

# The colonisation plans and the objections to them

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## The origin of the colonisation plans

The colonisation plans for the Amazon region took shape in 1970, at a time when the North East was again afflicted by an abnormal drought. It appeared clearly that the Superintendência do Desenvolvimento do Nordeste, which had been established in 1959 to further the integrated development of the North East, had not been able during the 1960s to develop the region socially and economically sufficiently to limit the harmful effects of severe droughts.

President Médici visited the North East personally at that time to acquaint himself with the disastrous consequences of the abnormal drought. As a result of that visit, he declared that the Amazon region should be opened up by roads to enable a large number of *nordestinos* to find a better life there. The building of roads would also provide employment for *nordestinos* and it was expected of the road construction contractors that they would hire their labour mainly from the North East. Just as the building of Brasília and the construction of roads to the new capital had provided work for tens of thousands of *nordestinos*, so would the new highways across the Amazon region provide employment for many.

The plan for opening up the Amazon region was not new. In 1969, Eliseu Resende, the director of the Departamento Nacional de Estradas de Rodagem, had already published a study in the *Revista Econômica do Jornal do Brasil* on “O Papel da Rodovia no Desenvolvimento da Amazônia.” In this article he referred, *inter alia*, to the increasing population pressure in the North East, to the inadequate accessibility of Amazônia by navigable waterway and to the necessity for government measures to bring about a more intensive occupation of the vast and still almost uninhabited North. He also made a few concrete proposals in the article, including an east-west link (Transamazônica), but made it clear at the same time that his *departamento* possessed insufficient funds to realise the rapid opening-up of the Amazon region and that there were road building projects which merited a higher priority. In his view, therefore, the great highways linking up the North could be constructed only gradually, i.e. in short sections (Resende 1971, 288 ff., especially p. 293).

The unexpected drought of 1970 brought about a change in the situation, causing President Médici to decide to give the highest priority to the construction of the Transamazônica and the road from Cuiabá to Santarém. This decision to give effect to the recently launched plans for opening-up Amazônia in the very short term came as a complete surprise to many. Many people were also surprised by the colonisation proj-

ects, especially as the government did not yet have detailed plans at its disposal. In the past, special measures had more than once been taken after periods of extreme drought to lessen the problems of the North East, but they had never yet gone so far as to include large-scale colonisation in the still thinly-populated areas of North Brazil.

In June 1970, the government introduced the Programa de Integração Nacional (Decree 1106 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1970). One of the points of this programme was that a sum of 2000 million cruzeiros should be invested during the period 1971–1974 in the areas under the aegis of the SUDENE and the SUDAM, to be used not only for further industrialisation and agricultural development in the North East, but also for the construction of the two highways referred to above and for colonisation along their margins (*TransAmazonian Highways* 1970, 11 and 14).<sup>55</sup>

Nor were these spectacular colonisation plans in fact original, since at other moments in Brazilian history there had been thoughts of reducing the problems of the North East by encouraging the migration of *nordestinos* to the Amazon region. After the disastrous drought of 1877 Pedro II offered the *flagelados* free transport to the ports of Belém or Manaus (Morais *et al.* 1970, 115). The idea had been toyed with at various times subsequently. What was new in 1970 was the decision actually to make use of the colonisation potential.

## The objections to the colonisation plans

Like the road construction projects, the colonisation plans gave rise to immediate criticism. Alberto Tamer and Roberto de Oliveira Campos at once called in question the necessity for colonising the Amazon region and also feared that such colonisation would be far from successful.<sup>56</sup> Other people also made written and verbal criticism of the plans and so put a damper on the almost lyrical enthusiasm with which the road building and colonisation plans were announced and defended. The criticisms are summarised in the sections below.

## The availability of land elsewhere

One of the first objections was that there were still ample possibilities for colonisation near the existing highways in the Amazon region, such as the road from Belém to Brasília and that from Cuiabá to Porto Velho. Similar possibilities were seen in Goiás and Mato Grosso, where large areas were put into use for extensive livestock farming at the time.

