

DESTRUCTION OF THE AMAZON AND THE PRESERVATION OF BIOS

Dr. John E. Carroll

Professor of Environmental Conservation
University of New Hampshire
United States of America

We are all aware that the Amazonian rainforest, the greatest of all rainforests on earth, is disappearing at an alarming rate. The same is happening to the Central American, the African and the Asian tropical rainforests, yet environmentalists sit in their cosy homes and offices all over North America and Europe pretending that they, and the societies of which they are a part, are playing no role in this destruction. The Amazonian forest is in fact one of the most remote, least accessible and most inhospitable of all places on this planet. Its destruction stands today as a symbol, very much like that of the Antarctic, that even the furthest, most remote places of the world are not safe or immune from the withering hand of progressive man; from the unforgiving and perhaps, unforgivable destructiveness of human society.

But who is responsible for the destruction? And, more importantly, who is making the destruction possible? It is very much us, the average middle-class, middle-income high-energy-consuming citizens of our respective North American and European nations, plus Japan, Australasia and others. Our governments and corporations, national and international, represent us well -- perhaps too well -- in this endeavor. They may not represent our rhetoric and what we claim to be our values, but they do represent our actions, our buying and acquiring, our investing and the values we express through those actions, through our materialism and investment, through our inquisitiveness. Indeed, they depend on us and could neither be who they are nor do what they do without us behind them. We make their work of destruction possible through our labor, through the wealth we create, through our support and involvement with them.

People, Poverty and the Amazon

Let me return to the case of the Amazon. Not long ago, Mr. David Rockefeller, long-time Chairman of the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York and a major force in Third World development, remarked in a speech in New York that it is neither the bankers, the multi-national corporations, nor the World Bank or national governments who are destroying the Amazonian rainforests. Rather the twin problems of overpopulation and poverty are destroying them. Mr. Rockefeller is both right and wrong. Certainly waves of peasants are moving into the Amazonian forests, slashing and burning to produce food for their families and to make a living. Mr. Rockefeller fails to ask three questions which essentially falsify his statement. He fails to ask:

1. How are the people getting into the Amazonian rainforests which have been significantly uninhabited for all of recorded history, due to their very remoteness and inhospitableness?
2. Where are all these people coming from? We already know they are not from Amazonia, a decidedly empty region.
3. Why are they leaving their homes and taking such desperate actions as relocating with their families to the Amazon?

The answers to these questions falsify the entire implication of Mr. Rockefeller's remarks, namely that banks, multi-national corporations or national governments are not responsible for the destruction of the Amazon. They are.

How are these peasants getting into the Amazon? They are travelling on the roads and rail rights-of-way built by the World Bank, international corporate capital and national government, not only built at great cost, but constantly maintained at great cost, in an exceedingly hot, wet environment. They exist for the purpose of resource extraction and development in the Amazon including timber, minerals, industrial agriculture, energy, manufacturing and refining. The peasants are arriving there, on Mr. Rockefeller's roads, and would otherwise have no access.

Where are these people coming from? They are coming from the rich agricultural states of South Brazil -- far from the Amazon. They are coming from the dry and often famine-stricken lands of north-east Brazil, closer but not too close or easily accessible to the Amazon. They are coming, in a continuing history of long distance Brazilian migrators, on foot and riding whenever possible and on whatever they can find. The length and difficulty of these migrations, as well as the harshness of the environment that awaits them at the end of their journey, suggests the answer to the third question.

Why are they leaving their homes far to the South? Their departure from their homeland is for the most part an act of desperation. Those in the far south, in the rich agricultural states of Parana, Santa Caterina, and Rio Grande do Sul, are being pushed off land they have squatted on for generations. They are being forced to sell their land so that large export-orientated industrial agricultural organizations can create large-scale industrial farms to export great quantities of soybeans and wheat, largely to Europe and somewhat to North America. This very profitable activity, being spurred on by Brazil's great indebtedness to international banks as well as by rich overseas export markets, is capital-

intensive and has no need for either the small-scale peasant farms (which get in the way and prevent consolidation), nor the labor of the peasant farmers. These formerly stable farmers are now redundant and must go somewhere. Their choice is the horror of the "favelas" (slums) of Brazil's largest cities, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, or the hard challenge of the long trek to the Amazon. Many are, quite naturally, opting for land in the Amazon. They have little alternative.

