

# Book Reviews

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*In this book review section, Andy Storey comments on two books covering the impact of changes in Eastern Europe on the developing countries; Vincent Tucker and Colm Regan consider some new thinking on development philosophies, with particular reference to the work of NGOs; and Stephen McCarthy reviews three books on Brazil and the Amazon.*

## **Eastern Europe and the Developing World**

### **Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the World Economy**

S. Collins and D. Rodrik, Institute for International Economics, Washington, DC, May 1991 (\$12.95 paperback, 172 pages).

### **Second World, Third World: How Changes in Eastern Europe are Affecting the World's Poor**

E. Mayo, World Development Movement, Occasional Paper 3, London, December 1990 (Stg £1.50, 30 pages).

The euphoria in the West over the transformation of Eastern Europe and reforms in the Soviet Union has begun to dissipate as awareness has grown of the problems involved and the attendant risks of chaos and conflict. The failed Soviet coup, the crisis in Yugoslavia, and the upsurge in migration from East to West have all helped to focus Western minds on perceived threats to Western security and economic prosperity. Potential effects on the welfare of other parts

of the world have received less attention to date.

These two books offer differing perspectives concerning the effects of changes in the East on developing countries of the 'Third World'. The Collins and Rodrik volume is a detailed, global economic analysis (though the present review will concentrate on what it has to say about the developing world). Ed Mayo's work is more of a popular, lobbying document.

Collins and Rodrik provide an excellent survey of the economic issues involved. They begin by pointing out that assessing the impact of the changes is greatly complicated by problems of measuring the size of the Eastern economies – estimates of, for example, Soviet GNP per capita range from \$1,735 to \$9,230! (p.7). (Problems such as this explain some of the disagreement over whether the economies of the East should themselves be regarded as 'developing'.) The authors also point to the heterogeneity of the economies concerned e.g., the heavy dependence on agriculture of Romania compared to the relatively indus-

trialised economies of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Chapter 2 of Collins and Rodrik examines the consequences of changes in the East for international trade. The main conclusion is that the developed country exporters in general, and those of Western Europe in particular, will gain most from emerging markets for goods in the East. This is because most Eastern imports will be of the capital and intermediate goods in which the developed countries are specialised. By contrast, the middle-income and newly industrialised countries are likely to lose out because they will be competing in most of the same market segments as the emergent exporters of the East. 'In commodities like textiles, clothing, footwear, steel and (potentially) consumer electronics, developing countries will face new competitors with greater geographical proximity to European markets and greater cultural and political ties to the importers' (pp. 115-116).

In addition, Eastern exporters may pose serious competitive threats to agricultural, textile/clothing and steel producers within Western Europe – the danger here is that the response will be to displace the impact onto non-European countries by tightening protectionist measures against middle-income exporters of these goods. 'The East Asian newly industrialising countries and the more industrialised Latin American countries....are likely to see their exports partially displaced from EC markets. Moreover, unlike the advanced countries, these countries

will not be able to make up for lost markets by increasing their exports to [Eastern economies]' (p.68).

Collins and Rodrik accept that the Eastern economies may be capable of diversifying upwards into 'high-tech' goods which would not compete head-on with those of the developing countries. But they doubt whether this can happen in the absence of massive flows of capital to the East, and they are sceptical about the likelihood of such flows emerging.

Chapter 3 focusses on capital flows. The 'best-guess' scenario developed by Collins and Rodrik is that the Eastern economies will receive inflows of \$55 billion per year over the next few years, well below the levels needed to create high-tech industrial bases. (Most of these flows will go to former East Germany.) The authors estimate that \$25 billion of this annual flow will be at the direct expense of transfers to developing countries, reducing their investment by around 0.6 per cent of their combined GDP. Furthermore, the transfers to the East have already raised world interest rates by about 1 percentage point, which impacts heavily on developing country debtors: 'there is a substantial transfer of resources to the industrial world, which amounts to around \$6 billion for each percentage-point increase in interest rates' (p.103). But not all developed countries benefit – in particular, the United States, a net external debtor, loses heavily.

