

Indian Genocide

“Brazil Has its Custers Too”

anon.

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Buried in a back section of an October issue of the *Detroit Free Press*:

“Manaus, Brazil (AP) Mayurunas Indians on the remote western edge of the Brazilian Amazon jungle have begun killing newborn females in an attempt to wipe out their tribe rather than confront civilization, according to a Brazilian anthropologist. Paulo Lucena said the Indians, whose numbers have been severely diminished in the last four years since coming into contact with white oil explorers, intend to exterminate themselves rather than continue suffering the impact of civilization.

“Desperate and feeling that they have no place to go, they decided to die,’ Lucena wrote to Ismarth de Oliveira, president of the National Indian Foundation.

“The Mayurunas, who inhabit dense jungle along the Brazilian-Peruvian border, 1,480 miles up the Amazon River, have been reduced from approximately 2,000 at the end of 1972 to little more than 400 at present, Lucena said.

“They died quickly from flu, measles, venereal diseases and gastro-intestinal ailments brought to their settlements by the whites. The remaining 400 are the only members of the Mayurunas living on the Brazilian side of the border.

“According to the National Indian Foundation, the Mayurunas were once considered ‘the terrorists’ (terrorists) of the region.”

The mighty conquerors are the Atlantic Richfield Co., Alcoa, Alcan, Caterpillar Brasil, Fiat, General Motors, Komatsu, Litton Industries, the Madeira Mamore Railroad, the Peruvian Amazon Co., Volkswagen and the Westinghouse Corp.; the spoils are bauxite, iron ore, manganese, rubber, timber, tin and the Trans-Amazon Road System; and the vanquished are the rapidly diminishing Indian tribes of Brazil.

Pursuing a policy of genocide hauntingly reminiscent of similar episodes in America’s history, the government of Brazil, in collusion with numerous foreign multinational corporations, has for many years now been involved in the gradual annihilation of its Indian tribes. In the name of “progress” and “civilization,” the rights of small tribal minorities to exist outside of established Brazilian society have been denied, leaving them to be uprooted, shunted around and ultimately abandoned, left to their own devices in an alien environment.

“We Indians are like plants: when changed from one place to another we don’t die but we never fully recover.”

—Tururin, chief of the Pataxo Indians.

Crimes Against Humanity

Crimes of inhumanity against the Indians of Brazil are hardly anything new. They've been recorded since the year 1500 when the Conquistadors first invaded and killed off as many as twelve million. Over the next three centuries, if the Indians weren't exterminated, they were doomed instead to a destiny of enslavement on one of the great plantations of Para or Maranhao.

Those fortunate enough to escape the tyranny of the plantations often found themselves in equally undesirable circumstances on one of the many Jesuit reservations, which have been described by British journalist Norman Lewis as "religious concentration camps where conditions ' were hardly less severe, and trifling offenses were punished with terrible floggings or imprisonment."

In the latter portion of the 1800s, the Indians of Brazil were more or less ignored as commodities while the blacks of West Africa, thought to be a stronger breed capable of harder work, became the new slaves. This situation underwent another transformation, however, with the rubber boom at the turn of the century, at which time the " Indians once again became the object of slave labor and torture.

It was only with the demise of the rubber boom in 1910 that the conscience of Brazil re-emerged and the Indian Protection Service (SPI) was created, followed by a rash of shocking revelations bringing to light the massive numbers of Indians brutally murdered by the rubber companies. The Peruvian Amazon Company alone, it was said, was responsible for the butchering of 30,000 Indians.

The Indian Protection Service may well have been an improvement over no sympathetic agency at all, but not by much. In 1967, sparked by angry opposition members of the Brazilian Congress, a full-scale investigation of the SPI was called for. The resulting report, issued in March of 1968, revealed literally hundreds of crimes perpetrated against the Indians heinous offenses including everything from bacteriological warfare and the bombing of Indian villages to torture, sexual exploitation and failure to provide assistance to Indians when needed.

What prompted the renewal of an offensive against the Indians was the businessman's shift from rubber plantations to land speculation. Rumors spread of great mineral resources awaiting investors in Brazil's million square miles of previously inaccessible land. Working hand-in-hand, government officials and shady real estate companies sold off land which, although occupied by the Indians, they promised was empty. So long as no one else knew the Indians were there, there was no problem. It was no matter that the Indian tribes were constitutionally guaranteed the undisturbed possession of their occupied land, which could only revert to the government should it be abandoned. The simple solution was to drive the Indians from their land without the fact being known.

