

MINING COMPANIES ON INDIGENOUS LANDS IN BRAZIL

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- (Folha de São Paulo, 22 April 1986)

There are some 537 claims conceded for mineral research in indigenous areas of the Brazilian Amazon and 1,732 requests for research in process: this is the result of a survey done on official data of the National Department of Mineral Production (DNPM) by a team of anthropologists and geologists of CEDI (the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information, in São Paulo) and CONAGE (the National Coordination of Geologists). The complete dossier of the situation was delivered on 15 April to the Ministers of the Interior and of Mines and Energy by the National Coordinator of the Union of Indian Nations (UNI), the President of CONAGE, and the President of the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA), and the Secretary General of the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI).

The dossier reveals the following data: 77 indigenous areas out of 302 in Amazonia are affected in 34% of their total extent by the conceded claims and by the requests in process. The indigenous lands of the states of Pará and Rondonia are the most affected. The Upper Rio Negro and the Yanomami area (Roraima) are almost totally requested.

Mining in indigenous areas was the object of a decree in the Figueiredo government (no. 88.985, of 1983). The Attorney General of the Republic, representing indigenous leaders, argued that the decree was unconstitutional and the process is currently in the Federal Supreme Court. Independently of the question of its unconstitutionality, the decree could not be applied without being regularized by FUNAI, which never took place. The conceded claims are therefore illegal. Even more: the decree provides for research authorization and labor concession to state companies, and only for strategic minerals. Only in exceptional cases could these be conceded to national private companies. Yet, the CEDI/CONAGE dossier shows that only 10% of the claims were conceded to state groups; 50% favored private national groups, and 40% multinationals.

Research claims were deferred, above all, between 1980 and 1985. The dossié, which covers this period, shows a peak in 1985, and particularly in the second half of that year: 160 claims were conceded in this period, after the Minister of Mines and Energy had delegated powers of concession to the General Director of the DNPM.

The UNI-CONAGE-CIMI-ABA delegation requested that the Minister of Mines and Energy revoke the conceded claims and that he and the Minister of the Interior together investigate the parties responsible for them. The delegation also requested that decree 88.985 of 1983, which allows for mining in indigenous areas, be revoked.

The results of the dossié surprised the ministers, who had promised in September of 1985 not to concede claims in indigenous areas, this despite the fact that at the time the Minister of Mines and Energy Aureliano Chaves, supported the continued consideration of 127 requests for mineral research. Aureliano Chaves promised to verify the information with the Minister of the Interior and to revoke the claims made in adequately described indigenous areas. It is worth pointing out that 30% of the indigenous areas in which there are claims and mineral research requests are demarcated lands, with federal decrees; 59% occur on lands described by FUNAI memoranda, but whose demarcation is in process and suffering considerable delays. We express our concern to the Minister of Mines and Energy that the greed for mineral resources in Amazonia will obstruct even more the already slow decision-making process of demarcation. Besides that, 10% of the requests and claims occur on lands of uncontacted Indians. The fact of not being described by FUNAI does not take away the rights of these Indians to their lands: such rights are guaranteed by the Constitution and are independent of demarcation, according to what is stated in the Statute of the Indian. Any additional delays in the demarcation of indigenous lands will only increase the possibility of conflicts and irreversible damage.

As for mining companies, an appeal and a warning: Amazonia is a very large area, with indigenous lands occupying only 15% of the total area. Do your research in the other 85% and avoid being historically responsible for the extermination of the few Indians that remain out of the 6 million that were here at the time of the discovery of Brazil. The warning is relevant to the historical moment in which

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we are living, in preparing for a new Constitution, with the mobilization of civil society concentrating on the formulation of more just principles of living together in this country.

The question of mining points out once again the urgent need for political willingness on the part of the government to adequately demarcate indigenous lands: as President Sarney stated in a recent speech, there is no need for Brazil to maintain an international image of a country that mistreats its older brothers, the Indians.

(transl.: R.M. Wright, CEDI)

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Mining firms rush into Amazon Indian reserves

From Jan Rocha
in Sao Paulo, Brazil

A third of the entire area occupied by 77 Indian reserves in the greater Amazon basin has been requisitioned by mining companies, both Brazilian and transnational, for prospecting purposes.

The rush to get at the Amazon forest's hidden wealth began after the chance discovery of the giant Carajas mineral field a few years ago. Similar two billion-year-old rock formations were found to exist in other parts of the Amazon.

Carajas, developed with European and Japanese investment, now exports mainly iron ore. But the interest in the rest of the Amazon is in gold and oil.

The revelations about the activities of the mining companies has come from two Brazilian non-governmental organisations, the National Association of Geologists, and anthropologists working for an ecumenical documentation centre, CEDI, both based in Sao Paulo.

After months of research they have published a 60-page dossier based entirely on official data, which lists 537 concessions for prospecting already granted, and another 1,732 applied for. Some 40 per cent of the companies are transnational. They include Brascan, British Petroleum, Shell, General Electric, and Rhodia.

The total of prospecting rights already granted and those applied for covers an area of 17 million hectares out of the 52 million occupied by the 77 Indian reserves. Among the tribes affected are the Tucano, Waimiri-Atroari, Yanomami Arara and the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau and many others.

Most of Brazil's estimated 200,000 Indians live in the Amazon basin region, at various stages of contact.

The concessions are concentrated in four main areas — the upper river Negro, in the north-west, the northern territory of Roraima, the western state of Rondonia, and the Caraja area itself in the east.