

SÍLVIO COELHO DOS SANTOS (July, 1938 – October 26, 2008)

By Pedro Agostinho (UFBA)

I first met Sílvio Coelho dos Santos during the founding of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters which would later become the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). I was taking my first steps into the faculty while Sílvio, somewhat ahead of me, was applying for a scholarship to study at the National Museum. Successful, he went there to study under Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira.

Later on, Sílvio contacted me again in connection with the resuscitation of the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) now that the military dictatorship was coming to an end. He wanted me to encourage students to go to the meeting in Florianópolis where the ABA would be refounded as it were. Heeding his call I led a group from Bahia and when we arrived in Florianópolis met similar groups of professors and students from other universities. In this way ABA was reborn as a result of the enthusiasm and leadership of Sílvio Coelho dos Santos and Manuel Diegues Júnior. The following meeting in 1976 was held in the city of Salvador, Bahia, thanks to the decisive support of the then Director of the Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences of the Federal University of Bahia, José Calazans Brandão da Silva.

In 1978, as Coordinator of the Post Graduate Programme in Social Sciences of the UFSC Sílvio signed an agreement with the electricity company serving Santa Catarina (ELETROSUL) and the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), to conduct what was termed the Uruguai Project—Dams and the Indians, designed to reveal the problems that could be caused to the local Indians with the construction of dams in the Uruguai river basin. After this, another project was launched in 1980 to deepen the analysis of the first one: “Uruguai Project: Consequences of the Construction of the Machadinho Dam for the Indians of Ligeiro in Rio Grande do Sul.” From then onwards, Sílvio Coelho dos Santos concentrated on publishing the results of the research and organizing political and academic debates under the auspices of the ABA.

He built up a research group with whom he worked throughout his life. He held a number of meetings. I remember some of them: Indians and the Law, which he organized with the UFSC and Cultural Survival in 1980. The challenge to Sílvio and David Maybury Lewis (the professor at Harvard and Director of Survival International) was to bring together lawyers and

anthropologists to discuss the situation of the Indians. The presence of 23 anthropologists, 10 lawyers and 11 special invitees is a measure of the success of their initiative; the round table discussion “The question of Dams: Consequences for Indian Societies”, which he organized during the annual meeting of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC); the “Meeting of Anthropologists and Dam Construction” held during the ABA meeting in Rio de Janeiro; the publication of a book entitled *Indian Areas Threatened by Hydroelectric Projects in Brazil*, em 1981, (ASPELIN, P.; SANTOS, Silvio, 1981); the round table discussion organized by the ABA during the annual meeting of the SBPC in 1981 in Salvador; and the discussion on Dams and Indian Groups at the meeting of the ABA in São Paulo in 1982.

This brief academic witness to says little of the anthropologist Sílvio Coelho dos Santos, and less still of a loyal colleague. And, above all of a true and affectionate friend, always calm and never arrogant. Sílvio Coelho dos Santos so often transformed his colleagues in friends with whom he generously shared his knowledge and his affection.

Because of this he leaves a gap which will be filled with difficulty. He was an unforgettable example.

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Translation: Peter Fry

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