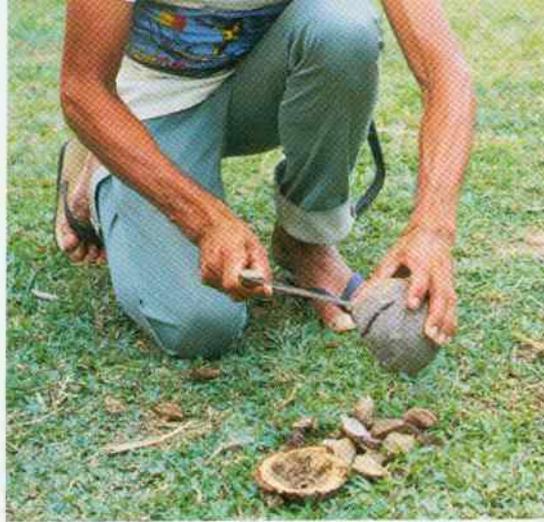
These new attitudes and behavior reflect new ways of doing things in the Amazon. There are now organized communities attempting to create sustainable resource management. There are new concepts, such as agroforestry, management of lakes, projects aimed at agro-industry, perennial crops adapted to the region. These many fragmented experiments are another kind of capital, which we can transform into public policy for the Amazon.

CHICO MENDES AND THE ROOTS OF CHANGE

Chico Mendes made an enormous contribution to these changes, politically, ideologically and conceptually. Chico became a symbol — a reference point for these ideas in all of Brazil and particularly in the Amazon.

But there are two underlying processes that form the context of Chico's work. One is that when the extractive economy, based for decades in rudimentary extraction of rubber and Brazil nuts, fell into decay and collapsed in the 1960's, it was replaced by a plan for the Amazon that the military government represented as the redemption of the region. People thought the Amazon would become another São Paulo. But large cattle projects, timber and mining failed to offer solutions to the problems that most people were living. A small minority benefited, but the benefits were not even invested in the region, since they had their fortunes in the center-south of the country. Whereas the extractive economy had incorporated the whole labor force of the Amazon, the new phase was much less labor-intensive. People began to see that in practice, the natural resource base that had sustained them was being destroyed and at the same time they continued on the margins of history.

The other factor is the emergence of socio-environmental proposals — and most importantly the idea that it is possible to do resource-based sustainable development, that the forest is our goose that laid the golden egg, that it can be used rationally for the benefit of the population. The people who live there know that the forest is a mystery. Everyone who lives in the Amazon thinks that the forest is something fabulous,



a box of miraculous secrets that could explode at any moment. People feel this, so when someone else says that it is so, they believe that something great can come from the forest that can benefit everyone without having to destroy it.

The reality of the Amazon is still harsh. The rubber tappers, indigenous peoples and the extractivist population continue to lead a precarious existence, without services, without decent incomes to support their families. The difference between now and when Chico was alive is that then, many of these groups were not even sure they would have a place to live in the forest. Now they do.

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

The next ten years will depend on the capital — political, social, cultural and economic — that we have accumulated and are building now. The global crisis through which we are living affects everything. But I am optimistic about the prospects for the idea of development, growth, and human potential with respect for

Everyone who lives in the Amazon thinks that the forest is something fabulous, a box of miraculous secrets that could explode at any moment.



Rubber tapper and union leader Luis Targino with ball of smoked rubber. Rubber latex was poured over a pole rotated by hand, above a smoky fire to cure the rubber. New processing techniques avoid the laborious, unhealthy process. Photo by Barbara Bramble



Rubber tapper union meeting. Novo Aripuanã, Amazonas state. Community organization is central to creating extractive reserves. Photo by Stephan Schwartzman.

the environment and for nature. These ideas no longer belong only to scientists or to a minority — they have become part of the concerns of a broader public. I think that Jorge Viana, Governor-elect of Acre, Capiberibe, the Governor of Amapa and other forces that will emerge in other Amazon states, can do exactly what needs to be done so that those who are betting on soybeans, timber extraction or the gold rush will begin to grasp that they are going against the current of history.