Collins and Rodrik conclude that opening up the East will be of global benefit by boosting world trade and investment opportunities. The

problems lie with the distribution of the benefits (and losses). The authors urge that 'on both the trade and macroeconomic fronts, a major concern should be that policymakers in the developed countries do not ease the domestic burden of supporting transition in the East by shifting the costs to the developing countries... It is in the interest of the world economy that the dilemma not be resolved by shifting the adjustment burden to those countries least able to support it' (p.123). Unfortunately, Collins and Rodrik do not make clear why the interests of the dominant actors in the world economy should lie with sparing the developing countries from the 'burden of adjustment'.

Mayo's analysis for the World Development Movement adopts a more sceptical political perspective e.g., 'The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe has given free rein to the determination of Western countries, using aid as a lever, to push poor countries into the triumphal axis of political democracy and economic liberalism' (p.2). Mayo also focusses on some specific issues skimmed over in the broad sweep of the Collins/Rodrik book.

One such issue is the diversion of Eastern aid (including that in the form of subsidised trade) away from traditional allies among the developing countries. The example of Vietnam is given: 'Removal of East European aid, coupled with a squeeze on the number of Vietnamese working in Eastern Europe, would leave it even more internationally isolated, ironically at a

time that the official reasons for prohibiting aid, after Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia, appear more and more anachronistic' (p.15). Cambodia itself, Cuba and other countries are also suffering through the redirection of Eastern aid priorities. Liberation movements, such as the PLO, are likely to be similarly affected.

The potential diversion of Western aid and investment, away from the developing countries and towards the East, is also discussed. Specific examples of diversion are rare (though the USA did cut its 1990 aid allocation to Latin America to make room for funds to the East), but Mayo argues that there is a significant prioritisation of the claims of the East: 'Using what has to be very rough estimates, each person in the Third World receives somewhere over £8 per year in western aid; each person in Eastern Europe will receive around £13.75' (p.11). Staff resources will also be diverted: already, staff from the development directorate in the EC Commission have been switched to work on Eastern Europe.

Mayo offers a somewhat more optimistic perspective on trade issues than the Collins/Rodrik analysis. He emphasises the possibility of increased demand for tropical products from developing countries – coffee, cocoa, bananas, etc. – in the East. And he forecasts that 'the main growth in demand at first will be for consumer goods, as most East European states have a political stake in improving their supply. Newly-industrialised countries such as South Korea would be best positioned for these' (p.25).

Of course, these relatively 'upbeat' forecasts are not necessarily incompatible with the Collins/Rodrik contention that the economies of the East and those of the middle-income developing countries will ultimately end up as competitors in more or less the same market segments (a prospect to which Mayo also refers).

Differences of perspective on trade matters apart, the real 'comparative advantage' of Mayo's book lies in its willingness to analyse questions of politics and power. Thus, he quotes the Dutch development minister: 'The demise of the totalitarian socialist system means that the development model based on that system has ceased to be a realistic option for the Third World. Market forces and private initiative are recognised as fundamental elements of a viable socio-economic system' (p.20). Mayo compares this comment unfavourably with that of ANC leader Joe Slovo: 'The opponents of socialism are very vocal about what they call the failures of socialism in Africa. But they say very little, if anything, about Africa's real failure: the failure of capitalism. Over 90% of our continent's people live out their wretched and repressed lives in stagnating and declining capitalist-oriented economies' (p.20).

Unfortunately, Mayo's book is somewhat marred by a repetitive style and disjointed structure. Apart from this problem, it is a good companion to the thorough and balanced (though less accessible and politically sharp) work by Collins and Rodrik.

*Andy Storey*

## **Development Philosophies and NGO Practices**

### **No Life Without Roots: Culture and Development**

T. Verhelst, Zed Press, London, 1990  
(Stg. £9.95 paperback, 192 pages)

Much of the 'Third World' is worse off today than it was three decades ago. In Africa, despite numerous aid programmes and 'development decades', food production has declined, millions suffer from malnutrition, many are uprooted and displaced. Gains in health care, education and infrastructure are being undone and the quality of life has deteriorated. In Latin America economies that were once regarded as 'economic miracles' are strangled by debt repayments. Cholera epidemics, long considered to be part of another age, have reemerged, devastating populations. Clearly something is radically wrong. Development, as both a practical and intellectual project, is in a crisis.

