

The plans for encouraging medium-sized farms

The activities concerned with the occupation of the land near the great strategic highways were no longer limited to the settlement of colonists on 100-hectare holdings from 1973. The government also began to sell land along these roads to private individuals and corporate bodies. The aim was to encourage the growth of the number of medium-sized holdings, so that there would eventually be a varied agrarian structure. This activity was designated as the “second stage” in the colonisation process.

By “medium-sized” was meant *lotes* of up to a maximum area of 3000 hectares.¹¹¹ These parcels could be obtained through *concorrência pública*, which involved applicants in first paying 3% of the statutory minimum price and then making an offer. At the same time, a detailed plan had to be submitted of the proposed type of farming, particularly the techniques to be used and the cultivation scheme. The applicants had also be able to show that they possessed sufficient farming experience, capital or means of obtaining credit in order to be able to realise their proposals. The plans had to be carried out within five years of signing the deed of purchase. The accumulation of properties was illegal.

Both the monetary bid and the submitted farming plan were of great importance in determining an applicant's chances of being allowed to buy the desired piece of land and applicants therefore often had their plans drawn up by agricultural engineers. In mid-1973, the Brazilian government had definitively already reserved 2 million hectares of land for public sale. Three *glebas* had been demarcated in the state of Pará and two in Rondônia.

The names of the *glebas* in Pará were Aratataú, Uruará and Anapú and they were situated along the Transamazônica, between Marabá and Itaituba. They had a combined area of 1.41 million hectares. The names of the *glebas* in the territory of Rondônia were Corumbiara and Garças. The former was situated along highway BR-364, between Cuiabá and Porto Velho, and the latter near highway BR-319, between Porto Velho and Abunã (see Fig. 5). They had a combined area of about 0.6 million hectares.

The first *concorrência pública* was held in the spring of 1973 and had been completed by the end of August of that year. A second *concorrência pública*, beginning in the same month, was held to dispose of the land still remaining. In 1976 almost all the land in the *glebas* had been sold. Further areas, however, had already been reserved, which shows that the government wished to continue its policy. The majority of purchasers so

110 This chapter is based on information gained in Belém and Altamira, as well as upon the publication by Ministério da agricultura (1973a).

111 In Rondônia the areas ranged in size from 800 to 2000 hectares. Along the Transamazônica, the largest of the parcels were 3000 hectares, their dimensions being 4x7.5 km (Ministerio da agricultura 1973a, 11–12).

far came from the Centro-Sul and proposed to take up cattle ranching. The maximum area available to them for this purpose was 1500 hectares, because half of the land had to remain *reserva florestal*.

The *glebas* near the Transamazônica were still very inaccessible, so that applicants were forced to gain an impression of the situation and topography of the land on offer by way of nearly impassable jungle tracks or from an inspection flight by aeroplane. Since the results of such an inspection were limited, a great many applicants eventually made their bids without having seen the land. The course of events was no different as far as certain parts of the *glebas* for sale in Rondônia were concerned.

In mid-1973 the INCRA had not progressed further than putting up the land for offer and selling some of the parcels. Roads were still to be built to open up the land and not until then would it be possible to establish holdings. The INCRA would not concern itself with this, which would be a matter for those who had bought the land or were about to do so.

The advantages of granting land in this way are clear. It enabled the Brazilian government to involve private enterprise and so limit its own intervention. By offering fairly large parcels it ensured that the holdings had a strong commercial basis and also accelerated the occupation of the Amazon region. While there were also social motives behind the granting of the 100-hectare parcels, the sale of the medium-sized holdings was governed only by economic motives.

The dangers of such a land sale policy, however, are equally clear. There was the possibility that it would eventually lead again, by legal or illegal means, to the creation of very large holdings. Although the government had expressly laid down that an applicant was allowed to bid for only one parcel and that, after a bid had been accepted, he was not eligible to participate in any further land sales, this did not prevent adjoining parcels belonging to several owners being later combined into a single holding. Moreover, if the policy was continued, large areas of land would fall into the hands of a relatively few people. The future would show what the positive and negative consequences of the new government policy were in practice.

The federal government was incidentally not acting alone in this. A few years earlier, the government of the state of Piauí had the plan of offering areas of land of 10 000 hectares for sale to interested entrepreneurs. The land in question was near the Parnaíba delta, in the Teresina district and in areas near the Transamazônica. The state government also wanted to develop the southern part of Piauí through the agency of a development company. In that area there were about 1 million hectares of land that were still almost unused and which would be made more accessible through the improvement of highway BR230 ("Transamazônica acelera o ritmo," *Rodovia* 291 1971, 44–50, especially p. 49).