EXTRACTIVE RESERVES

I think that the extractive reserves will have a privileged place in the future of the Amazon,

because they combine preservation with management by traditional populations. But the extractive reserves are also our greatest challenge. The extractive reserve, beyond being a laboratory, is a point of reference. It is a place where all of us who helped Chico and believe in these ideas, have an obligation to show that an area of preservation can be compatible with resource management by a traditional population. The reserves have established their first benchmark, which was their demarcation. Today we face

the challenge of making the reserves a model for other kinds of productive activities that can demonstrate environmental protection, produce a reasonable income for extractivists, and help them preserve their cultural heritage.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

People who support sustainable development know that it is not a challenge for any single nation. It is a challenge for humanity and so must be shared among us.

The idea of partnership is a necessary part of thinking about the future of the Amazon. We cannot fix the past. The developed countries did not have the understanding that we now



Rubber tappers in Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve prepare manioc roots to make staple food, manioc flour. Most rubber tappers plant gardens; planting is permitted in extractive reserves for family consumption.

have while they were developing. But today we have learned that their way is not the right way. So developed and developing countries have to be partners in creating a new path. The natural capital that humanity still has is in a sense in our hands, but those who have accumulated economic capital can also help build a new path.

Partnerships also created an international climate of opinion that put environmental issues, the Amazon, Chico Mendes, and all of the questions on which we work, on the agenda.

Partnership in terms of technical cooperation, and support, which is still incipient in relation to the challenges we face, is also important. International partnerships need to be made stronger, and even put on a more just basis.

REMEMBERING CHICO

I remember when I used to walk with Chico through ranches and areas of scrub regrowth. There were all kinds of noxious weeds and it was very uncomfortable. There were briars and thorn bushes and burrs that would stick to us, and we would go through these things and com-

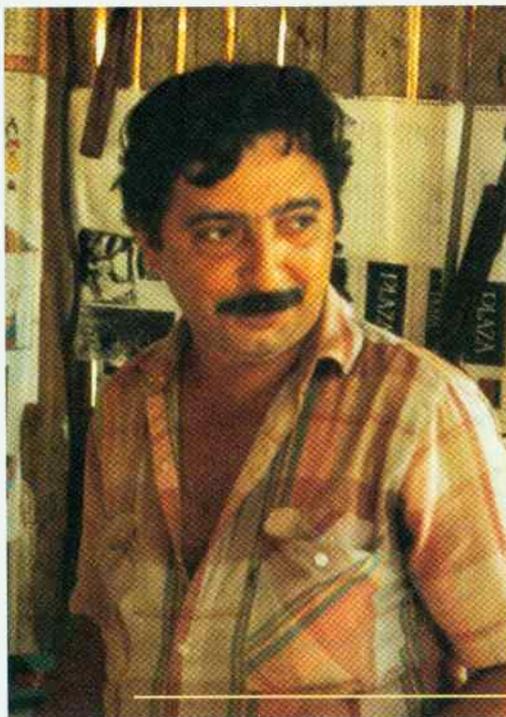


Chico Mendes greets union members coming to Xapuri for demonstration, 1987

plain about it. Then we would get into the virgin forest, and Chico with that big fat stomach of his would say, "Boy! When I come in here it's like taking a bath!" This is something that everybody feels, when you go through that scrub and see all that confusion, it is as though some kind of plague created all those noxious weeds, where there once was gallery forest, there were various species of hardwoods, different kinds of game animals, and birds.

A memory that I have of Chico, that other people do too, is of him moving through the forest and at the same time being very connected with various other people across the whole world. It's as if he carried with him the concern of the other people who also concerned themselves with the forest.

People who support sustainable development know that it is not a challenge for any single nation. It is a challenge for humanity and so must be shared among us.