Thierry Verhelst's book goes a long way towards identifying the roots of this crisis as well as indicating some means for overcoming it. He argues that at the root of the problem is the neglect of culture by development theorists and practitioners. Without consideration of culture, which essentially has to do with people's control over their destinies and their ability to name the world in a way which reflects their particular experience, development is simply a process of social engineering whereby the more powerful peoples control, dominate and shape the lives

of others. When a peoples' beliefs, ideas, meanings and feelings – in a word their culture – is not taken into consideration and respected we cannot speak of human development. 'The basic problem is the assassination of civilizations whose societies remain in a state of shock, like a body without a soul, even if one last impulse of self-preservation means a sort of vegetable existence is maintained' (p. 19).

The development which we have witnessed over the past three decades is replete with programmes of rapid economic growth, increased production and rapid industrialisation imposed from outside. Entire populations were expected to endure considerable economic hardship and human rights deprivation in the name of 'development'. Developers, for the most part, believed that they had the answers. That their models might be inappropriate or that they might have something to learn from other cultures different from theirs was not entertained. Such forms of 'top down' development have tended to strip people of their identity and capacity for self determination. The real tragedy of underdevelopment is when people are forced into dependency in ways which negate their vitality. For this reason despite the transfer of goods, capital, technology, hospitals, and roads, the economic policies and social accomplishments of the West cannot be replicated in 'Third World' countries in the same form. From the material point of view everything is set to go but the symbolic engine is missing. Culture, that system of meanings and

shared beliefs which plays a decisive role in mobilising energies, has been ignored.

It is generally acknowledged that NGOs are better placed to be sensitive to the culture of peoples they work with than government aid programmes or international agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. However even the more progressive NGOs often fail to come to terms with the underlying reasons for the failure of, or resistance to, projects. The more radical projects based on consciousness raising, grass roots organisation and struggle for justice and economic self-reliance also encounter foot-dragging, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, sabotage and so on. Many projects conceived in good faith are reduced to a shambles by such tactics. Where projects are insufficiently rooted in the local culture they encounter processes of resistance which can be frustrating for development workers and NGOs.

A classic example is the failure of co-operatives in Africa. Misappropriation of funds and the high prevalence of corruption has frustrated many development workers. Must we make moral judgements and conclude that Africans are more prone to corruption than Europeans? Verhelst suggests rather that we must consider the cultural aspect of traditional African attitudes to money and see here a kind of non-cooperation with the monetary system.

Misappropriation of funds is, therefore, not entirely a question

of personal enrichment as in the West, but is rather a question of social solidarity deeply rooted in tradition. Loyalty to the clan is seen as more important than loyalty to the employer, whether it be the State, the capitalist boss, or a development project (p.28).

Co-operatives are, after all, a Western solution to a Western problem. They are a form of solidarity which is often alien to pre-existing forms of solidarity whose requirements remain stronger than newly introduced forms. Verhelst gives many other examples of cultural resistance through which peoples resist the imposition of values which are alien to them.

Verhelst has worked for many years with the more progressive NGOs and is currently the co-ordinator for the South-North Network on Cultures and Development. His book is not only addressed to individuals interested in the practice and theory of development but also to NGOs working for a more human and just form of development. Such NGOs are also prone to ethnocentrism. As Verhelst points out, certain peoples seem to conform more readily to the type of struggle these NGOs expect. For this reason the forms of solidarity proposed by European and American NGOs finds a ready made field of action in Latin America and the Philippines where there is a long tradition of trade unionism and sophisticated political consciousness (p.43). Africa by contrast has only been superficially Westernised and,

with the exception of South Africa, tends to react with indifference to such projects.