It was also pointed out that there were still large areas of land available for colonisation in the state of Maranhão. This region possesses a natural environment that differs less from that of the North East than does the Amazon region proper, while

55 In the following year the government announced the Proterra programme, which formed part of the Programa de Integração Nacional and included further measures for the development of agriculture in the North and North East.

56 See their publications relating to the Transamazônica (Tamer 1971; Morais *et al.* 1970). Some of the criticism is to be found, in briefer form than what follows here, in the publications included in the list of references. It is derived from short newspaper articles and conversations with Brazilians.

colonisation had also already been taking place there for several decades. There was a considerable migration to the region from the neighbouring states of Piauí and Ceará, in particular. Another important advantage of Maranhão was the fact that it is situated much closer to the North East, which meant that the problem of isolation and of the great distances to the more densely occupied areas of Brazil were felt much less keenly there than in the North proper. This closer location was advantageous, for example, in the marketing of agricultural surpluses (Morais *et al.* 1970, 123; see also Tamer 1971, 91 ff.).

A colonisation study instituted by the SUDENE in 1972 showed that, in the zones of Itapecuru, Gurupi and Alto Parnaíba alone, a total of at least 48 000 families would be able to find a living (Apote *et al.* 1972, 55).

In view of all this, it is not surprising that, after the colonisation plans were announced, it was quickly concluded that the government would do better to use the money, not for road building, but for an intensification and improved organisation of colonisation in Maranhão, especially since a number of colonisation projects were already in progress there, so that it could draw upon some experience in the field.

### The low level of education of the *nordestinos*<sup>57</sup>

There was also doubt from the beginning as to whether the *nordestinos*, from whom the government expected a great deal of interest in the colonisation projects in the North, were the most suited population group to realise a successful colonisation scheme. The *nordestinos* had, in general, little education and many were even illiterate. By no means all of them yet saw the necessity of education for their children, with the consequence that they often kept their children at home as soon as there was work to be done on the land.

Moreover, many *nordestinos* had an extremely limited knowledge of agriculture. Many employed traditional agricultural methods, not only when they practised farming in the North East or in Maranhão, but even when farming in the Amazon region. The *nordestinos* who were established in Amazônia in about 1970 almost without exception turned to simple, shifting cultivation. Some of them did not see the value and the necessity of more intensive production techniques, since there were still vast areas of forest that could be cleared. Consequently, measures to combat soil exhaustion and erosion were by no means always employed. Those who were more aware of the possible dangers of shifting cultivation were often unable to employ better methods because of lack of capital and/or the absence of the necessary technical knowledge. Added to this lack of capital and knowledge was the fact that people were often prevented by malnutrition and disease from achieving the amount of work that would be desirable. As a result of all this, the harvest was often modest, while the lack of good storage facilities meant that part of what was harvested was lost.

Tamer also pointed out that many *nordestinos* not only had a traditional outlook, but were even fatalistic and resigned. They often also had a poorly developed social instinct. The majority were strongly individualistic and they tended to be mistrustful of credit-giving institutions and cooperatives.

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57 Alberto Tamer paid detailed attention to this in his *Transamazônica* (1971), particularly on pp. 123–130.

Alberto Tamer and others accordingly rightly remarked that one need not expect that people with physical disabilities, a lack of technical knowledge and the attitudes just described would suddenly behave in the Amazon region as modern, progressive farmers. Tamer therefore did not consider the *nordestinos* to be the best suited population group to realise a rapid and successful colonisation of the North, with its difficult natural environment.

### The constantly inadequate government support

Disappointments and failures could be prevented by a proper supervision of the colonisation process. Up to 1970, however, the Brazilian government had never succeeded in providing large numbers of colonists with intensive and expert supervision. The successful realisation of large colonisation projects was naturally extremely difficult. The chance of success was present only if extensive preliminary studies were carried out and if plans were drawn up in advance, with all aspects of the colonisation process worked out in detail. In addition, a large and expert staff was required to supervise the whole process. By no means all these conditions had been satisfied in the past.

