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**The Grandchildren of Lenin are Celebrating
Peace Mission in Gulf far from Goal
On the Soviet Border to Afghanistan
No Mercy for Brazil's Last Indians**

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No Mercy for Brazil's Last Indians

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At the end of August the Brazilian federal police closed the Yanomami Indian Catholic Mission of Catrimani. The reason given was an incident where four Yanomami Indians and one gold digger were killed. Officially the government claims that the Italian missionaries are responsible for inciting and arming the Indians and that they are even involved in gold production themselves. But in reality the future of Brazil's last Indians is at stake: the government and industry want to have a free hand in exploiting their reservations and the missionaries are trying to defend the cultural and physical existence of the Indians. The Brazilian Episcopal Conference, the Indian Mission Council and Caritas of Switzerland all demand the immediate opening of Catrimani. Over a hundred patients are there exposed to the devastating epidemics of malaria and influenza. Shortly before it was closed the author of the following report visited Catrimani.

"This is a war not just a dispute," Dom Aldo Mongiano, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Roraima, said as he greeted us at the airport of Boa Vista. We only understood what this cultured Italian gentleman with white hair meant the following evening, and his demeanor was in no way warlike. Messengers from the Muxi Indians appeared out of breath and reported to the

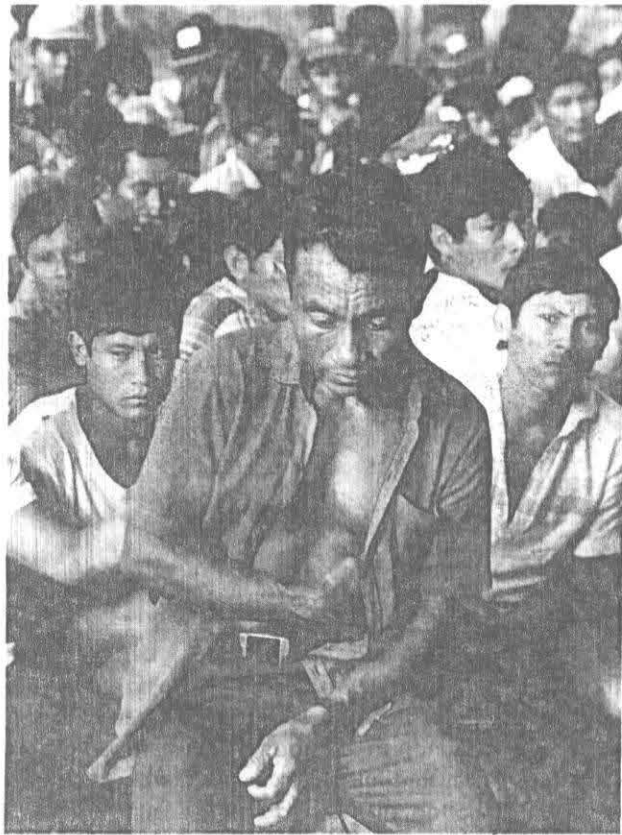
Bishop that they had overwhelmed and captured three pistoleiros 200 kilometers north-east of Boa Vista. These had been threatening them for a long time. The clash between whites and Indians had thus reached a new culminating point in this north-west corner of Brazil.

In this "war," in which the Church acts as an ally for the Indians, the whites are always one move ahead. Early the next day the governor's helicopter headed north with a detachment of police. Before Dom Aldo could get hold of a lawyer and charter a plane, it was already noon, and then bad weather forced them to return. Late in the afternoon we finally landed in Normandia, near the border to Guayana. But the encounter was already over: the police had freed the pistoleiros, beaten up some of the Indians, arrested nineteen of them and taken them to prison in Boa Vista. The maloca (settlement) Santa Cruz, the actual scene of the police operation, is three hours away on foot through the Normandia savanna.

The access to the houses of the Indios is blocked by a close-meshed entanglement of wires. This is where the latest confrontation flared up. The fazendeiro Newton Tavares has wanted to enlarge his ranch Guanabara for a long time now at the expense of the Indians. Because



The grass runway of Catrimani: two worlds meet. The Italian missionaries protect the Indians from being overwhelmed by other cultures and from imported diseases.



