

and, in 1969, the American-Brazilian company that controlled the production exported 1.4 million tons. At that time, manganese ore was the most important export product of the North. A part was destined for the United States. Expanding mining led to significant population growth. In the early 1950s, the municipality of Macapá had only 20 600 inhabitants, by 1970 the population had increased to 98 700 and the city had undergone a remarkable modernisation. However, Macapá had also attracted quite a few rural people for whom no suitable employment was available.

Another post-war development was the rise of tin mining in Rondônia. This was made possible by the construction of a road connection between Porto Velho and São Paulo in 1965. As a result, the ore could be transported in trucks to Volta Redonda, where processing would take place. In 1960 only 49 tons of tinstone were produced in Rondônia. Rubber, Brazil nuts, hides and some vegetable oils were still the main export products at that time, but in 1970 production was estimated at 4 000 tons and tin ore was in first place. In 1967, 97% of production was done by tin washers, who worked in groups of two to four people and had only simple resources at their disposal. They sold the ore to companies that somewhat concentrated and transported it and also supplied food and other necessities to the washers. Of the approximately 30 000 tin washers in the area in 1968, many had previously been rubber tappers. Tin mining had become so important in a few years that almost half of the population outside the towns of Guajará Mirim and Porto Velho found a living in it. In the period 1960–1970, the population of Rondônia increased from 71 000 to 116 600. The expectation at the end of the 1960s was that production would increase considerably. At that time, the army had started building a road connecting Ariquemes to Guajará Mirim. This would no longer make it necessary to transport a large part of the ore by air to the larger collection centre Ariquemes, but made it possible to transport the ore directly into trucks. At the end of the 1960s, large-scale production started to increase. Several large foreign and Brazilian companies began to show an increasing interest in tin mining, so that several large concessions had already been issued. One problem was that the *garimpeiros* occupied the best grounds. Their existence was threatened. It was expected that the large companies would use modern mechanised extraction methods; they were used only in a few places in the 1950s.

Mining stimulated agricultural activity. Settlers started farming along the Cuiabá-Porto Velho road and milk and poultry production had increased around Rondônia's capital.

## A weak economy

In 1970, no more than 11% of the active population were employed in industry. This was limited to the processing of local raw materials such as jute and to companies that provided basic needs such as foodstuffs. In 1969, the North had only 1.25% of the Brazilian industrial population and 2.6% of the number of industrial enterprises. Most of these were small.

In 1965 the vast North contributed only 1.7% of the national income. According to official estimates, the average *renda interna per capita* in Brazil that year was 298 cruzeiros. In the North, this average was approached only by the territory of Amapá,

thanks to manganese mining (270 cruzeiros). In the other areas it was between 116 cruzeiros (Pará) and 193 cruzeiros (Acre).

The level of prosperity was low. 47% of the active population earned a monthly income of less than 150 cruzeiros. 45% of the population of five years and older could not read and write. In 66% of the homes there was no running water or a well available.

Only two cities were really significant and they owed this mainly to their collecting and distribution function. Belém was the most developed and served the entire Amazon basin, including the nearby Belém–Bragança zone, the most populous and most colonised region of the Amazon Basin. Because of their transport and trade function, their infrastructure and their population, both cities had managed to attract the larger part of the northern Brazilian industry.

Until 1970, other parts of the vast country of Brazil had been increasingly more attractive as settlement areas than the Amazon Basin, with its tropical jungle, high average annual temperatures, abundant rainfall, high humidity and danger of disease. It had received little attention over the centuries from private investors, the mother country Portugal and the government of independent Brazil. There was no question of a development policy for the region. The North was just a resource frontier. All federal development activities focused on the Southeast (also referred to as Centro-Sul), as did private initiative. The North attracted mainly poor population from the Northeast.

In 1946, it was decreed that 3% of federal tax revenues should be used for a period of at least 20 years to promote the progress of the North. However, it was not until 1953 that the Superintendência do Plano de Valorização Econômica da Amazônia (SPVEA) was created to coordinate the intended development activities. By no means every year were the funds earmarked for the North actually set aside, while the funds that did eventually become available partly disappeared through corruption or could otherwise be used only for a limited number of projects, such as the establishment of some jute processing industries, construction of a small petroleum refinery near Manaus and the construction of the road from Brasília to Belém. The socio-economic structure was not transformed by these measures and there was, in fact, no noticeable progress.

In 1966 there was a clear turnaround in the interest of the Brazilian government. Since then, the latter made it increasingly clear that it was serious about opening up the North better, colonising it more intensively, integrating it more into the national economy and thus developing it more. To what extent it has succeeded in this will become apparent in Volume 2.

## Population size and distribution

Northern Brazil has often been characterised as a “demographic vacuum.” Because of the low range of (high) temperatures, the constant high humidity, the incidence of various tropical diseases, the dense tropical forest and the predominance of soils which rapidly lose their fertility after clearance, Northern Brazil has always been a difficult area of settlement. It would be inaccurate, however, to attribute the fact that this enormous forest region still remained largely uncolonised, until the 1970s, to the generally unfavourable environment of the humid tropics. Other circumstances must also be considered in explanation.