

# Tales from the Planet

Fifth Estate Collective

1988

**For over five years, villagers in Portugal** have been battling the mass planting of eucalyptus trees, a “quick money,” fast-growing, drought resistant tree which, according to its advocates, provides a good light fuel and prevents soil erosion.

In reality, the eucalyptus planting is truly life-threatening for what remains of Portugal’s small farming communities. The tree, which drives its roots deep into the ground, robs the villages of their already meager water supplies, quickly drying up the wells and small streams.

In the course of its rapid growth, it robs the ground vegetation of water as well; the earth beneath the tall crowns is void of other plant life, and as a result, soil erosion and silting of rivers and streams follows.

Eucalyptus has become an established cash crop for Portugal. The financial forces behind the planting are the Portuguese government, conservative economists, the paper pulp industry and the World Bank (a financier of some of the planting projects). Economists claim that the growing paper pulp industry provides jobs with higher than average salaries, and they suggest that paper pulp exports could help reduce Portugal’s huge trade deficit and foreign debt.

But in actuality this big business drive further threatens rural subsistence, forcing more and more workers to the cities and to France, W. Germany and Holland, countries to which rural families have been flocking for several decades now in search of jobs.

Aside from robbing the land of its water, such a monoculture has other adverse side effects; the planters use dangerous fertilizers and pesticides thus contaminating the remaining water supplies, the soil and the air. One of the most immediate threats to farmers and villagers in this cash crop process is fire.

According to a small agricultural project, the “Colectivo Zahack” in Coimbra, Poi-tugal, “fires are not in contradiction to the interests of the eucalyptus factories.” On the contrary, they are a useful tool and they are started regularly, and often by arsonists in the pay of the pulp companies so that the land can be cleared of other less profitable, slower growing trees and vegetation and made ready for the eucalyptus seedlings.

Since 1974, half of Portugal’s pine trees have been destroyed by fire. Entire villages have been burned down and many people have been killed. Farmers are then forced to sell their scorched fields to the paper companies in order to survive.

Many have no other option than to leave for the cities or for Portuguese communities in other countries. But farmers and villagers have been opposing the mass plantings in whatever ways they can, often by tearing the new seedlings out of the ground as soon as the companies plant them, as well as by cooperatively staffing fire stations in an effort to catch the fires before they spread.

The Colectivo Zahack is trying to continue its organic farming project in the midst of this crisis and has put out a flyer asking for support from concerned people in other parts of the world. They need donations to help them reforest the land with mixed vegetation and fruit orchards, and to help them organize around the clock fire stations.

They are also in need of building tools and materials,' and they invite interested people (especially those with building and agricultural skills, and knowledge of solar and wind energy) to visit their collective and to take part in the project. But they advise visitors to be prepared for very simple accommodations; they are far from the nearest village and there is no phone or electricity.

Those wishing to make a financial contribution should write first and ask for their account number. For more information, write: Colectivo Zahack, apartado 6059, 3000 Coimbra, Portugal.

**On May 28<sup>th</sup> this year the *Yomiuri*,** a major Japanese daily, reported a rather curious incident from the rural area of Kumamoto in southern Japan. Farmers had been complaining of crop damage caused by wild monkeys, prompting the local agricultural co-op to begin capturing and caging the animals. On the night of May 26<sup>th</sup>, the cooperative's headquarters were infiltrated and about thirty of the monkeys were liberated. In addition, the letters ALF were spray-painted on a nearby wall. Although the incident was generally believed to be the work of an unknown animal protection group (Animal Liberation Front), the *Yomiuri* stated that ALF stands for the "Arab Liberation Front."