The injured and the ones who could get away come together after a police raid in which 19 Indians were arrested in the Macuxi settlement of Santa Cruz.

all dirty and legal tricks failed, Tavares had this fence put up. It crowded the Indians together like in a narrow cage. The 200 Macuxi Indians of this maloca finally had to cut a hole in the mesh in order to get food and water, thus causing damage to property. The fazendeiro then had the fence guarded by three pistoleiros. After one of them had raped a woman from the maloca, the Indians surprised their tormentors one night and chained them to a mango tree.

In Santa Cruz the situation is in a turmoil after the humiliating police operation. Maria, an old woman, wept quietly to herself because her son had been arrested and because one of her grandchildren had had to flee to the mountains out of fear of the police, and had not yet returned. One man with broken ribs lay in his hammock, suffering agonizing pain. "We purposely hid our arrows in the rocks, otherwise blood would have been shed," one of the Indians said. The Macuxi have been living here for generations; the old mango trees testify to this, and there is even a school in the village. But almost all of the land around the maloca has been lost to Newton Tavares.

Yet in Boa Vista the situation is seen differently. The three local newspapers, all in the hands of fazendeiros, proclaimed on the following day: "Indians attack Fazenda Guanabara" – "Invasion and kidnapping by Indians." The only television station in Boa Vista, also controlled by cattle-breeders, brought a report with a horrified Tavares in which he related how the Indians forced their way into his fazenda and how they tortured the "functionaries." Private pistoleiros are thus shown on television to be functionaries because after all they are employed by the company Sacopa (a security agency for the Amazon area), and it belongs to retired army officers.

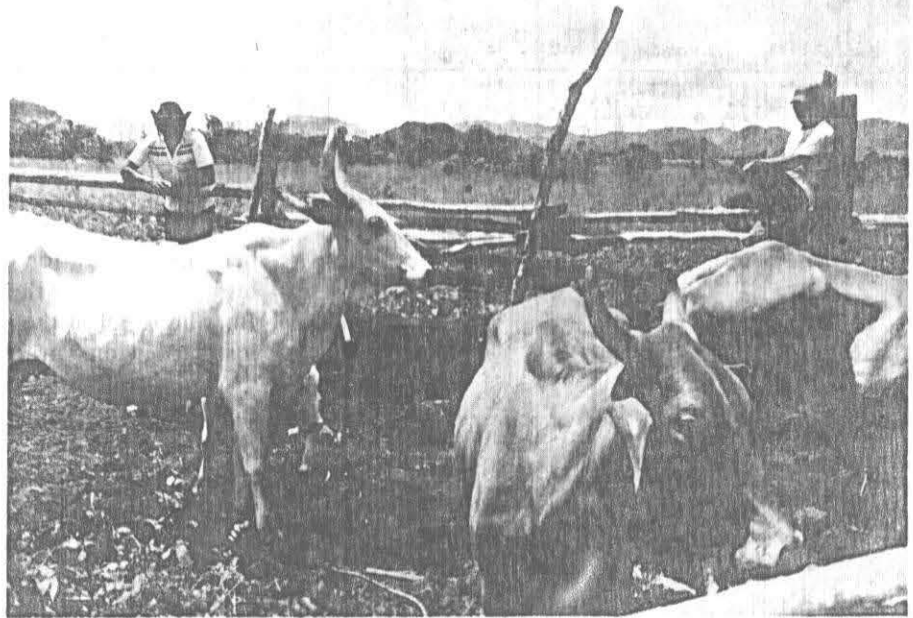
After this Colonel Menna Barreto, chief of security in Roraima, led a press campaign against the bishop and the other Italian Consolata missionaries. He accused the padres of inciting the Indians to commit criminal acts and even of making guerrillas out of them; he referred to them as being "foreign elements" and "subversive." These cynical press reports were even illustrated with tasteless caricatures: Dom Aldo with a halo between two horns; Padre Giorgio lying on top of an Indian woman, saying: "This is how I forgive you your sins."

Of all the missionaries Padre Giorgio "Jorginho" Dal Ben is the most hated by the cattle-breeders. Just as his fellow missionaries, he came to Roraima twenty years

Father Guilherme Damioli and his nursing team are constantly fighting against diseases brought in by whites. Malaria and influenza still have a devastating effect on the Yanomami; measles have been brought under control through vaccination campaigns.



Thanks to the cattle-breeding project of the missionaries, the Macuxi Indians are more determined to defend their land against the fazendeiros.



