

Environment Preservation: 200 Years of Fight

By Evaristo Miranda

Many are the environmentalists who believe that environment protection is something new. Some believe it has been started by them and thanks to them. Well, Brazilian whales were defended for the first time by Jose Bonifacio two hundred years ago! In a study named 'First memory on whaling and extraction of oil, and several comments on our fishing activities and their decadence', Jose Bonifacio, known as "The Patriarch of Independence", disclosed the "... disorders promoted by foremen that know nothing about the art of hunting whales". He was astonished by the practice of hitting young whales thus jeopardizing the future of the species.

But his concerns on the preservation and rational utilization of natural resources were rather comprehensive. A prominent geologist, he defended the scientific knowledge of mineral resources and their rational and mechanized exploitation, thus abolishing slave labor and the losses resulting from the manual and rudimentary mining, still largely found in the country. In 1823, he suggested the end of slavery to the Constituent Assembly. He defended the protection of forests and the replanting of trees as the result of a land reform to a Parliament dominated by latifundiarios. The new small landholders, ex-slaves and indians, would keep by need and interest, the ancient virgin forests whose grandness and greenery characterize our beautiful land, like a sacred heritage for our posterity.



ars from the discovery of Brazil, the Crown had established a series of rulings aimed at protecting the natural resources in the colony from domestic and foreign covetousness. It defined those so-called royal trees that required a royal approval to be cut. Gabriel de Souza gave a detailed description of these legally-protected trees on his Brazil's Descriptive Treaty of 1587. The Portuguese expression for them, i.e. "madeira de lei", now denotes rare and much sought after woods like mahogany, jacaranda, etc. The arrival of the Portuguese royal family to Brazil launched a new age for our natural resources. A significant example: futu-

Janeiro, ordered that wild trees should be replanted on the hills. This pioneer reforestation drive created Floresta da Tijuca, which is the largest national park in a urban area worldwide. This is absolutely no surprise considering that the Emperor placed Imperial Guards at thermal fountains and other environmental estates to prevent their destruction. These Guards would eventually give their own lives to fulfill their duty, being the incident in Caldas da Imperatriz, state of Santa Catarina, an example. Nothing was more decisive to the environmental issue than the fact that the Empire of Brazil did keep our national unity after In-

battle of simple Brazilians - like the rubber tappers - whose consolidation was achieved by grand representatives of the empire like Barao de Rio Branco. It is our challenge to preserve it! And this is not much compared to what our ancestors have done.

When choosing Floresta da Tijuca to announce environment-related measures, especially those regarding the Brazilian participation in the World Conference on Environment and Development 1992, President Collor was right. Has the president been told who should be credited for our Floresta da Tijuca?

In 1992, more than ever, the eyes of the world will be focused on Brazil. It will be a good time to remind the Nation and the world of the example of those men of light who challenged the limits and the smallness of the predatory minds in their days. In 1815, Jose Bonifacio submitted a radical work to the Portuguese authorities: 'Memory on the need and usefulness of the plantation of new woods in Portugal'. It defended the preservation of forests and advised it to that country, all accompanied by ecological, social, and even political arguments. Why not to forward the writings, such as that on whales dated 1790 to countries like Japan, Norway and Denmark? Whaling activities remain alive as if they were vital to their "weakened" economies. Legally, the treatment is entirely distinct! In a land of many intents and not many actions, the publishing of efforts and drives by these Brazilians

F.P. cabinet in Brasilia, that the cameraman has committed a crime by filming the first to take the measures needed and avoid helping the wounded". Although according to Passarinho, Pereira Bueno and businessman Alcindo Meyer have been accused of the crime.