This ridiculous assertion on the part of the Japanese media is not surprising given the current anti-terrorist hysteria in Japan (and elsewhere!). Since last November's arrest of Osamu Maruoka, a leading figure in the Japanese Red Army, there have been more than 260 domiciliary searches of Japanese activists. Yet the identity of these activists and the police confiscation lists indicate that few of these raids have uncovered evidence linking these activists to the Red Army. It appears that the police had targeted the general radical community for harassment, including prisoner support and anti-capital punishment groups, anti-nuke activists, and anti-"emperor system" groups.

One reason for this upsurge in police harassment, the one usually given by government spokesmen, was the Olympic games hosted by Japan's neighbor, Korea. The Japanese authorities want to display a "responsible attitude" towards the defence against anti-Olympic "terrorist" actions. But a few of those familiar with the culture and politics of modern Japan see another motivation for the crackdown. It concerns "X-day"—the day of the emperor's death. This aspect of Japanese politics is rarely mentioned in the Western press, but many activists there feel that X-day will have a significant impact on the political and cultural life.

1988 marks the sixty-second year of the Showa period in Japanese history, meaning that the present emperor, Hirohito, has been head of the Japanese royal family since 1926. This period represents the consolidation and domination of politics by the militaristic right-wing (up to 1945) in conjunction with rapid industrialization and economic expansion. In addition, the Showa period represents the "synchronization" of Japanese cultural identity symbolized by the emperor and his family. In this way, the ideology of the Japanese nation as one big family, the emperor's family, was grafted onto the politically pragmatic movements to centralize and standardize the language and educational structure. But while the military-industrial clique which governed Imperial Japan on the political level was supposedly destroyed after its defeat in WW2, on the cultural level, the "emperor system" was preserved. The emperor system served to symbolize Japanese cultural integration and was maintained as a centralizing and unifying force directing the development of a new post-war Japan.

It is important to understand that the role of the emperor system in Japanese cultural and political life is significantly different from that played by the remnants of the royal families in Western Europe. Hirohito is seen as being more than merely the secular arm of the first estate, the church. Theoretically, the emperor is the god in Japan's predominant religion, and the emperor system is one estate representing the entire nation. Thus, the 'conservative elements in Japan fear that X-day will usher in a period of instability which radical activists will seek to exploit. Now that Japan has clawed its way to the top of the heap, the authorities are using the spectre of "international terrorism" as the pretext for harassing and disrupting domestic anti-authoritarian and leftist organizations.

In this context, the *Yomiuri's* ridiculous misinterpretation of ALF is a bit more comprehensible. Perhaps those wishing to visit Japan will find themselves unable to receive visas due to their affiliation with radical terrorist organizations such as CARD (Committee for Arabian Revolutionary Defense), NAACP (National Association of Arabian Communist Parties) or even the notorious PTA (Palestinian Terrorist Association)!?

**As government and corporate interests continue** to exploit and develop the Amazon rainforest, countless native peoples are threatened with extinction. Their cultures are rapidly being destroyed by the overwhelming trauma

of contact with civilization. Indians are being killed by prospectors and timber merchants and are constantly being exposed to diseases they have no immunity to.

The Yanomani, one of Latin America's largest forest tribes, have an estimated population of 20,000 with 9,000 living in Brazilian territory and the rest in Venezuela. Due to a major gold rush in the area, the Yanomani are being surrounded on all sides and are truly facing genocide. Since last December, the number of gold prospectors has jumped from 2,000 to 15,000 and, in spite of the fact that prospecting in Yanomani territory is illegal in Brazil, the government claims it is powerless to control such a massive influx of people. As a result, the Yanomani are periodically killed by miners and prospectors.

Last August the Brazilian government's national office of Indian affairs (FUNAI), expelled missionaries who work in the northern territory of Roraima and who have apparently been protecting the Indians from national and business interests. The missionaries were accused of organizing the Indians into gangs to attack the prospectors. The expulsion came after 4 Yanomani were killed by prospectors who claimed that the Indians ambushed them. The missionaries maintain that the prospectors fired on the Indians after they demanded the miners leave their land.