The colonisation process had, in fact, been largely spontaneous in the past while, where there had been official supervision, it had usually been very limited. The occupation of the lands which had been opened up by the Belém–Brasília highway had been chaotic in many respects and had taken place without any government support worth mentioning. Few provisions were made for the settlers. The government had also not taken sufficient care to ensure that those who occupied the land enjoyed security of tenure. A great many colonists became squatters and some of them were forced out again by *fazendeiros* who regarded them as intruders or were wishing to extend their properties (Glaser 1971, 27f.). All this largely explained why many preferred living in the shanty towns of the big cities to settlement along colonisation fronts, such as that along the Belém–Brasília highway.

In view of all this, it is not surprising that many people wondered immediately after the colonisation plans for the North were announced whether there would be sufficient interest in a pioneer existence and whether the government would be able during the coming years to provide the tens of thousands of colonists with adequate supervision. In other words, it was feared that there would be a repeat along the Transamazônica and other roads of what had occurred along the Belém–Brasília highway.

### The less healthy environment

The pessimism in the early 1970s concerning the success of colonisation was also based upon the fact that the physically often weak *nordestinos* would have to go and live in a not immediately healthy environment. Malaria and other tropical diseases could make their lives very difficult and greatly discourage them. Naturally, many diseases could be prevented by appropriate government measures, but providing adequate medical facilities in a vast region was by no means a simple matter, particularly if the opening-up led in a short time to the settlement of thousands of people. Besides a lot of money, much specialised manpower was needed. It was, of course, also true that medical facilities would be of little effect if they were accessible only to certain population

groups and if the population still had little understanding of the need for hygiene, as had more than once been observed, particularly among the poor *nordestinos*.

### The problem of markets

Attention was naturally also drawn to the problem of markets. The question at once arose of whether there would be adequate markets in the still thinly populated Amazon region and the impoverished North East for the agricultural surpluses of the colonists' holdings and, if so, whether the high transport costs would result in an inadequate ability to compete. The distances to the more densely populated and more prosperous South East were still greater.

There was also the not unjustified fear that private traders would seize upon the difficult and expensive transport as an excuse to pay the farmers extra low prices in order to ensure themselves a respectable profit. Cooperatives might have been the solution in such a situation, but without supervision, advice and a feeling for community, it was difficult to get such organisations started. Cooperatives, accordingly, had hardly developed.

### The nature of the soil

Not the least of the reasons for the reservations about the success of agricultural colonisation was the limited suitability of many of the soils for arable farming. Both earlier and more recent pedological investigations had led to the conclusion that the greater part of the *terra firme* (the higher land not subject to periodical flooding) consisted of soils of limited fertility, which might be rapidly lost after reclamation.<sup>58</sup>

According to Falesi, no less than 70 % of the Amazon region consists of latosols, which have been formed mainly from Tertiary sediments. They are soils which are generally deep and permeable. Their profile shows them to be well aerated and to possess a good water circulation. The texture varies from sandy to very clayey, sometimes even with a clay content of more than 70 %. Opposed to this, however, is a high acidity and a low chemical fertility (Falesi 1973, 4 ff.). After reclamation the soils rapidly lose the limited amount of plant food which they contain. This is the result of a low retentive power and of exposure to higher temperatures, which lead to an accelerated burning up of the humus content. Consequently, the agricultural production capacity rapidly declines. Where these soils are occupied for shifting cultivation they are usually abandoned after two to four years (Meggers 1973, 22 f.).<sup>59</sup>

58 See the publications by Sioli, Condurú and Falesi in the Bibliography. Harald Sioli referred in his "Ecologia da paisagem..." (1969b, 268) to a "pobreza extra-ordinaria dos solos da terra firme." He also pointed out in various publications that all the northern and many of the southern tributaries discharge nearly distilled water, which is indicative of an extremely low soil fertility.

59 As is well known, the dense forest growth is no indication of high fertility, since the forest lives by means of a branching surface root system on the humus which it produces itself. There is an almost closed cycle. Small losses are compensated because one or a few deep roots transport food from the deeper layers of the soil (Harald Sioli 1969b, 271).