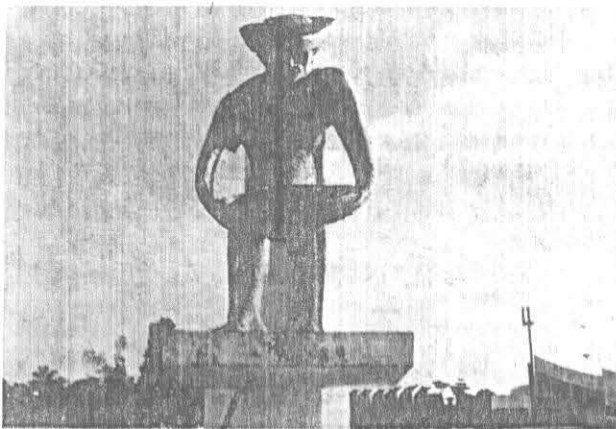
ago as a well-behaved priest who baptized, said mass, and was liked as a regular guest at the tables of the cattle-breeders. But the flagrant acts of injustice committed against the Indians made the Italian padres gradually take sides with the original inhabitants. Just as his other colleagues, Giorgio, for example, worked in the

Indian hospital of Surumu, which is financed by Caritas of Switzerland. In addition to this, however, he started a project that hit the fazendeiros where they felt it the most: the Indians were to become cattle-breeders, just as the whites, and to fight for their rights cow against cow. The Macuxi Indians, with a population of about 15,000, have long ago been overtaken by the white civilization. Robbed of their hunting grounds, they are most useful to the fazendeiros as day-laborers.



Macuxi representatives at a briefing with Dom Mongiano (right).

Suddenly now this cattle-breeding project has made the Macuxi insist on their land rights, and they no longer have to slave for the whites. Padre Giorgio started out with fifty cows and two bulls which he left to a maloca. Five years later this village had to hand over the same number of animals to its neighbors. In the meantime this chain plan of action has already produced 1,500 cattle, in spite of violent resistance from the fazendeiros. They not only killed several cows or let the pistoleiros shoot the horses of the Indians, but Padre Giorgio also had to fear for his life. Just to be on the safe side, the missionaries are now sending him home on a leave of absence for a few months. There he is going to continue collecting money for the cattle-breeding project and for the Macuxi: "At last the Macuxi can prove that they are not lazy, as the whites are always claiming, and that they can do something with the land." Up to now this biased opinion has been used by the fazendeiros to get at the Indians' land.



A monument in honor of the gold diggers in the main square of Boa Vista. The garimpeiros are increasing their attacks on the Indians.

Roraima, a federal territory under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, is situated in the farthest part of north-west Brazil. In size it is ten times larger than Switzerland, but only has a population of 180,000 inhabitants. This makes it the promised land of cattle-breeders and an Eldorado for gold diggers. The former are rounding up large tracts of land to the north-east at the expense of the savanna Indians, and the latter are moving in on the Amazonas Indians in the south-west, for example the Yanomami. In terms of number the Yanomami are the most important tribe of Indians on the continent still living in a traditional manner. Two

hundred years ago the large tribes along the Amazonas were already cut up, but innumerable rapids in the rivers in the frontier country between Brazil and Venezuela prevented the rubber collectors and colonists from penetrating this area. The first white men to arrive there were part of an expedition led by the Swiss explorer Georges Salathé in 1929. Today an estimated 15,000 Yanomami live along the headwaters of the Orinoco on the Venezuelan side of the river. A few hundred of them have never seen a white man. The number of Yanomami in Brazil is estimated to be 8,000. They live in large families numbering from 30 to 150 members and share a maloca, a large, long house. From there they hunt in an area covering thirty kilometers, and collect wild fruits and grow manioc, bananas and maize near the maloca. After five, six years, when their hunting grounds and fields have been depleted, the large families move on to another part of the jungle. Their lives as far as material goods are concerned are extremely simple, but their spiritual culture is immensely rich.

This relative tranquility came to an end for many of the Yanomami in 1973 when construction was started on the Perimetral Norte, the northern border highway. During the time the Transamazonica was to make the area south of the Amazonas river accessible, the federal highway BR 210 aimed at the far north of Brazil. This highway from Guayana to Venezuela was considered to be very important by the army.

The BR 210 proved to be disastrous for the Yanomami. By suddenly getting in contact with white construction workers, the Indians became victims of unknown diseases against which their immune systems could not fight. Epidemics of measles, whooping cough, influenza, tuberculosis spread rapidly; and for the first time they also were infected with malaria and venereal diseases. Ethnologists have recorded cases in which up to 90 per cent of the members of some malocas were wiped out through these disasters. Probably a total of one third of all the Yanomami died as an indirect result of the highway construction.