Brazil's National Security Council has now decided to establish military bases along the Yanomani territory border which Indian supporters claim will only serve to further encroach on their land claims and expose them to continued "acculturation."

Last February two Kaiapo Indians accompanied by an American anthropologist, who has worked among them for eleven years, visited the World Bank in Washington to complain about the destruction of the rainforest, the pollution of the rivers, the construction of dams and the total disregard for the rights of the region's native peoples. The visit has complicated the Brazilian government's receipt of a \$500 million World Bank loan which would permit the construction of two large dams on the Xingo River, which would have devastating effects on the Kaiapo lands.

The Brazilian government has since retaliated against the Indians and the anthropologist by prosecuting all three under a law which applies only to foreigners—a move which clearly spells out the state's disdain for its native citizens; the statute bars "aliens" from interfering in Brazil's domestic affairs. The ludicrous charges have sparked new debate on Indian rights and set off protests by environmental and human rights groups in Brazil and the U.S. which continue to argue that development projects, many funded by foreign loans, are responsible for the decimation of numerous native tribes in the region.

The Kaiapo (a tribe of close to 9,000 people) staged a large protest for October 14, when one of the accused Kaiapo, Kube-i, the son of the Kaiapo chief, appeared in court. Several hundred warriors from his village and a dozen other Kaiapo villages accompanied him on the 15-hour journey to the court in Belem to dance and protest outside during the proceedings.

Last March 28 a timber merchant's strongmen attacked a group of unarmed Ticuna Indians. They shot and killed at least fourteen Indians, including some children, and wounded some twenty-three to twenty-seven men, women and children. The Ticuna are one of the largest native groups in the Amazon region, numbering approximately 18,500 in Brazil, 3,500 in Peru and a few hundred in Colombia.

In contrast to other tribes, the Ticuna have been in contact with non-Indians for some generations. They live by fishing and growing vegetables and occasionally work for non-Indians as boatmen and day laborers. According to the Rainforest Action Network the attack was ordered by timber merchant Oscar Castelo Branco and carried out by local lumbermen. Though the accused were arrested by local police, they were subsequently released.

Five Indian leaders travelled to the state capitol of Manaus to denounce the killings and the corruption of the local county court in Tabatingas where a fair investigation is doubtful since the local courts usually submit to the pressures of local businessmen, timber and agricultural interests and the police; in fact, Oscar Castelo Branco's brother is the Chief of Police in Tabatingas.

To put international pressure on local and federal courts in this case, write Exmo. Sr. Paulo Brossard, Ministerio da Justica, Esplanada dos Ministerios, 7000 Brasilia DF, Brazil.

For further information contact: Survival International, 310 Edgware Rd., London W2 1dY, England (tel: 01-7235535); or The Rainforest Action Network, 300 Broadway, No. 28, San Francisco, CA 94133.

**No matter what impression Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo tries to give**, the army continues to rule in Guatemala, and with a heavy bloody hand.

Disappearances and political murders have sharply increased in 1987–88, especially in rural areas. According to Rigoberta Menchu, the exiled leader of the Committee for Campesino Unity, “The destruction of Indian villages is an attempt to destroy the whole conception of the Indian way of life. It’s a form of genocide and ethnocide.”

On November 26, the Guatemalan army massacred 22 peasants in the town of El Aguacate in Chimattango. To help them with their massacres, the U.S. State Dept. recently approved Colt Industries’ \$13.8 million sale of 20,000 M-16 rifles to the Guatemalan army.

**The People’s Republic of China** announced in December that they will turn state-owned companies into private enterprises which will issue stock with free trading of shares permitted. Said one financial “expert,” “There’s no other way to go.” We thought they were considering socialism. One wonders what the reaction of all those giddy 1970’s Maoists is to this turn from state capitalism back to the private variety. We once said this was impossible since what would they do, hold a lottery to see who became the owners? Guess the always inventive Chinese figured out a way.

# fifth Estate

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