Notes

- 1 [Editor's Note] João Alberto Capiberibe, of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), was elected governor of Amapá state in 1994 and reelected in 1998. He ran, and has governed, on the basis of a program emphasizing sustainable development, environmental protection, and social equity.
- 2 [Editor's Note] Edmilson, the mayor of Belem, of the Workers' Party (PT).
- 3 [Editor's Note] Marcos Barros, the Workers' Party (PT) candidate for Senator in conservative Amazonas state won a far larger vote than expected.

About the Author:

Marina Silva, rubber tapper, co-founder of the union movement in Acre with Chico Mendes, Goldman Environmental Award winner; Senator from Acre

A Citizen of the Amazon

Daniel C. Nepstad and George M. Woodwell
Woods Hole Research Center



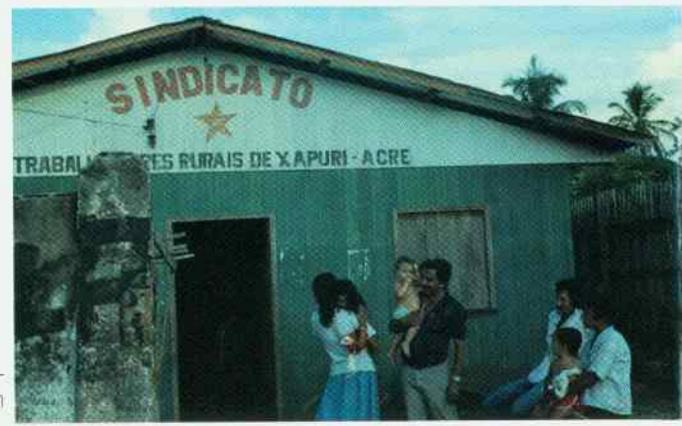
Deforestation in Rondonia state. Photo by NASA Goddard Space Flight Center

The acrid smoke of smoldering rainforest hung in the early-morning air as we climbed into the rickety single-prop plane in the southeastern corner of the world's largest tropical forest. Within minutes we were airborne, crisscrossing the landscape and sampling the vegetation below with our eyes. Four hours and 500 miles later, we returned to the airstrip, sweating and stunned. Half of the forest we viewed from above had been scorched by fire in recent months. In this tiny corner of Amazonia, at least three thousand square miles of forest were singed by fires that had escaped from cattle pastures and agricultural fields...

— September 22, 1998

Amazonia is the world's last great tropical forest frontier. Tragically, people in search of sustenance and wealth are transforming the riches of this vast ecosystem into sickly cattle pasture, ephemeral crop fields, and ash, destroying indigenous cultures as they push deeper into the heart of the region. There is nothing new or surprising about this reckless, wasteful, violent occupation of this rainforest. It is the highly predictable pattern by which modern humans have occupied the great forest frontiers of the world, from the eastern deciduous forests of North America, to the rainforests of western Africa, to the Atlantic Coastal forest of Brazil.

But the stakes are higher in Amazonia than in the world's previous spasms of forest destruction. They are higher because of the sheer magnitude of the ecosystem and the forces that are consuming it. Ten Costa Ricas of Amazon forest have already been replaced by cattle pastures and scrub forests. Each year, a forest area the size of Massachusetts is clear-cut and burned in Amazonia, releasing 5% of the world population's emissions of carbon to the atmosphere, and greatly reducing the amount of water vapor released through evaporation that feeds the region's rain clouds. The destruction of this forest may be large enough to change the climate of the Amazon and of the world.



Headquarters of the Xapuri Rural Workers Union — Chico with his family. Photo by Stephan Schwartzman

And yet, our own studies have recently discovered that satellite-based estimates of deforestation are detecting only about half of the forest area that is impoverished each year. For every hectare of forest that is clear-cut, loggers and fire severely degrade an additional hectare of standing forest, beyond the view of current deforestation monitoring programs. And when El Niño releases its fury upon the world's climatic system, parching the rainforests of Amazonia, the stakes grow still higher.