Such soils are permanently suited to arable farming only if:

- trees or shrubs are planted on them. Because trees and shrubs protect the ground from extreme temperatures and rapid leaching, the soil fertility is maintained longer, while they also provide humus;
- lime and manure are applied. According to Sioli, the addition of artificial fertilisers is not sufficient, since the soils contain insufficient colloids to retain a large quantity of mineral substances, so that the latter would be rapidly leached out again. In Sioli's view, therefore, it is also necessary to use animal manure to supply the soil with colloids (Sioli 1969b, 275).

The *várzeas*, the low alluvial lands which are flooded during periods of high water levels and usually provided with a layer of silt, do generally form good agricultural land. The majority and the best of the *várzea* soils occur along the main river, which transports a large quantity of sediment from the Andes. Along the Amazon the *várzeas* actually cover a total area of about 60 000 square kilometres. Their exploitation for the cultivation of rapidly growing products could be intensified through improved accessibility. One problem, however, is that the construction of permanently usable roads in the flood plains is a difficult and expensive matter. The Transamazônica was therefore not planned in the immediate vicinity of the Amazon, but at a considerable distance from the river, so that it opened up mainly the poorer lands of the *terra firme* just described. The same was true of the road from Cuiabá to Santarém. It should incidentally be remarked in respect of the *várzea* soils that, in the view of agricultural experts, these do require some manure, at least if good yields are to remain assured (Falesi 1973, 32–35; Ministério do Interior 1971b, 21).

The agriculturally most productive soils are the *terra roxa* soils, which consist of the weathering products of basic rocks (basalt, diabase). The presence of these soils had been proved in various places, including the region of Altamira (on the Xingu), in Rondônia and Roraima. According to Falesi, the *terra roxa* soils certainly covered an area of 1.03 million hectares. Condurú, however, gave a figure of 2.5 million hectares and a study by the Banco da Amazônia mentioned an area of 2.3 million (Falesi 1973, 14; Condurú 1973, 5; Ministério do Interior 1971b, 18).

Large areas had not yet been covered by soil surveys in the early 1970s, so that the figures mentioned were obviously provisional, but enough was known to be able to state that the fertile *terra roxa* soils formed the exception rather than the rule. Soil investigations along the Transamazônica had already shown that these soils certainly did not occur everywhere south of the Amazon. It is incidentally also true of the *terra roxa* soils that they can be successfully permanently exploited only if the correct cultivation methods are employed and if manure is applied.

### Earlier colonisation activity in the Amazon region: government supervision

We feel bound to conclude, on the basis of what has been stated in the preceding section, that the doubts which have been expressed since 1970 concerning the success of the colonisation plans were certainly not wholly unfounded. These doubts were fur-

ther strengthened when it was noted that the colonisation which had taken place up to about 1970 in Maranhão and the Amazon region proper was not very extensive and also not very successful, even where it occurred under government supervision. The colonisation realised in the North up to 1970 had in fact contributed nothing to the solution of the socio-economic problems of the North East and provided the majority of colonists with only a very simple existence, as will appear from the examples below.

### The colonisation in Maranhão<sup>60</sup>

In Maranhão, the state government made available 3 million hectares of land in 1961 to the SUDENE for colonisation purposes in an area where there had already been spontaneous settlement for some time. The area in question was situated near the locality of Alto Turi and Pindaré Mirim in the north west of the state, about 200 kilometres from São Luis. During the 1960s it was accessible only by a very poor road. The intention of this grant of land was to concentrate the migration from the North East more in certain areas of the state.

The SUDENE had already made a start with colonisation during the first years of its existence, but its activities had always remained very modest and one certainly cannot speak of a successful occupation.

According to a SUDENE publication, only 450 000 (4500 sq km) of the 3 million hectares were inhabited in about 1970. In the most southerly zone (1300 sq km), which possessed the best road network, some 3000 families had settled spontaneously a few years before and the number of large livestock holdings was increasing. An area of about 2700 sq km had been occupied spontaneously by about 8000 families, who were mainly engaged in arable farming, nearly always in the form of shifting cultivation. In the remaining area of 500 sq km, during the 1960s the SUDENE sponsored the settlement of about 1000 families, who lived dispersed in some 17 centres.

