

## Report from Rio by Geraldo Lino

### Greenpeace not welcome in Brazil

*The wealthy multinational was shaken by its cold reception in Amazonia and the sabotage of its plans for "direct action."*

It was not exactly what Greenpeace expected. In an action planned some time ago, the notorious multinational environmentalist group sent its ship, the *MV Greenpeace*, to travel in Brazilian waters during October and November. Its first target was Amazonia, where the ship intended to navigate close to 2,000 nautical miles of the region's rivers as part of its campaign to "fight for the rainforests of Siberia and Amazonia." However, an unexpected reaction from Brazilian authorities forced the group to abandon its aggressive strategy of "direct action," including deploying its "green commandos" against selected targets, in favor of demonstrations typical of well-behaved high school students.

As they left the port of Belem in the state of Para on Oct. 9, the occupants of the *MV Greenpeace*, including activists and reporters from Brazil, the United States, Germany, Holland, England, and Argentina, were informed that throughout their journey, the ship would be escorted by a Brazilian Navy corvette. The next day, in the straits of Breves 120 nautical miles from Belem, the environmentalists had their first direct contact with the military in an incident that underscored that they were not exactly being accompanied by an "honor guard." Deciding to board the Navy ship for a "courtesy visit," activists on a launch and on the *MV Greenpeace* helicopter approached the corvette and tried to deliver presents to the captain. But when the helicopter flew over the ship so that photographers could take pictures, the Navy crew immediately and ostenta-

tiously moved to combat positions. In reciprocating by presenting the environmentalists with teeshirts and caps with the Navy insignia, the ship's captain remarked "God willing, everything will turn out all right."

In the days that followed, every attempt by Greenpeace to land was met with similar actions by the Navy, which closely tracked the group with combat groups in launches and helicopters. On Oct. 12, exasperated by the close surveillance, Greenpeace's Brazilian director sent a letter of protest to the Navy minister and also questioned the cost of the Navy operation.

At the port of Santarem, where it arrived on Oct. 13, the *MV Greenpeace* ironically docked next to a ship carrying hardwood destined for Holland, Greenpeace's world headquarters. Under other conditions, the environmentalists would have attempted to take "direct action" against the shipment, but under the Navy's watchful eyes, they were reduced to merely issuing a press release in protest. Although claiming to have evidence that the wood originated with "predatory actions," Greenpeace's Brazilian director José Augusto Padua cautioned that the environmentalists would have to be patient and "do things at the appropriate time."

Greenpeace's only public demonstration in Santarem shows what its objectives are. It targeted U.S. and European firms which sell mercury to Brazil, a large part of which, according to the greenies, is sold to the gold prospectors in Amazonia and pollutes the region's rivers. Right next

to the protest, which was limited to a picket line and press release on the matter, the existence of an open sewer demonstrated one of the region's biggest problems, which is ignored entirely by Greenpeace: lack of basic sanitation, which leads to frequent outbreaks of such epidemic diseases as cholera and hepatitis.

Also in Santarem, the environmentalists were greeted with criticism from where they least expected it. During a visit to a development project including 19 rural communities, the project coordinator Eugenio Scannavino Netto surprised them when he said that "environmental groups make loud denunciations about the Amazon but they never present practical solutions."

An even harsher condemnation came from Manoel Quintas Ferreira, secretary of environment, science and technology of the state of Amazonas. Referring to Greenpeace's first action in Amazonia two years ago when its activists threw buckets of black ink on lumber-cutting machines causing serious damage, Ferreira said that "when it comes to the use of Brazil's natural resources, we reject the interference of a foreign group of vandals and unemployed who, sailing around the world, provoke disturbances and prevent the development of private companies and honest work for Brazilians." According to Ferreira, the preservation of natural resources, of flora and fauna, and of the Amazon's genetic potential are the joint obligation and responsibility of the people and the government because "the priority, whatever the cost, is man and the improvement of his quality of life."

The Brazilian chapter of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement also protested Greenpeace's activities with a press release accusing it of carrying out "irregular warfare" in Brazil.