As we commemorate the tenth anniversary of Chico Mendes' assassination, more than ten percent of Amazonia's remaining rainforests are precariously dry. Half a million square kilometers of Amazonian forests, normally too wet to burn and containing trees that have seen 1000-2000 years of such an environment, are suddenly, as a result of human activities, vulnerable to fire.



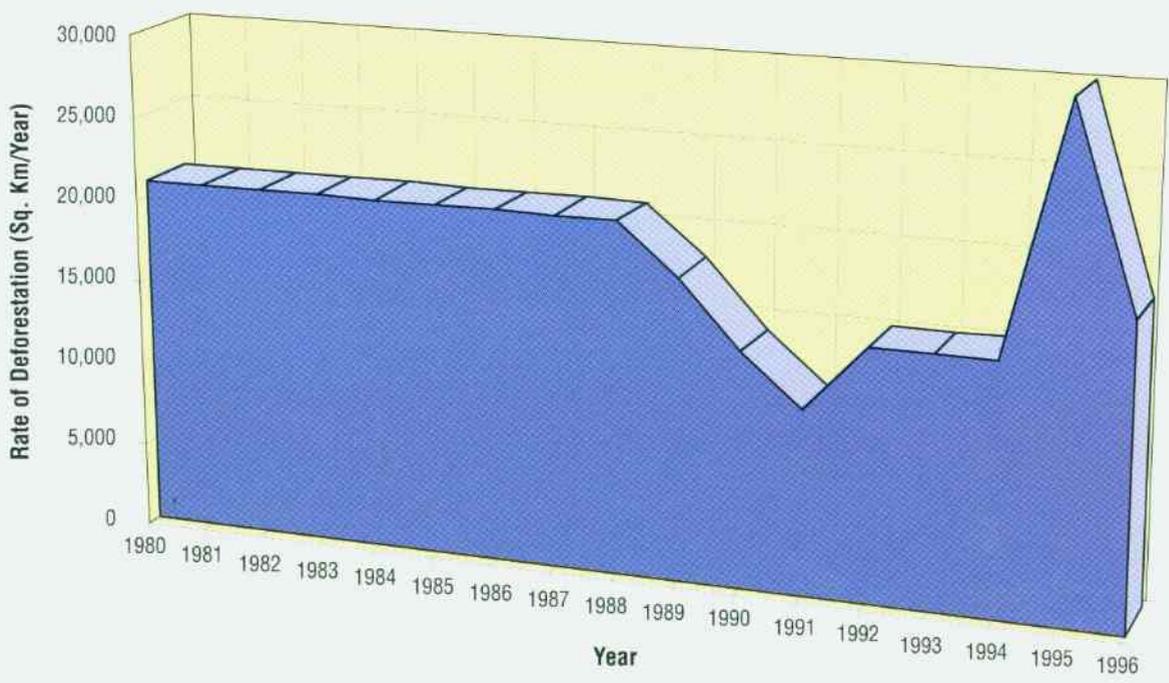
The Amazon chapter of the human assault on the world's forests is distinctive for another important reason. While the destruction is pursued in the name of economic development, the effect is biotic, and economic, impoverishment. There is time and ample knowledge, experience — and reason — to deflect such a self-destructive path.

In one perspective there is a race between the expanding influence of loggers, ranchers and other miners of the landscape and its forest wealth, and the emergence of a government competent to defend society's broader interests in preserving a landscape that functions in support of all.