Those going to the Amazon from the often drought-stricken North-east are leaving behind an area which is the poorest and probably most hopeless in Brazil, given the great hunger, starvation, malnutrition, sickness and drought which is so rampant there. It is understandable that these people would want to leave and accept the dangers of the unknown in the Amazon rather than the known horrors of the homeland which does not enable them to survive.

Is it any wonder that poverty and over-population are threatening the Amazonian rainforest? It is true enough, but also incorrect, and indeed immoral, to suggest that it is not induced by government and corporate entities, and ultimately by those of us who are their investors and customers.

European Pork Consumption and Amazonian Destruction: A Case of Linkage

Reference has been made to the destruction of stable peasant agriculture in the South of Brazil and its replacement by large-scale, energy and capital-intensive industrial agriculture in those regions. Why is it happening? How is it possible? Few seem to want to ask such questions and fewer still are interested in the answers.

Pork in Europe is in great surplus, and comparatively cheap to buy. Per capita consumption as a result is high. But what has happened to the traditional pork producers in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and elsewhere? They have disappeared. Where are all the hogs? They are concentrated in huge feedlots in two small nations: the Netherlands and Denmark. In fact, they are so concentrated on feedlots in these countries that there are beginning to be serious pollution problems. Both ground and surface water contamination, air pollution, and acid rain are a result of the excess nitrogen, ammonia liquids and gases associated with these vast operations. The Netherlands and Denmark are becoming huge "hog factories" and are suffering all the environmental consequences.

How are these hogs being fed in two such small countries? Where is the feed coming from? It is coming not from those countries, not in fact from Europe, but from South-east Asia and South America. I am referring to tapioca from Thailand, which comes from tropical rainforest regions and plantation agriculture, which is having a range of effects on the social and ecological systems of those Asian rainforests. Even more importantly, I am referring to soya or soybeans from Brazil, grown in great quantity on those large, aforementioned industrial farms in southern Brazil, and so destroying the previously stable peasant societies, disrupting and evicting large numbers of farmers from those regions. Why are the Netherlands and Denmark doing this? Because they are good members of the European Community and are partners to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which makes such scale and concentration possible. They receive economic profit, but at horrendous environmental cost. It also comes at great social cost to the stability of Europe's own agriculture and to farmers in general; there is incalculable environmental and social damage in Brazil and Thailand. Why is Brazil doing it? Because it represents a good export opportunity for profit, a good source of much needed foreign exchange, and a way for Brazil to pay off its great debt to the international banks. Brazil must do this for economical survival in the short-term, although it may well be bringing nearer the day of its own economic, political, and social demise in the slightly longer term. While European consumers are temporarily enjoying pork surpluses and the ensuing lower consumer prices of pork, it is ironic that Europeans are, in this process, destroying their own agricultural base in addition to directly destroying the Amazonian rainforests. For Europeans, in all of the countries of the Community under their ill-chosen Common Agricultural Policy, are destroying their own farms and farmers, their own long-term food production ability, all for inexpensive pork today.

The consumption of European breakfast bacon and other pork products and the destruction of the Amazonian rainforest are on the very same continuum, and are directly linked. How much of the same could be said for countless other examples in food, clothing, transportation, fuel, housing and other items of everyday life in our rich, overdeveloped, energy-consumptive, capital-intensive societies, whether in Europe, North America, Japan, or in other so-called "modern, industrial" states? A great many such linkages can be made, in both our consumption and investment patterns, perhaps far more than most of us would like to admit. For nothing can be done about these things which is at present politically palatable.

With a continuation of present trends, the forest will go the way of the dinosaur, and perhaps us with it. Maybe we should take a closer look.