The death blow to the Indians came in 1964 when Brazilian President Goulart was deposed, replaced in a right-wing coup d'etat by someone more responsive to the interest of the land speculators. With the change in command came a new policy in dealing with the Indians as well. Many tribes were forced to vacate the lands which they were guaranteed by the previous government and were re-settled in reservations. The results were devastating.

One pitiful example of the way in which these tribes were treated is the Bororos, who were uprooted from their primitive village and moved to the Teresa Cristina Reserve in the South Mato Grasso. Excellent hunters and fishermen though they were, there was no game left to hunt nor fish to catch, the rivers in the area already having been illegally fished-out by commercial operations.

Although the government attempted to turn the Bororos into cattle raisers, it was in vain. Many of the cattle were sold off for personal gain by officials of the SPI and those left eventually wandered off and were seized by neighboring landowners. With no meat available, the tribe turned to a steady diet of lizards, locusts and snakes, with an occasional handout from one of the missions.

"Not only were they starved, but their traditions and customs were forbidden by the authorities as well. It had always been the custom for the Bororos to bury their dead twice, once soon after death then dug up when decomposition was advanced, at which time the remaining flesh was stripped from the bones, which were then adorned with paint and feathers and re-buried. Plead as they did, they were not allowed to continue the ritual on the reserve, leaving them feeling spiritless and hollow. "Never before was so much being done for the Brazilian Indian as today when we want to better the conditions of life of these groups and not let them be treated as animals in a zoo for the pleasure of tourists. Our plan

is for their gradual integration into our society, participating in our economic system; because, if not, in the future, the process of development will not leave one Indian alive in his own habitat.”

—Sr. Jose Costa Cavalcanti, former Brazilian minister of the Interior.

Brazil Condones Genocide

International attention was drawn to the Indians' plight only after the publication of an article in 1969 by Norman Lewis entitled “Genocide, From Fire and Sword to Arsenic and Bullets—Civilization Has Sent Six Million Indians to Extinction.” Response to Lewis's article was immediate, with newspapers worldwide accusing the Brazilian government of condoning a blatant policy of genocide against its Indian tribes.

Hardly benefiting from the attention it was receiving, the military government of Brazil reacted by creating the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) to replace the tarnished SPI, promising at the same time to protect the Indians' right to life, cultural freedom and land. In the first article of FUNAI's impressive statutes, the Indians were guaranteed: a) respect for tribal institutions and communities; b) permanent possession of lands which they inhabited and the exclusive use of the natural resources found there; c) the preservation of the biological and cultural equilibrium of Indian communities in contact with national society; and d) the defense of the spontaneous acculturation of Indian communities rather than their rapid and enforced acculturation. Within a few short years, every promise was violated, all in the interests of big business.

With the opening of the seemingly boundless regions of the Brazilian Amazon for construction of the 3,000 mile long Trans-Amazonic highway, which was to run from the Atlantic Ocean's edge in northeastern Brazil to the jungle frontier with Peru, Brazil was once again the subject of international interest. What had once been a “Green Hell” inhabited solely by the country's Indian tribes was now (according to a pamphlet entitled “Supysaua—A Documentary Report on the Conditions of Indian Peoples in Brazil,”) a “businessman's paradise, a garden of mineral, timber and agricultural wealth.”

With information about the ambitious project also came news of bloody confrontations between highway workers and the “hostile” and “savage” Indians along the newly opened frontiers.

“All Indians who let the white man move into his territory ended up losing nearly all their land...The Txucarramae do not want to kill anyone. But if caraiba (the Indian word for white man) invades our land we, will kill because the land was always ours and we never had to ask for it in the big cities.”

—Rauni, a Txucarrathae chief.

It was at this point that it became apparent the government's Indian policy had changed. While fashioning an effective facade of cooperation and good will towards the Indian tribes with the support of the Xiniu National Park—the home of fifteen tribes representing the four major aboriginal language groups of Brazil—and the creation of five indigenous parks, the government was, in reality, yielding to pressure from economic groups from the south of the country, large landowners and foreign corporations to open up the lands of the Amazon.

The official term used by government planners and economists to describe the combination of state incentives, international aid and investment and private financing used to promote the economic growth and development in Brazil was “The Brazilian Model”. It was this model, or plan, that transformed the intentions of the FUNAI from the “defense of the spontaneous acculturation of Indian communities, rather than their rapid and enforced acculturation” to the insistence that the Indians must be fully integrated as a manual work force into Amazonian development and growth.

“This is a promise that I can strongly make: we are going to create a policy of integrating the Indian population into Brazilian society as rapidly as possible...FUNAI constituted one of the important themes of my conversations with the President. We think that the ideals of preserving the Indian population within its own ‘habitat’ are very beautiful ideas, but unrealistic.”