When the SUDENE began this colonisation, spontaneous settlement was already intensifying along highway BR-316, which was the principal traffic axis of the whole region and connected the places Teresina and Belém. Because of this settlement the SUDENE was unable to establish any further colonisation centres along the road, but had to found them on land situated farther from the road and still covered by forest. Each family obtained 50 hectares, incidentally without definitive title of ownership. In theory, there was proper supervision, but in practice the organisation and supervision were defective in many respects. This was mainly the result of the absence of clearly defined objectives, insufficient capital, the lack of experts in the field of colonisation on virgin land and of inadequate coordination between the different bodies involved in the colonisation process. In addition, insufficient preliminary studies had been made before beginning with the execution of the plan.

The colonists were in a somewhat better situation than the squatters, because they did not have to fear being driven from their land and because they did receive some support and supervision. Nevertheless, their existence was described as wretched. The average income from work on the agricultural holding in 1971 was only 72% of the official regional minimum wage. The average annual income per family was 4133 cruzeiros

60 The following is based mainly on Tamer (1971, 142 and 238) and Apote *et al.* (1972, 13, 29–31).

(Tavares *et al.* 1972, 82 f.).<sup>61</sup> Sickness made life still more difficult. The predominant form of arable farming here was again mainly shifting cultivation, which was technically not very advanced and served only the local market. In fact, little was achieved of the intention set out in the SUDENE's first *Plano Diretor* to settle 6500 colonists' families in a three-year period.

A second potentially important colonisation zone was the area along the road from Santa Luzia to Assailândia, which penetrated into the transition forest (*matas pre-amazônicas*). The government of Maranhão decided in 1969 to reserve 540 000 hectares here for colonisation purposes, making provision both for family holdings and large livestock holdings, which could be established with the aid of taxation facilities. The intention of this reservation was to ensure a more organised and more concentrated occupation process. A short while before, however, detailed studies of the region had not yet been made, nor had concrete colonisation plans been worked out, while the government also lacked the necessary financial means. Consequently, it could in fact do little more than try to put some order into the spontaneous colonisation. According to a SUDENE study from the early 1970s, the area was at the time in danger of being occupied largely by extensive livestock holdings (Apote *et al.* 1972, 30). Here, too, the settlement of small farmers was on a modest scale and there was no supervision.

### Colonisation along the Belém–Brasília highway

Along the Belém–Brasília highway, where the colonisation was uncontrolled and took place with minimal government support, many colonists made a living from the practice of simple shifting cultivation. After a few years of cultivation, therefore, they had to clear new areas of land. In so doing, many ran the risk of being driven off by big landowners because ownership rights had never been granted in many instances and the property titles had not been properly registered.

The land could be leased only on unfavourable terms. Generally half of the harvest had to be surrendered and the land could be cultivated for only one or a few years, after which it had to be handed over to the *fazendeiros* for livestock farming. As a result, the majority of arable farmers led a poor existence. The farm workers, who lived from their labour, had to be content with very low wages. Many had to contend with diseases. Educational facilities were inadequate.

In the north of the state of Goiás was to be found one of the few agricultural colonies established by the government before 1975. It was the settlement of Bernardo Sayão, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária in the 1970s and was established at the beginning of the 1960s. 320 families were officially settled there in 1971 on *lotes* of 30 hectares. They suffered much disadvantage from the poor communications, because the road which connected with the Belém–Brasília highway was extremely bad. Nor was there a bridge over the river. There was no medical station, although malaria was very prevalent. The largest part of the land had not yet been demarcated. The changes in the official bodies supervising the colonisation during the preceding ten years had done little to encourage the rapid and successful development of the colony. About a half of the farmers lived predominantly from subsistence agriculture and some production for the local market (rice).