Western NGOs by virtue of the funds they disperse have considerable power vis-à-vis their partners in the 'Third World'. They not only choose which projects they will fund but also, and this may happen inadvertently, shape the projects they fund in ways which may be detrimental to the needs and concerns of the recipients. Here again Verhelst is challenging:

Our NGOs, however, insist that their partners, whatever their inspiration (political affiliation or religious motivation), share their analysis and concept of society and organise projects that conform to the criteria and priorities that they have established. This is probably the case with most NGO projects today. Their declared intention is to support anyone, without religious, partisan or national discrimination, as long as the goals and methods of attaining them have been agreed. This seems perfectly reasonable. But it must be pointed out that, in practice if not in theory, this attitude principally fosters relations with Western or very Westernized organisers. Thus, the militants and 'developers' supported in Asia are generally very Westernized, whether they be Marxists, Christians, or promoters of capitalist modernisation. In India, it is estimated that barely 15% of those who organise projects supported by Western Catholic NGOs are

Hindu. Non-religious NGOs are apparently little better in this respect. In black Africa, half of the projects supported are still instigated and run by whites, and this twenty five years after the era of decolonisation (p. 114).

Would a Western NGO accept Islam as the basis for an education project which they are requested to fund? Questions such as these pose dilemmas for NGOs and in posing them so lucidly Verhelst's book can make a major contribution towards helping Western NGOs become more aware of their ethnocentrism and in taking steps to correct it.

In sections headed: 'Indigenous Cultures as Foundations for Alternatives', 'Indigenous Cultures as Sources of Social Struggle', 'Third World Aid to the West', 'Intercultural Solidarity', 'The Right to Be Different', and 'A New Generation of Projects', Verhelst offers practical advice to NGOs as to how they might overcome some of the problems mentioned above. He stresses the need for NGOs to get off the beaten track of funding familiar partners, groups whose conceptions are close to their own.

Verhelst also proposes that solidarity which is truly respectful of indigenous vitality must not limit itself to the funding of projects. The provision of funds is a limited form of co-operation and where aid is limited to the provision of funds it can lead to unequal relationships and reinforce North-South dependency. There are many other possible ways of expressing solidarity and working

together. NGOs must pay more attention to projects that promote South-South co-operation and solidarity. Few NGOs have come to terms with the implications of treating others as equal partners from which they also have much to learn. As Verhelst points out indigenous cultures often have a much more developed spiritual tradition as well as a greater consciousness of the sacredness of all life and of the profound interdependence of all peoples and things. In an age when the West is rediscovering the importance of ecology we have much to learn from these cultures. Other examples cited are the Gandhian tradition of self-reliance and voluntary simplicity and the Islamic tradition of hospitality.

In putting culture at the centre of the development process this book redresses the one sided emphasis on economic and political factors. For Verhelst culture is not a 'decorative accessory', neither is it a substitute for economic and political analyses. But culture is not an easy phenomenon to come to terms with. Raymond Williams once spoke of culture as analogous to the water in which a fish swims. It is all-pervasive but yet the fish is aware of everything else except the water. The strength of Verhelst's book is that it firmly puts culture on the development agenda and this is an important contribution. It does not, however, provide us with a theoretical approach to culture which we can bring to bear on some of the problems and dilemmas posed in this book. A recognition of the importance of maintaining cultural

integrity and cultural diversity should not lead us to cultural relativism. Dialogue does not preclude mutual criticism. Verhelst poses the question of how a European NGO should respond to a request for funds to construct a well-equipped clinic where female excision and infibulation operations could be carried out under hygienic conditions. However he does not provide us with the means of addressing such questions. To do so would require a more sophisticated theory of culture. Current concepts of cultures as integrated functional wholes or as inherited traditions are not helpful. Neither is Verhelst's definition of culture as 'every aspect of life' (p.18) adequate for such purposes.

*No Life Without Roots* is one of the best and most original books about development currently available. It poses a challenge to both development theorists and development practitioners. It should be required reading for all students of development, development workers and agency staff. Meeting the challenge posed by this book would take us a long way beyond most current development theorising and practice.

*Vincent Tucker*

### **Democratising Development: The Role of Voluntary Organisations**

J. Clark, Earthscan, London, 1991  
(Stg £9.95 paperback, 259 pages)

The debate on the future role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) has only just begun. In the

1960s and 1970s the role of such organisations seemed clear enough. The dominant international economic and political systems seemed capable of satisfying basic needs if the targetting of crucial inputs could be made effective. NGOs, from their base in practical relief and development projects, could help direct such targetting. The situation in the 1990s seems a lot less optimistic – capitalism, now the dominant world system, seems incapable of delivering even the most basic needs of approximately 25% of the world's people. The Third World development agenda remains firmly locked at the bottom of the world's political agenda. The emphasis on the need for private charity rather than structural solidarity echoes the dominance of free market models of growth. The public's perception of the Third World agenda has changed also. How should NGOs address these and a host of related questions?