—Sr. Mauricio Rangel Reis, Brazilian minister of the Interior, 1974.

From here on, it was evident that the genocidal policies of the Brazilian government would go unhindered. The consequences to the Indian tribes have been devastating.

“Civilizing The Indians”

The tribe most affected by the government’s lack of concern for their well-being has been the Cintas-Largas. Having somehow survived the efforts of big business in the ’60’s to remove them from their village by the slaughter of their women and children, the bombing of their dwellings and the death from gifts of sugar mixed with arsenic poison, the tribe was finally subdued and removed to an Indian park along with the Suruis tribe at the insistence of a FUNAI “pacification” team in 1968.

Unhappy in their new-found surroundings, from the beginning, they discovered even less to feel good about as time went on. First a measles epidemic broke out in 1971, killing off a number of the tribe. Then a scandal erupted with the revelation that colonization companies, with the authorization of the Indian Foundation, were selling off parcels of land. From there it was uncovered that several tin mining companies were given permission to prospect within park boundaries. It was also learned that gunmen had actually been hired in 1972 to assassinate the entire Cintas-Largas tribe. The tragedy went on and on. It was reported that the Suruis were plagued with tuberculosis and malnutrition. In ’73, SUDECO, the agency in charge of the development of the central-west region, announced the construction of the highway through the park. The final straw came in October of 1973 when FUNAI explained that the original demarcation of the park was “hasty” and that one-third of the property would be taken away. That property was given over in prospecting rights to ten multinational mining corporations. If the Cintas-Largas and Suruis were left with anything, it’s hard to find what it was. Other tribes were accorded similar treatment. At the request of U.S. Steel, the Paracanas were “pacified,” initially with blankets which resulted in an influenza epidemic involving the deaths of forty members of the tribe. Further investigation revealed that FUNAI agents were frequently having sexual relations with the Paracana women.

Within a year the living situation of the tribe was dire. Thirty-five Indian women and two FUNAI agents were found to have venereal disease. Eight children were born blind as a result of gonorrhea and at least six children died from dysentery. In 1972 another influenza epidemic struck and without the proper medicines, the population of the tribe was again severely reduced, leaving very few of what had been a great people. “Big business is moving into the backlands... In the Brazilian Mato Grosso between two tributaries of the Amazon, the Italian conglomerate Liquigas is carving out a 1.4 Million acre ranch. Only a few charred tree trunks remain after the jungle is slashed and burned, and the land is seeded in hardy native grasses...As part of an indigenous scheme for eliminating middlemen, Liquigas is building an airstrip in the jungle big enough to take chartered 707s. “The company will slaughter on the ranch, package the meat in supermarket cuts with the price stamped on in lire, and fly it direct to Italy, letting nature do the chilling at 30,000 feet.”

—Richard Armstrong, “Suddenly It’s Mañana in Latin America,” *Fortune Magazine*, August 1974

Seeing as all the original FUNAI statutes had been disregarded anyway, in December of 1973 a new “Indian Statute” was signed into being, providing a mandate for the destruction and extermination of Brazil’s Indian tribes in the name of “assimilation” and “integration:”

Amongst the articles of the new Statute were allowances for the government to intervene in Indian territory for the imposition of national security”; “the realization of public works that are in the interest of national development” and, “for the exploitation of the subsoil wealth of relevant interest to national security and development.”

Over the past few years the Brazilian government has done nothing to remedy the plight of its Indian population.

Over the past few years the situation regarding the Brazilian government’s treatment of the Indian population has grown steadily worse. Even the boundaries of Xingu National Park have been invaded and disregarded, first by cattle ranchers looking for beef and cheap Indian labor, then by the BR-80 Highway project sanctioned by the government.

In the name of “progress,” in the striving for economic development for capitalism, and with the only too-willing assistance of the American government and multinational corporations around the world, the Brazilian government has openly and ruthlessly embraced genocide as its solution to the “Indian problem.”

For the benefit of a small minority of Brazilians representing the private sector of business and for economic concerns worldwide, the Indian tribes of Brazil have all but been rendered extinct.

“How could you return to this world after seeing how we live? How can you breathe this foul air or sleep with these noises (the traffic)? How can you eat this food made to have tastes which are not its own?”

“Why would you want to have intercourse with these women who seem afraid to be women and hide themselves and cover their eyes? And who are these men with guns who stand in the paths of the village?”

—Tawapuh, a Wausha tribesman, commenting upon his impressions on being taken to the Brazilian city of Sao Paulo for medical treatment.

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