

The rainforest guardian

What precisely does a rubber tapper do?
They help to make items for me and you.
Latex, rubber tyres all from a tree,
As the sap is released and slowly set free.



A few cuts here, and incisions there,
As the bark of the tree is slowly laid bare.
But if you think this is harmful and foolish and wrong,
The tappers don't stay at the same tree for long.
They shift around the forest, from tree to tree
As they work with nature as much as can be.

Chico Mendes, a rubber tapper by trade
Was appalled, disgusted and even dismayed,
At the foolish approach of many around,
Who were slicing the forest flat to the ground.

“We need wood” they said “for we have to progress,
Or as a nation we'll struggle, even regress,
If we don't fuel our industry, and find more space
For those people in Brazil who have been displaced.
We could rear more cattle, perhaps on a ranch,
It's only some trees – what use is a branch?”

“But listen!” said Chico, “Just stop for a mo!
This approach is foolish – I live here – I know!
We could mine it for gold, or copper, or zinc,
But despite its enormity, it's no endless sink.

It's here for a reason, and logging must stop,
It's not just the trees that are there for the chop,
The Lizards, the snakes, the monkeys, the birds
Live on those trees – haven't you heard?

But Chico's words were gradually drowned
By the noise of emergents hitting the ground.
The ranchers and miners all wanted their slice
And pushed on relentless, unaware of the price.

Chico responded, but appeared to have failed,
As his protests and actions resulted in jail.
“That’ll show him” they said “How stupid – in vain!
If he has any sense he won’t be back again!”

What they did not realise was the strength of the man
To protect his own rights, and those of the land
From the grinding, crunching sound of the saw,
And he stood even stronger, in their way once more.

“Chico!”, “Chico” – others started to follow
For the ranchers and miners, a tough pill to swallow.
They had families at home, and mouths to feed
This man was a problem – he must not succeed!

So they needed this moustachioed Brazilian man dead.
But how would they do it? A shot to the head?
A rifle....some bullets....a place, and a time
A gruesome and deadly, horrible crime.

When the trigger was pulled it ended the life
Of a peaceful man with some kids, and a wife
Of a leader with passion, whose flames did ignite
In others the longing to continue the fight.

Deforestation figures continue to sound,
How long till the rainforest is no longer around?
How long till the trees are ground down to dust?
Who’s telling the truth? Who on earth should we trust?

But the mood and the feeling of people has swayed,
They feel worried, frightened, perhaps even betrayed.
Is all of this chopping of branches and wood
Really the right thing, and for own good?

The spirit of Chico is well and does thrive,
A full twenty years since he last was alive.
Let’s hope that his struggle was never in vain
For those ancient forests cloaked in mist and rain.

M F Cowan, 2007