

The Amazon: an Eldorado or a Green Hell?

The Portuguese writer Ferreira de Castro, in his book “The Jungle”, wrote of his impressions of Amazonia at the start of the 20th century, at the height of the rubber boom. The book ends with a great fire that destroys the rubber plantations, which could be interpreted as the end of a cruel period of exploitation, with the light coming from the fire as the possibility of reinventing a new Brazil.¹

Since then, many things have changed, but the social relationships continue, in many situations, as cruel as in the past. The rubber plantations simply gave way to pastures.

No one is indifferent when the subject matter is Amazonia. Everyone has proposals to make or opinions to give about the development of the region. The most recent of these proposals, “Amazonia: a Brazilian challenge for the 21st Century – The need for a scientific and technological revolution”, was elaborated by the Directorate of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences (ABC).² (http://www.abc.org.br/article.php3?id_article=200).

Another important proposal for the development of Amazonia, by the illustrious Brazilian Paulo Bêrredo Carneiro who, for many years, was the Director General of UNESCO, merits being reviewed for its relevance to today, even though it was written more than fifty years ago. Not as wide-ranging as that of the ABC, but not any less important, the proposal of Paulo Carneiro suggests the establishment of the “International Institute of Hylea Amazonia: Reasons and Objectives for its Creation”.³

What is in common between these two proposals is that the great challenge to develop Amazonia is a question of the State, and that science, technology and innovation have a fundamental role in this development.

To these proposals, should be added this special issue of the Journal of the Brazilian Chemical Society (JBCS) about Amazonia. The Directorate of the Brazilian Chemical Society (SBQ) and the editors of JBCS, when they decided to publish this special issue, wished to show the role that SBQ has in the formulation of developmental plans and policies for Brazil. Not less important, this special issue continues the presentation of relevant themes of national interest in the journals edited by the SBQ.⁴ The subject matter in this special issue considers questions such as “the black earth of the Indians”, the fertile land that is believed to have been produced by Amazonian peoples and that covers at least 10% of Amazonia, being important for studies by archeologists and anthropologists, alongside articles about medicinal plants and those that produce

essential oils and articles that contain relevant information to better understand the region.

The words of Paulo Carneiro continue to be relevant: “*The Amazon will only be really ours when we understand it and use it. Until this happen the Amazon will be a mysterious green spot in the geographical configuration of Brazil, lacking the human and technical potential needed to make the contributions that destiny reserves to it.*”

Nothing really new is required for the development of the Amazon. The basics are already present, in the richness of its natural resources. However, the region lacks human resources and investment capital. But, of all the investments that could be applied to the region, that which will give the most important returns is, without doubt, education.

The creation of new universities and research institutes in the Amazonian region will only have their hoped-for success if accompanied by graduate research, which can only be realized with the nucleation of adequately supported research groups and the permanence in the region of good group leaders.

Neither Eldorado or a Green Hell, the Amazon is a region rich in natural resources that needs science, technology and innovation to develop with sustainability.

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