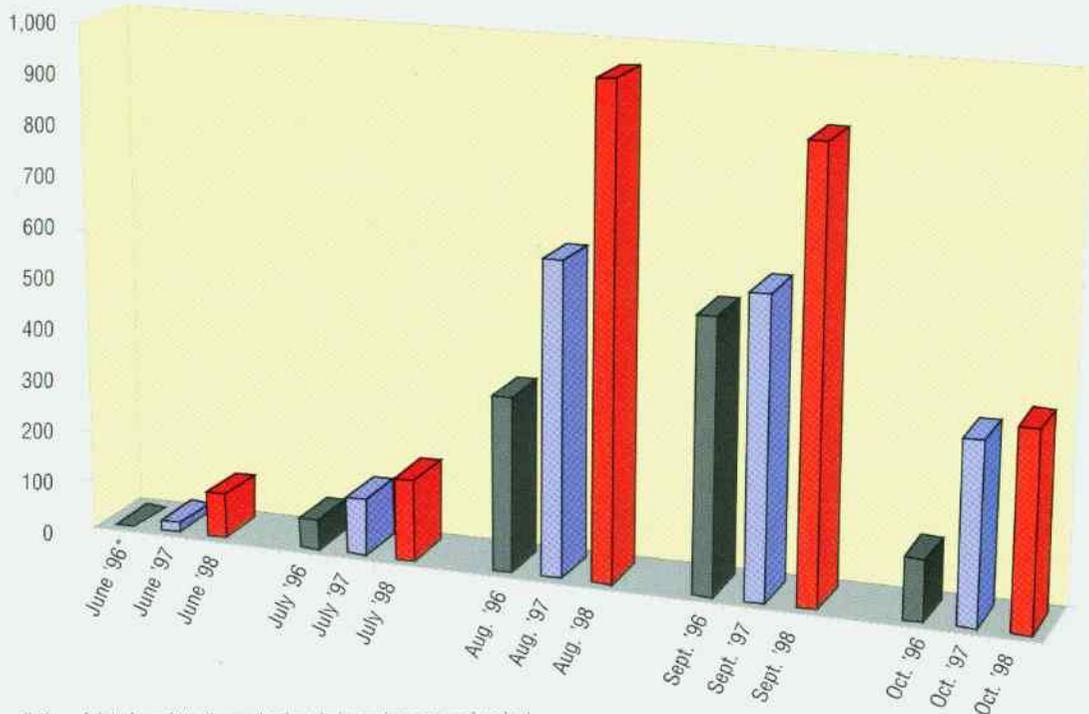
It is a race between the frenzied greed so common at the frontier and the emergence of an Amazonian citizenry that understands the full magnitude of the region's environmental and social problems and that is willing to act jointly in advancing solutions.

Each year, a forest area the size of Massachusetts is clear-cut and burned in Amazonia.

**National Institute of Space Research, Brazil (INPE)
1990-1996 Annual Average Rate
Deforestation slowed in late 1980's, but surged in the 1990's**



Average Number of Fires Per Day in Brazilian Amazon: NOAA 12 Satellite June-October, 1996, 1997 and 1998



* No data

Source: EDF compilation of data from http://www.dsa.inpe.br/users/mapas_queimadas/

It is a race to prevent human history from repeating itself endlessly. There is still time to replace the reckless exploitation of forest resources with a development model that allows agricultural intensification within a contained frontier, and which gives the region's traditional forest residents the rights and the means to continue their forest-based livelihoods.

Chico Mendes was willing to invest his life in a vision of Amazonia that deviates sharply from history. His vision, synthesized in the extractive reserve, embraced the traditional residents of Amazonia — indigenous tribes, rubber tappers, *caboclos*¹, *ribeirinhos*² — that occupy half of the region's forests and have used them for centuries. Given the rights and the means to remain in their forests, as the extractive reserve proposes, these people are the social capital that is necessary to defend the highly vulnerable rainforests of Amazonia from the final destruction wreaked by loggers and ranchers. His vision embraced the ecological vocation of Amazonia as a forested ecosystem that supports life abundantly, and that can support human life indefinitely through management and utilization systems that are adapted to the local biota, and that respect the limited capacity of the forest to endure stress and impoverish-

ment. He marked the emergence of an Amazonian citizenry that is devoted to the task of changing history, by standing up to the region's prevalent economic and political forces in defense of an Amazonia that is forested and habitable and enduring. His insight was local, but it was accurate. And, although he did not know it, the lesson he tried to teach his fellow citizens applied to the world.