THE DILEMMA

The linkage that has to be, if we are to live as we do

The people of western European "developed countries" (generally the North) constitute c.20% of the world's population and constitute c.80% of the world's demand requirement for all natural resources and energy. It stands to reason that much of the demand is met by the people and natural resources of the "developing countries" (generally the South). To say, therefore, that the requirements of the industrial nations do not

have a direct impact on the natural resource base, the natural ecosystems, the tropical rainforests, and expanding deserts, industrial pollution, the destruction of coral reefs, wildlife (including many threatened and endangered species) and the peoples themselves - their communities and their lives, and to say that we in the North do not have any impact is untrue - we can and we do.

It must be understood that it is not possible to comprehensively include, or understand, all of the strands of interrelationship of the North's importation (some would say expropriation) of goods from the South. This is particularly true of the indirect, secondary, or tertiary relationships. One must also bear in mind that many of these relationships are more significant in their ecological, environmental, or social impact than is the case with the much more obvious direct or primary relationships. However, the strands are so many and so diverse that even the proudest and most competent academic mind must accept, as uncomfortable as it may be to do so, an inability to "encompass the whole."

That is not to say that a clear, if not fully comprehensive, picture cannot be developed. Such a picture can be developed. Any data put forth can be argued and debated, but the picture, even on incomplete data, will be very clear. Bananas, coffee and cocoa, tomatoes and oranges out of season, in developed countries are imported. Iron and steel keep coming, in spite of the widespread close-down of operations in the North. They, too are imported. The same can be said for pulp, paper and chemicals. Likewise, much cheap food. The energy that lies behind varieties of products, whether fossil fuel as the base for plastics and synthetics, or electricity in enormous quantities for aluminum, comes from elsewhere. The justification for packaging a low-value soft drink (water, sugar, coloring) in an expensive electricity-rich aluminum container (which is worth far more than its contents) can only be made through the provision of great quantities of exceedingly cheap energy from elsewhere.

Public and Private Capital

How does our capital find its way to the far-away tropical forest region? How are these regions impacted by our public tax revenues, our market demand, our consumption, our investments?

In the United States, we significantly support tropical forest impacts through our taxes. This occurs in many ways:

1. We provide direct national aid bilaterally from our country to other selected countries, largely for political reasons.
2. We contribute significantly to the operation of the United Nations and its agencies, particularly the Food and Agriculture Organisation, an agency which has been called by some of its creditable critics "the most pernicious agency ever invented by the hand of man."
3. We contribute to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), otherwise known as the World Bank, to the extent of about 22% of its annual budget - it is largely our creature.
4. We contribute to all the regional development banks - Latin American, African, Asian.
5. We contribute tax revenues to other such international entities of a smaller size.

All of the aforementioned have been indicted as significant destroyers of the tropical forests and their allied human communities, and could not exist without our support and that of our European brethren.

We have observed these entities since World War II, as ways to "develop" the "undeveloped" nations of the world, to bring them "up" to our level of "development" (or should we say "overdevelopment?"). Yet, who are we to say what constitutes "development" for anyone? Do we really believe the planet could sustain all of us at our level of development (or overdevelopment, as the case may be)? Perhaps we need some attitudinal readjustment.

What about our private behavior, or private activity on the market, in fulfilment of our demands. Perhaps we should start with a few of our assumptions on foreign trade. Who is it for? Who does it benefit? What assumptions do we make?

Assumptions

In the opening paragraph in his report on the European Community, The EEC's Trade Relations with the Developing Countries, Malcolm Subhan writes: "The focus (of this report) is on imports (to the EEC) because the aim is to see how effectively the EEC is using trade policy to promote the economic development of the Third World."

There are assumptions here which must be questioned even if they may represent "conventional wisdom", and are rarely, if ever, questioned. Note, e.g., the focus on "economic development policy." By whose definition? Is this necessarily and automatically good? Is it sustainable? If it means conversion of those countries to the western industrial model and the movement of material living standards toward that model, it is clearly not sustainable. A faulty goal from the start.

It is clearly to be assumed from the statement that EEC importing from the Third World helps promote economic development there, i.e., therefore, a good thing. Does the EEC import from the Third World altruistically, or does it do so to placate its own consumer and market demands? The latter is much closer to the truth. Finally, this fundamental introductory statement to the study is presented in such a way as to imply that all this is common knowledge, and certainly not to be questioned as if it were beyond questioning. It is no wonder we lead

ourselves astray.