61 The amounts are given in cruzeiros at 1971 values. A cruzeiro was then worth about £ 0.07.

There were no cooperatives for dealing with the production surpluses, nor were there good storage facilities, so that a part of the harvest was lost. The average labourer's wage in 1971 was only 0.9 *salario mínimo regional* (1867 cruzeiros at 1971 values). The average family income was 2.3 times the regional minimum wage (4770 cruzeiros at 1971 values) (Tamer 1971, 91 ff.; Tavares *et al.* 1972, 79–81).

It is not surprising that, in such circumstances, some of the farmers and agricultural labourers left again after a short period of time, often for the larger centres, where many tried to find a better living in the tertiary sector. Consequently, no strong bond was created between man and land.

### Colonisation in the region around Altamira<sup>62</sup>

The state of things in 1970 in the area around the little town of Altamira, situated on the Xinguú, was not very different. During the 1960s, the government of the state of Pará had tried to attract colonists from the North East and to settle them in the neighbourhood of Altamira with the aim of expanding agriculture to meet local needs. The colonists received 100 hectares in provisional ownership and had to clear 1/3 of the forest within three years. 50% of the land had to remain covered with forest. After these and certain other conditions had been met, definitive ownership rights could be obtained.

The final results were modest. In about 1970 a total of only 300 families from the North East had settled in the neighbourhood of Altamira. Some had come of their own accord, others on the initiative of the Pará government.

The soils in the region consist of *terra roxa* and are therefore fertile, but nevertheless the colonists did not lead a very flourishing existence. According to Tamer, they practised traditional shifting cultivation and produced chiefly maize, beans, rice and manioc, all of which were products used mainly for their own or local consumption. Livestock farming was of very little importance. Deterioration of the soil could already be observed in various places.

The communications with Altamira were poor and expensive. During the wet season the roads were even impassable, so that the colonists were compelled to transport the harvests partly by horse or mule. The marketing of the produce was greatly hindered by the long distances to the major urban centres, such as Belém.

Added to all this, was the nuisance of insects, which ate up part of the primitively stored harvest. Excessive rainfall sometimes diminished the yields, while production was also reduced by plant diseases and parasites. The majority of settlers did not have enough money to buy insecticides etc., which were very expensive, as well as being scarcely obtainable in Altamira.

In his not very encouraging account, Tamer also mentioned that the middlemen abused their position to pay low prices to the farmers. The majority of the latter led an impoverished existence, were primitively housed and troubled by disease. Because of the low income from their holdings they were compelled to rely wholly or in part on physical labour, but could not afford to employ hired labourers, although this would have been desirable for the further reclamation of the land.

62 Data derived mainly from Tamer (1971, 99–113).

Apart from *nordestinos*, a few dozen families from Paraná had also settled in Altamira after 1969. They had to contend with the same kind of problems as the *nordestinos*.

According to Tamer (1972), the situation described above arose from the circumstance that the colonists had received only land from the government, which in itself was totally inadequate, even though the land was of good quality. In Tamer's view, there should also have been supervision and all kinds of infrastructure should have been provided, such as roads, schools and small hospitals. Tamer considered that the district around Altamira furnished an example of the way in which colonisation in the Amazon region should most certainly not have been tackled.

### The situation elsewhere

Tamer encountered a similar situation in agricultural colonies near Manaus, along the road from Manaus to Itacoatiara. Only the Japanese colonists formed a marked exception to the rather dark impression he formed (Tamer 1971, 114 ff.). It also seemed that the *nordestinos* who had recently settled voluntarily along the completed sections of road in Roirama would not find a much better living. They, too, practised shifting cultivation and enjoyed no government support.<sup>63</sup>

Lastly, up to shortly before 1975, the situation was also rather bleak in the agricultural colony of Iata, one of the few settlements established by the government in the territory of Rondônia. The colony lies not far from the little town of Guajará-Mirim. It was founded in about 1957 and contained some 600 families in 1970. Most of the settlers led a miserable, subsistence existence, because their holdings produced very little as a consequence of the progressive exhaustion of the soil, the small area of the holdings (25 ha), the primitive farming methods and the almost complete lack of government support. All colonists had, in fact, the status of occupier, as definitive property rights had not been granted. 61 % of the settlers were illiterate, 95 % of the families did not have sanitary facilities. There was no medical assistance. The majority lived in straw huts (Ministério da Agricultura 1971c, 13, 77–79).