Is the world going to hear it? Or hearing, heed?

Notes

¹ *Caboclos* are the descendants of original indigenous populations of the Amazon who have become acculturated to the regional society.

² *Ribeirinhos* are the fishing communities that live by the riversides.

Smoke cloud from burning forest, Rondonia state. Photo by NASA Goddard Space Flight Center



About the Authors:

Daniel C. Nepstad, biologist, Associate Scientist, Woods Hole Research Center; founder of the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM) in Brazil

George M. Woodwell, ecologist, founder and director of the Woods Hole Research Center, member of the National Academy of Sciences

Amazon

Area of Amazon Basin	2.8 million square miles (7.3 million square kilometers)
Area of Amazon in Brazil	1.9 million square miles (70% of the basin) (5 million square kilometers)
Area of Amazon originally forested in Brazil	1.5 million square miles (4 million square kilometers)
Area of Brazil	3.3 million square miles (8.5 million square kilometers)
Population of Brazilian Amazon	157 million
Population of Amazon	17.5 million (11% of total)
Amazon population in urban areas	60%
Inhabitants in rural areas per square kilometer	1.4
Water discharged by Amazon river	6.2 million cubic feet per second
Water discharged by the Mississippi	0.6 million cubic feet per second
Number of known fish species in the Amazon river	2000
Number of known fish species in the Mississippi - Missouri	260
Number of bird species in the United States	650
Number of bird species in the Amazon	2,700
Area of Indigenous reserves in the Brazilian Amazon	380,000 square miles (20% of the Amazon; twice the size of California)
Area of all parks and strict protection areas	121,000 square miles (6% of the Amazon)

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon (square kilometers*)

	1978	1988	1996
	152,200	377,500	517,069
	3.8% of total forested area	9.4 %	12.9%

*1 square kilometer = .3861 square miles
 *1 hectare = 2.471 acres



Brazil

- National Capital
- City
- International Boundary
- State / Territory Boundary
- Para State / Territory Name
- 400 km
- 0 400 Miles
- Brazilian Amazon
- Non-Amazon Brazil
- Neighboring Countries

"The prospects for our movement have gotten much better. All that we've achieved over the last 15 years is just a drop in the ocean ... but we've taken the first steps and we are optimistic about the future ... We are demanding that the government expropriate more areas ... with big concentrations of rubber and Brazil nut trees, areas rich with valuable hardwoods, areas threatened with burning ... We believe it's not enough to create a few isolated extractive reserves surrounded by pasture. The government has to expropriate many more areas where rubber tappers live and where there are conflicts over land."

— Chico Mendes

Fight for the Forest: Chico Mendes in His Own Words,
Latin America Bureau, 1989

The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and National Wildlife Federation (NWF) work in partnership with local and national citizens' organizations around the world to defend endangered forests and the rights of forest peoples.

In honor of the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Chico Mendes, EDF, in collaboration with the National Council of Rubber Tappers, is launching an international campaign for the creation of new extractive reserves in the Brazilian Amazon.

To join the campaign check our website - <http://www.edf.org>, or contact:

Julene Freitas — Program Associate
Environmental Defense Fund
5655 College Ave., Ste. 304
Oakland, CA 94618
Tel: 510/658-8008
Fax: 510/658-0630
email: jfreitas@edf.org

To make a direct donation to continuing the work of Chico Mendes in the Amazon, give to: **The Chico Mendes Fund** at the National Wildlife Federation*.

For more information about our organizations, contact:

National Wildlife Federation
1400 16th St. N.W.
Washington D.C. 20036
www.nwf.org



Environmental Defense Fund
Capital Office
1875 Connecticut Ave. N.W.
Washington D.C. 20009
www.edf.org



* Make checks payable to the National Wildlife Federation; please indicate "in memory of Chico Mendes" in the memo line.