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BRAZIL'S AMAZON SELLOUT THREATENS CRITICAL INDIGENOUS LANDS

November 13, 2017 by Bill Laurance

Two of the world's most eminent experts on the Amazon, ALERT members Philip Fearnside and Thomas Lovejoy, tell us about truly frightening developments happening right now in Brazil:

PHILIP FEARNSIDE: A PRESIDENCY MIRED IN CORRUPTION

Environmentalists have become used to attacks on the Amazon by Brazil's president Michel Temer, but the latest happenings **may be the scariest of all.**

Temer faces multiple accusations of corruption—and has barely survived two votes in the Brazilian Congress to commence impeachment proceedings against him.

On both occasions, Temer's survival has hinged on votes of the conservative "ruralist" block—members that represent large landholders and control a big block of the Congress.

Prior to each vote, billions of dollars in handouts were granted to selected deputies in Congress.

But the cost was not only financial—it was also paid for by the Amazonian environment, via an amazing series of government concessions.



These concessions included decrees and promises to:

- revoke or reduce protected areas
- build forest roads demanded by ruralists
- “regularize” large illegal land claims
- forgive billions of dollars in fines and debts owed by those charged with land-theft
- halt efforts to restrict the “**equivalent of modern-day slavery**” for poor laborers

MORE TROUBLE BREWING

Temer's second impeachment vote on October 25th didn't end the bonanza for the powerful ruralists.

Opinion polls show that Temer has only 3 percent public approval—the lowest figure ever recorded for a Brazilian president—and there are still dozens of other impeachment proposals pending in Congress.

To survive politically, Temer needs to keep appeasing the ruralists.

Last month he met with the ruralists and reportedly promised a frightening new executive order—one that would allow indigenous lands to be 'rented out' to agribusiness interests.



This is astounding from environmental and social perspectives: the Brazilian Amazon has the largest expanse of indigenous lands in the world, each designated to protect a particular native people.

The indigenous lands are not just traditional territories. They're also doing a critical job of reducing illegal deforestation and fires in the Amazon—in many cases doing as well or better than national parks and other formally protected areas (see [here](#) and [here](#)).



This is because the highly territorial indigenous groups fend off illegal loggers, miners, ranchers, and land thieves.

THOMAS LOVEJOY: FEAR FOR AMAZON PEOPLES AND FORESTS

The Brazilian constitution gives indigenous peoples the unassailable right to designated lands on which to continue their traditional livelihoods—lifestyles that have persisted for many centuries or millennia.

This vital right of indigenous groups has been dutifully carried out by past Brazilian governments, often with large international funding (such as the [G-7 Pilot Program for the Brazilian Rainforests](#)).

Overall, demarcated indigenous lands—which are both constitutionally mandated and involve extensive efforts by global donors—now total around 25 percent of the Brazilian Amazon.

To legalize agribusiness activities in such sacrosanct territories is both unconstitutional and grievously illegitimate.



For one thing, how could it not beget more criminal activities the Amazon?

Who can imagine remote groups of indigenous peoples—many of whom are unfamiliar with the modern world—resisting fast-talking entrepreneurs showing up with swollen bags of cash and lavish promises?

And by slicing into remote and protected areas of the Amazon, agribusiness interests could be cutting their own throats. This is because Brazilian agribusiness direly needs an intact Amazon rainforest to sustain its own rain-fed agriculture.

Much rainfall in the Amazon and in surrounding lands are generated and recycled by the Amazon itself—a phenomenon that is well-studied and documented scientifically (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

As the forests vanish, you get sparser rainfall, more droughts, and less climatic stability—it's as simple as that.

No matter how you look at it, the disastrously ill-advised actions by president Temer and his ruralist political accomplices should die.



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