The statement continues "The assumption that foreign trade is a key factor in economic growth is one of the constants of development policy since the early 1960s." Likely true, but that doesn't make it correct. Such trade continues because the North has the market demand for the products of the countries of the South at the relatively cheap prices at which they are offered to consumers in the North. Until the "conventional wisdom" changes, we will continue along our troubled path.

A further statement in the introduction contends that developing countries need to raise the level of their exports as much as possible. This is not a very questionable assumption but a dangerous one. It is realized that most readers assume this to be true, not because they understand its implications, but because the reader assumes this to mean more wealth for the needy countries, often a far cry from the truth.

The report also calls for greater emphasis to be placed on the export of higher-value manufactured and processed export products rather than raw materials. This is a change from the past emphasis by the North on using the South in a colonial way as a supplier of raw materials only, thus keeping the jobs in the North. The North finds it more profitable today, however, to let the job go to the South, in return for higher unemployment, but far cheaper goods as well. The impact on the South, contrary to earlier expectations, can be negative, caused by severe industrial pollution episodes, widening the gap between rich and poor, and even more rapid destruction of natural resources and ecosystems. Again, these assumptions are presented as if they represent common knowledge and common sense and are not to be questioned. Once questioned, however, they put the lie to all that follows.

All of the above pertains equally to North America and the United States as it does to the European Community. The assumptions found in this article are universal across the breadth and scope of thousands of similar articles published and statements made throughout Europe and North America. Tropical forests happen to stand in the way of these questionable assumptions, and are paying the price.

A Focus on the European Community

The dependencies differ somewhat between Europe and North America. The EEC is more dependent on Third World imports than is the United States, largely because of oil dependency.

In recent years the United States has become more dependent on the Third World for non-oil, manufactured products especially from Latin America and Asia.

The EEC is the largest market for Africa. This is one, but not the best way of looking at it. Perhaps it is better to say that Africa is the largest supplier of EEC imports. Much depends on how you look at it! Does Africa have a need to sell? This is assumed. But does Europe have a need to buy? This is more likely. The assumption made here is that Europe is doing Africa a favor by taking its products. This is not necessarily the case.

There is now a clear trend in the EEC towards a steady rise in imports of products in their processed forms, in spite of the loss of jobs involved. Traditional economic colonialism is normally described as importing only raw materials, after raping the supplying country in the process, and keeping the jobs at home. Raw material suppliers always complained of this as prohibiting them from gaining the jobs and affluence of the "developed" countries. Today they are getting more of what they want, but a case can be made that it is halting, not helping them. It creates jobs, but at enormous pollution and social dislocation costs and after, tragic circumstances internally. Obviously it hurts the developed countries in terms of job losses and the destruction of the working class, but it keeps the prices down and the big profits rolling in so it is accepted by the powers that be.

EEC clothing imports (from Third World) doubled from 1977-1983.
Textile imports rose 50% since 1977.

EEC exports to developing countries are also up tremendously - 400% between 1973 and 1983. What effect does this have on native economies, and traditional agriculture?

With respect to Africa, it should be understood that the Lome Conventions, the European Community's primary vehicle to provide aid assistance, are heavily devoted to Africa. They single out Africa to derive maximum benefit from the provisions of the Conventions. The Conventions are to be used to: "... diversify the range and increase the value and volume of their (African countries) exports to the Community, as well as to domestic regional and international markets." The linkage between aid assistance and trade is not unusual. It sets up and strongly maintains a system of dependence of the developing countries on Europe, and specifically on the EEC. The consequences of this dependency are profound for both European and Third World countries. The Europeans come to depend on a steady and increasing flow of cheap consumer goods, and their farmers and laborers cannot compete with cheaper imports and suffer at times the ruination of their own agriculture and manufacturing. Third World peoples are forced to convert to export crop agriculture at the expense of basic domestic food

production, and to host industries which are often excessive pollutants and socially disruptive in the society.

In addition, Third World exporters of goods like crops are completely vulnerable and beholden to externally-controlled prices.