These are just some of the issues addressed by Oxfam's Campaigns Organiser, John Clark, in this accessible and well argued book.

Clark is optimistic. Recent years have witnessed a groundswell of popular agitation for democracy and participation in the Philippines, South Korea, Chile, Brazil, Haiti, Nicaragua and, of course, Eastern Europe. There has been an impressive growth in 'basismo' – basic level political organisation. Many major multilateral organisations have increased their links and partnerships with NGOs, realising their strengths and successes. There have also been a growing number of public demon-



strations of concern for, and interest in, the world's poor. Clark identifies issues and occasions such as these as opportunities for a new, more pragmatic role for NGOs. However, making the most of those opportunities will require 'a more strategic, co-ordinated way of working'.

Early on in his argument Clark outlines the basis for what might be described as the NGO model of development – this he characterises as the **DEPENDS** model. The **DEPENDS** model is the basis of just development and comprises the following components: **D**evelopment of infrastructure with a focus on the needs of the most vulnerable groups, rather than an overall strategy for infrastructure creation per se; **E**conomic growth directly targetted at improving the quality of life; **P**overty alleviation as a direct goal not as an adjunct of more indirect policies; **E**quity, with the emphasis on equity as an engine for growth; **N**atural resource base protection as an investment not only for today but especially for the future; **D**emocracy as a starting point for development rather than as a result of it; **S**ocial justice as a means for releasing the most vital of all assets – human potential.

Clark debates a number of key issues which many NGOs (including those in Ireland) often shirk. He enumerates their strengths (poverty focus, broad participation, innovation, scale, commitment of staff) but also their weaknesses (questions of legitimacy, independence and accountability; problems of leader-

ship, project design, planning and evaluation; small scale and over-extension of both staff and resources). He devotes a chapter to the relationships between NGOs and governments and outlines the benefits as well as the disadvantages of closer ties. These he sees as both desirable and necessary but with a pressing need for NGOs to be more precise and analytical in order to maintain independence.

A considerable part of *Democratising Development* examines the impact of NGOs in the Third World. Clark addresses a number of central concerns – the difficulty of replicating projects in different locations and thus of generalising from experience; the difficulties and dangers of building a grassroots movement; the problem of 'scaling up' from local level projects to regional or national policies; and the vexed question of influencing policy reform. All of these issues are illustrated by specific project case-studies. The role of NGOs in the developed world is also addressed – development education; lobbying for specific reforms as well as for more general change; and the need for strategic alliances. Clark introduces a number of central issues which experience suggests NGOs should note when designing a campaign. These include the need for clear and realistic policy targets, popular appeal, direct experience, support from 'southern' partners, a media strategy, networking, the identification of allies, etc. It is clear from this discussion that Irish NGOs could benefit immensely from a close reading of Clark's text.

The central thesis in *Democratizing Development* is that there is a need for a new pragmatism amongst NGOs. This pragmatism is called for by the changed economic and political climate of the eighties and nineties; the failure of past NGO strategies in, for example, Africa; the reality of structural adjustment; and changed public perceptions and demands. It is in this part of his book that Clark is weakest, not for what he argues but for not developing it in more depth as well as for some omissions, especially as regards education and lobbying work. Chapter 11 on the new pragmatism is simply an initial statement; Clark could do well to extend and develop it further. It is clear that his experience could sustain such an extension.

*Democratizing Development* is a very welcome and important contribution to a debate underway in the 'South', in North America and in parts of Europe. In the light of recent debates in Ireland on the future of NGOs, Clark's text could be well used.

*Colm Regan*

### **Fight for the Forest**

#### **Fight for the Forest: Chico Mendes in His Own Words**

Latin America Bureau, London, 1989 (Stg. £2.95 paperback, 96 pages)

#### **The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers and Defenders of the Amazon**

S. Hecht and A. Cockburn, Verso, London, 1989 (Stg. £16.95 hardback, 266 pages)

### **The Decade of Destruction**

A. Cowell, Channel 4/Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1990 (Stg. £14.99 hardback, 213 pages)

Large estates have been a dominant feature of the Brazilian landscape ever since the occupation of that country by the Portuguese in 1500. The story of Brazil since that time and of the Amazon region today is one of continuing conflict over land.