### Conclusions: The reaction of the Brazilian government to the criticisms of its colonisation policy

The above has shown that, for various reasons, the realisation of a successful, large-scale colonisation in the Amazon region was by no means a simple task. It has also shown that, up to 1970, the Brazilian government had not succeeded in helping large numbers of landless families to obtain a holding and in giving the colonists intensive supervision by providing facilities and granting extensive technical and other support. The doubts which were expressed when the colonisation plans for the Amazon region were announced in 1970 were therefore not without foundation.

In spite of all the criticism and all the doubts, the Brazilian government did not let itself be deflected from its plans. It clung to the view that it was necessary to integrate the Amazon region more into the national economy and that colonisation was one

63 *Opinião* 20 a 27 de agosto de 1973, p. 5 ("A corrida para Roraima").

means of achieving this. In order to rebut criticism, it repeatedly emphasised from the middle of 1970 that it did not intend to let colonisation proceed uncontrolled. It would be better supervised than before and would be carried out in an orderly manner. Spontaneous colonisation along the Transamazônica and other projected highways would not be permitted. A similar state of affairs to that along the Belém–Brasília highway would be avoided.

The Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA) was therefore created in July 1970 as a result of an administrative reorganisation. It was given the task of controlling and supervising colonisation in Brazil. Another task was to legalise the spontaneous occupation that had occurred in various parts of the country.

The INCRA from then on concentrated a great part of its activity on the Amazon region. In 1971, the total colonisation budget of the INCRA was 68.1 million cruzeiros, of which 20.3 million was used for colonisation programmes in North Brazil. One of its first activities was the drawing up of detailed plans (Panagides and Vande Lage 1973, 15).

The Brazilian government also repeatedly stressed from 1970 that the Amazon region still possessed good, but scarcely utilised, agricultural potential. Attention was drawn particularly to the extensive areas with fertile soils. In the popular publication *Uma nova marcha ao norte / Une nouvelle marche vers le Nord* (n. d., n. p.) reference was made to a “solo generoso, rico em materia orgânica, agrestável aos mais diversos tipos de culturas conforme levantamentos técnicos já demonstraram.” The more scientific publications and reports also contained passages full of optimism or tried to arouse it. One cannot avoid the impression, therefore, that the government was trying to push the problem of limited soil fertility into the background in the early 1970s by pointing regularly to the existence of areas of fertile soils.

One of the first measures taken by the government in advance of colonisation was the reservation of strips of land. It was initially determined that strips 10 kilometres in width should be reserved along both sides of the road from Cuiabá to Santarém and of the Transamazônica. The Decree of 1<sup>st</sup> April 1971 (No. 1164), however, declared all *terras devolutas* (state lands) in Amazônia Legal situated within a distance of 100 kilometres along both sides of all existing or proposed roads to be indispensable for national security and national development. They came under direct government control (Ministério da Agricultura 1971b, 25).

Proposals concerning the number of colonists were quickly made known. Up to 1975, within the framework of the Programa de Integração Nacional, a total of at least 100 000 families were to be settled in the whole Amazon region, in particular, along the Transamazônica and the Cuiabá–Santarém highway (Ministério da Agricultura n. d., *Desenvolvimento rural*, 14). The proposals envisaged 10 000 colonists in the first year, 20 000 in the second year, 30 000 in the third year and, finally, 40 000 in the fourth year (Condurú 1973, 19). The text of Decree 1106/70 refers to the settlement of 70 000 families during the period 1972–74 (Ministério da Agricultura 1972b, 19). Another official publication stated that the intention was to settle about 1 million colonist families (or some 5 million persons) in the North over a ten year period (*Uma nova marcha ao norte / Une nouvelle marche vers le Nord* n. d.).

These plans were immediately regarded as highly ambitious. The following chapter will show to what extent and in which areas the government succeeded in realising its plans. In it we give a short review of the state of affairs in the first half of the 1970s.