The tone of such trade documents is on how the various Community instruments have benefitted the developing countries. Why are we never ready to take an honest look at the reverse, of how the developing countries' exports in a very materialistic way benefit the developed countries with cheap prices (and tropical products not otherwise available)? It may be argued, of course, that there is no long-term net benefit to developed countries, given destruction of their own agriculture and industries. This benefit is almost completely ignored in the literature which moralistically and falsely implies that the trade is conducted to benefit Third World peoples.

EEC imports from ACP countries (Africa) rose 220% between 1973/1983, and by 280% in all developing countries; even without OPEC it was 260%.

It is admitted that "... the Community's purpose in granting preferential entry to developing countries is to help them industrialize" -- a true statement, undoubtedly, but to what end? Who does it serve?

Theories of export-led growth are the ones in use, but why should growth be export-led, given that it creates real dependency? The growth is completely based on external conditions over which the developing country has no control.

There is an assumption that it is a sacrifice, and a big one, for EEC Community members to expand import of manufactured goods from developing countries - maybe traditionally, but not today.

It now helps the "power elites" of the developed and developing countries but no one else.

1973-1983 Asian country exports rose 365% Latin American exports rose 273%
Middle East exports rose 206% ACP (Africa) exports rose 220%.

The EEC has the stated goal of increasing developing countries' exports of manufactured goods, acceptable, under an earlier, uninformed view of development, and even altruistic, but it certainly has become otherwise in modern times. (Brazil, India, South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and China) are an example.

The EEC's average import tariff is only 1% (compared to 2.9% for Japan, 3.5% for US), so the EEC is really very much encouraging imports, largely from Third World countries. The EEC scheme also very much furthers developing countries exports to EEC countries, since it includes all industrial products (including highly sensitive ones) and is available to all Third World countries.

European textiles and clothing: production in Europe of both textiles and clothing has fallen below the levels reached in 1975; and employment in those industries in Europe has fallen by 50% between 1973 and 1983, (in a stable demand scenario); and in spite of stable demand, imports have increased by 115%.

This is certainly not because European nations love the suppliers or wish to be altruistic towards them - but because there is a real economic advantage in importing!

Imports from developing countries on a per capita basis:

EEC \$51
US \$36
Japan \$16

"Although all EEC imports are subject to quotas or ceilings, in many cases no action may be taken, even after the ceiling has been substantially exceeded" - this is a sign of a desire to enjoy the price benefits (cheap prices) rather than altruism towards the country.

ASEAN agricultural exports to EEC: agricultural exports to EEC rose by 50% between 1973-1983; EEC imports of manufactured products from ASEAN rose by 692%; textiles, clothing: EEC was the major market for ASEAN exporters in 1980-81, taking 27%-30% of the total.

There is recognition that "the industrialized countries have outgrown a certain number of industries, because they are labor-intensive -- or even because they pollute the environment."

Various other European Community (EC) documents make it clear that the South is viewed as an important market for EC goods, and clearly admit that trade is driven by a recognition of EC interests, not by altruism. In recognition of its particular relationship with Africa, the EC interestingly admits how decisive the EC market is for Black Africa and the Maghreb, two regions from which it buys half the exports. The EC further admits that for every dollar it gives the South in aid, it gets back \$9 worth of goods. (Moralists will be shocked, of course, by such self-interested generosity, The numbers speak for themselves. And where Europe gets 9 times its original outlay, the US gets 15, Japan, 21 and the USSR, 25.

It can readily be contended that all trade by the First World with the Third World is designed for the benefit of the First World. Why should it be otherwise? Indeed, business is business, isn't it? I am, of course, being facetious here, but also demonstrating that we have an international trade system that is designed to lead to these results, regardless of the consequences on the ecosystem, human societies or individual people.

Professor **John Carroll** is Professor of Environmental Conservation, University of New Hampshire, and chairman of the Environmental Conservation Program. He received his Ph.D. at Michigan State University in resource development (A.B., M.A., geography), and is active in many fields. A member of advisory boards in the U.S. and Canada, his activities in resource protection are worldwide, and he has published five books and numerous articles on environmental issues.