It was in the north-east that the Portuguese established the large sugar plantations which were presented by the crown as rewards for services rendered. In the region behind these plantations large cattle ranches developed providing meat and hides for the workers of the sugar plantations. In all of these areas the indigenous Indian population was forced to migrate further and further into the Amazon as the European settlers set about systematically destroying the forest for their own economic purposes.

Although these large estates have changed in appearance, developed new technology and moved from slavery to other forms of labour exploitation, the concentration of land in large estates has remained unchanged. In 1980 Brazil had 5.2 million agricultural enterprises or properties, occupying a total area of 370 million hectares. 33% of all properties were used by small tenants or squatters who possessed no land of their own. 50% of all properties had less than 10 hectares and made up 2.4% of the total agricultural area. Although only 10% of all properties had more than 100 hectares they

occupied 80% of agricultural land. Only 20% of all estates had more than 500 hectares but they occupied 60% of all agricultural land. Brazil's largest estate (latifundium) has 4.3 million hectares and the 20 next largest estates occupy an area of over 20 million hectares.

This large concentration of land in the hands of a few, alongside a growing population, has led many poor, especially from the north-east, to migrate and take possession of land in the Amazon region, often with the encouragement of the government. The large estate owners and multinational companies also moved in to grow cash crops, to develop cattle ranches and to reap the tax concessions available on agricultural property. This has led to conflict over the land as one group struggles with another for possession. Since 1980 there have been an estimated 1,000 killings and other incidences of gross human rights violations in relation to land conflict in Brazil.

As the poor and the wealthy migrate deeper and deeper into the forest, once again the Indian population suffers most. However they are not alone, as the rubber tappers are also being attacked and their source of livelihood is being destroyed.

In order to defend their rights the rubber tappers set up their own union. *Fight for the Forest* is the story of Chico Mendes, President of the rubber tappers' union of Xapuri and his struggle to defend the rights of his members and the forest environment in which they work.

The book is based on a series of interviews taken shortly before Chico Mendes was assassinated on 22 December 1988 by the son of a large estate owner who saw Mendes and his union as a threat to his interests.

The book sets out to describe the history of the rubber tappers of the Amazon, most of them, such as Chico Mendes' father, arriving as poor migrants from the north-east. It describes the way in which they extract the rubber from the forest, reputed to be the most environmentally friendly economic activity in the rainforest. It also describes what the rubber tappers see as the way forward for the forest and what is necessary for its protection through the development of 'Extractive Reserves.'

We realise that in order to guarantee the future of the Amazon we had to find a way to preserve the forest while at the same time developing the region's economy. So what were our thoughts originally? We accepted that the Amazon could not be turned into some kind of sanctuary that nobody could touch. On the other hand, we knew it was important to stop the deforestation that is threatening the Amazon and all human life on the planet. We felt our alternative should involve preserving the forest, but it should also include a plan to develop the economy. So we came up with the idea of extractive reserves. What do we mean by an extractive reserve? We mean the land is under public

ownership but the rubber tappers and other workers that live on the land should have the right to live and work there. I say 'other workers' because there are not only rubber tappers in the forest. Our proposals are now not just ours alone, they are put forward together by Indians and rubber tappers. Our fight is the fight of all the peoples of the forest.

The first 'Extractive Reserve', situated in the Upper Jurua Valley, was recognised by President Jose Sarney just before he left office in March 1990.

A more detailed background to the history and exploitation of the Amazon region and the events leading to the assassination of Chico Mendes is to be found in Hecht and Cockburn's book *The Fate Of The Forest*. This book gives a very comprehensive account of the Brazilian rainforest from the days of Portuguese colonisation to the present day. The authors point out that what is now called the environmental destruction of the Amazon is merely the latest surge in a long epic of annihilation. There has always been a desire amongst the various colonisers of the Amazon to develop the region from being a source for extractive products such as quinine bark, sarsaparilla, vanilla, chocolate, indigo and rubber, to being one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. Hecht and Cockburn trace this desire from the attempts of the Marquis of Pombal in 1770 through to the 'March to the West' scheme of

President Vargas in the 1930s and the more recent colonisation attempts of the Generals of the 1960s.

