

05 aug 22 - Roads to Destruction

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The BR 163 is another example of the strength of 'agro is pop, agro is tech'; in Brazil: in the name of 'development'; anything goes. The highway, which crosses the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, Mato Grosso do Sul, Mato Grosso and Pará states, is the main land route that transports agricultural production from the Midwest to the ports in the North of the country. The project was born of the 64-85 dictatorship, in the wake of the nationalist slogan 'integrate to keep' (an allusion to the need of populate the Amazon with settlers or other colonial powers would occupy the region). Its construction began in 1971, under the government of General Emílio Garrastazu Médici, and the inauguration took place five years later, with Pres. Geisel in power. Over almost five decades, this open vein, more than 3,000 km long, was practically abandoned by the public authorities. The stretch of road in Pará, a route for exporting agricultural commodities, is surrounded by several indigenous lands, conservation units and thousands of hectares of public forests. For years, environmentalists mobilized to prevent the paving of the route, anticipating the advance of deforestation and other environmental crimes in the region. However, in the Pres. Temer government (2016-2018), the nationalist rage came true. In September 2016, Temer signed an agreement with the Brazilian Army to complete the paving, and the work was resumed in 2017. And the prophecy came about as predicted. In November 2019, BR-163 was completely paved in the stretch that connects the MT to the PA. 'This work is at the heart of agribusiness and will reduce export costs,' celebrated Pres. Bolsonaro at the time. Since then, environmental degradation in the region has exploded. Between January and April 2020, there was a 359% increase in deforestation around the Pará stretch of the highway, compared to the same period of the previous year. According to data from Rede Xingu+, the leap from 591 to 2,717 hectares. 'What the general started, the captain will finish,' said Tarcísio de Freitas, Minister of Infrastructure; he talked about the highway (Pres. Bolsonaro was a Captain before he was expelled from the Army), but in the end, also about the predatory occupation of the forest, an explicit agenda of the Bolsonaro government. The Violence Connection BR 163 not only carries soybeans from the Midwest to Pará ports, but also violence into the Amazon. 'And for decades. The construction of the road is marked by the near extermination of an indigenous people. In 1973, with the progress of the work in the stretch known as Cuiabá-Santarém, two thirds of the Panará population was decimated by the violence of contact with white men, amid diseases and massacres. The road cut through the traditional territory of the indigenous people in the Peixoto Azevedo river region, in Mato Grosso. In 1975, on the verge of extermination, they were taken to the Xingu Indigenous Park, and only managed to return to their ancestral land more than 20 years later. In 2000, in an unprecedented feat in the history of the indigenous peoples of Brazil, the Panará won an indemnity action in the courts, against Funai and the Union, for the material and moral damages caused by the contact. 'Also in 2000, the paving of Cuiabá-Santarém stretch, installed in the boundary between the Xingu and Tapajós rivers basins, was completed. To mitigate the impacts of the work, the government would put into practice the 'Sustainable BR-163' plan, which provided for land title regularization around the road and the delimitation of protection and sustainable use areas, such as Conservation Units and Extractive Reserves. But the plan was not implemented properly. The 'low use of resources, accompanied by insufficient inspection and lack of proper implementation of these protected areas, resulted in the advance of the agricultural frontier, as the ease of flowing production acts as an incentive to open new areas', explains Greenpeace in the study 'Areas without destination around the BR-163 in the sight of squatters'. In 2019, the Pastoral Land Commission denounced that in all municipalities in Pará that the organization follows around the highway (Trairão, Rurópolis, Itaituba, Jacareacanga and Novo Progresso) there are farmers, indigenous peoples, settlers and extractivists threatened with death. BR 163 is a historical vector of violence and destruction in the Amazon. And the Bolsonaro government, where does this tram fit in? Come on. 'It is interesting to point out that, decades after the beginning of its construction, even during the dictatorship, it was at the end of Bolsonaro's first year in office that the paving of the stretch connecting Mato Grosso to Pará was completed. The feat was commemorated by the president and his 'super minister' of Infrastructure, Tarcísio de Freitas, as a kind of foreshadowing of the ministry's priorities: opening the way for the production of Brazilian commodities, beckoning to the government's rural base, without any socio-environmental protection plan for the crossed areas, which became an even more vulnerable target of environmental criminals. The ease of flow encourages the advance of the agricultural frontier into the forest and

the exploitation of illegal wood, for example, a platform for land grabbers. Just a few months before the completion of the work, on August 10, farmers around the BR 163 in Pará orchestrated a criminal action in support of Bolsonaro, who was being charged for the significant increase in fires in the Amazon, while discrediting the data presented by INPE. It was the Day of Fire that turned the skies of different parts of the country into night. Days of fire in the region of the municipality of Novo Progresso, which totaled 1,457 hot spots in the PA, 38% in forest areas and 33% in deforested areas. And what happened to the perpetrators of this arson? Nothing, even if the identities of the owners of the properties where the fire started can be consulted, via CAR (Rural Land Registry), by the State Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainability of Pará. The famous “one hand washes the other”. In 2021, another feat: without consulting the indigenous peoples of the region, such as the Kayapó das Terras Indígenas (TIs) Baú and Menkragnoti, and the Panará, historically victimized by the highway, the Federal Government auctioned the stretch of highway between Sinop (MT) and Mirituba (PA). The highway #BR163 is just one more example of the government’s pact with the military dictatorship and its colonizing project for the Amazon. Written and Produced by Julia Alves, adapted to English by Marianna Olinger, Art by Gabriel Pasin.