Today the need to develop the region to generate foreign income to meet debt repayments and the need to secure borders with neighbouring states are arguments that are used (and have always been used in the course of the history of the Amazon) to justify the destruction of the forest and the genocide of Indian nations living there.

Over the last decade Adrian Cowell has been filming for a Channel Four series called *The Decade of Destruction* both the land and mining catastrophes of the Amazon. In a book of the same name he explains how the 'Polonoroeste' (Northwest Brazil Integrated Development Programme) brought about large scale destruction of the Amazon in the state of Rondonia. Polonoroeste was launched in 1981 with over US\$440 million in loans from the World Bank. The programme was to bring the upper Amazon into contact with the rest of Brazil by paving highway BR-364 from Cuiaba in Mato Grasso to Porto Velho, capital of Rondonia. The programme was also designed to stop uncontrolled migration into the region which was destroying the forest. The project was to provide financial and technical help for small farmers, improve health and education services to new planned settlements, and protect vast areas of forest and its Indian inhabitants. The story of one of these small farmers, Renato, is described in the book. Renato sets about clearing the forest

from the plot of land which he was given by INCRA, the organisation responsible for distribution of the plots. Very quickly he discovers that the soil is not suitable for farming.

‘What will happen to Renato and the other colonists’, I asked Gabriel de Lima Ferrira, a researcher for the Brazil’s National Institute for Amazonian Research. ‘If it’s the same as in earlier colonisation projects in Amazonia,’ Gabriel replied, ‘it will be a process of migrating agriculture within the plots, cutting more forest every year and exhausting the soil. In real terms they will get poorer and eventually be obliged to sell – usually to a big landowner who will combine a number of small-holdings into a ranch. He pays for the land, but what he gets is a title deed and the jungle already half tamed. All the breaking in, all the risks, all the malaria, have been taken by the colonist.’

Apart from the issue of land ownership in the Amazon the other factor that is creating massive destruction is mining. Like the land, mining attracts both the poor landless peasant and the large mining companies. In the Catajas region of the Amazon both the poor and the rich have come to find their El Dorado. Cowell describes how the Brazilian mining company CVRD (Companhia Vale Rio Doce) has set about mining one of the largest reserves of iron ore in the world – at least 18 billion tons of ore. It is estimated that at present rates of exploitation there is sufficient iron

ore to last for 250 years (with a production rate of 35 million tons per year).

Next to the Carajas iron ore mine of CVRD is one of the largest gold mines in the world – the mine of Serra Pelada. This mine was not worked by a multinational company but by the hands of 100,000 *garimpeiros* (poor miners). The mine, according to Cowell, became what is probably the richest manually excavated gold strike the world has ever seen. He goes on to describe the environmental destruction, the violence, the frustrations of the poor miners, and the wealth obtained by the few at the expense of the poor in the mine.

All of this pales however in comparison to the treatment given to the indigenous Indian nations, who live in the Amazon, by the government, the landgrabbers and the miners. Cowell describes some of the initial contacts made by the whites of Brazil with the Indian people.

Enter we, the *civilizados*. Like all good liberators we tear the ‘cage’ away and the Indian, whose life has been moulded by 3000 years of acceptance of that cage, is like a man let out after a life-time in prison. The light blinds him. Like the ‘liberated’ so often in history, the Indian is equipped for the exact reverse of ‘freedom’. He is an uncivilised man, and contact with us means he has to adapt to the system of the city. Then we are amazed that he does not fight the challenge that comes with change.

But previously when the Indian was faced with a challenge, he met it by killing the enemy. Yet we, the civilizados who are destroying him, say that killing is wrong and refuse to fight. With his world tumbling about him, without the means of understanding the challenges, let alone having the weapons to conquer them, the Indian despairs in his bewilderment. He begins to lie down and die . . .

Perhaps the only hope that one can get from reading these three books is best summed up by Cowell when he states that the great thing that has happened about the Amazon is that the issue has moved from the unknown periphery of our society to the centre of the political stage.

*Stephen McCarthy*