It is amazing that the Indians made no attempt to oppose the intruders in the Yanomami area, such as was

the case during the construction of the BR 174 (Manaus-Boa Vista), from which the Perimetral Norte branches off. The highway that cuts right through the Waimiri-Atroari reservation had to be protected by the army. Some of the construction workers were killed by poisoned arrows. But the soldiers hit back by opening fire on the Indians, and there are witnesses who claim that even the air force was deployed against some of the malocas. Massacres and epidemics during the construction of the highway cut down the number of Waimiri-Atroari from 3,000 to just more than 600.

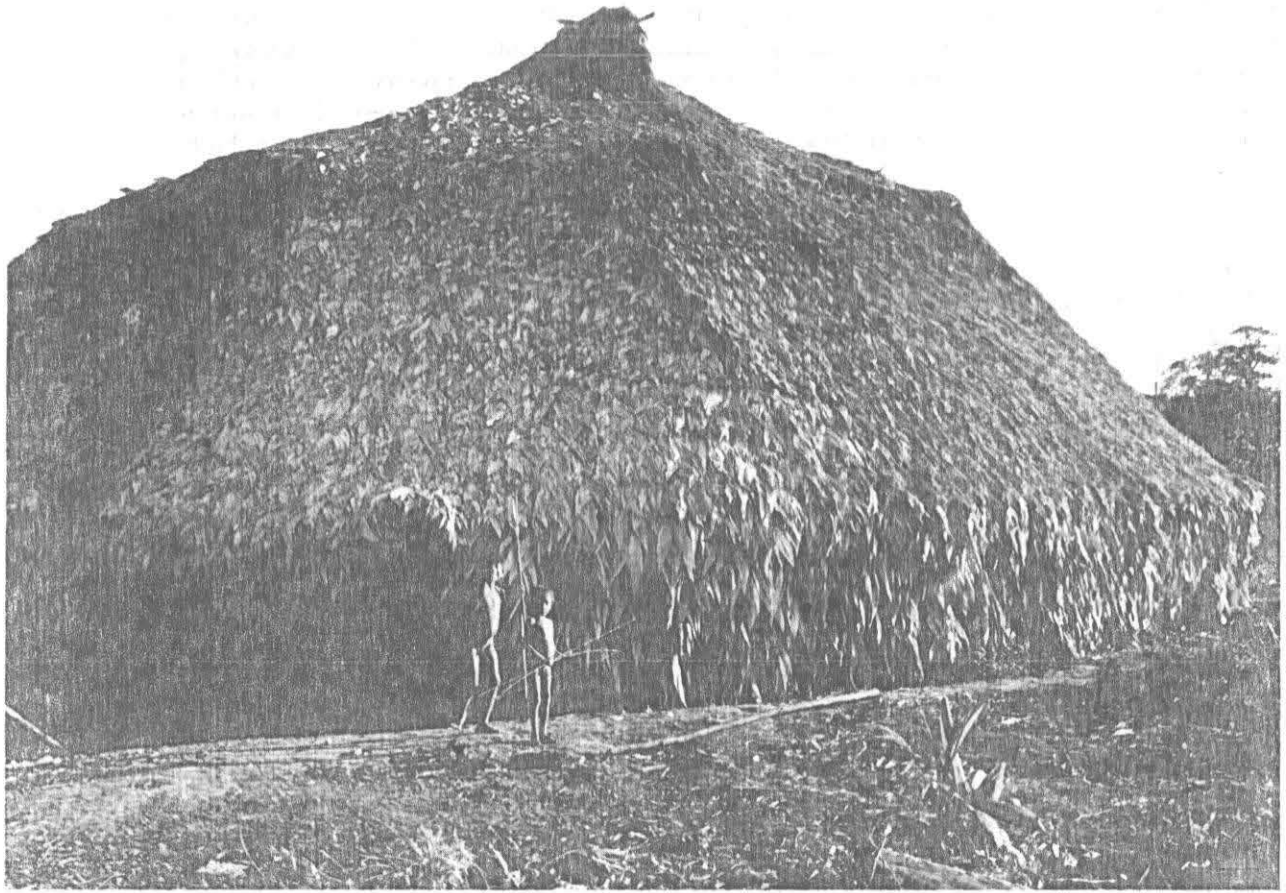
Dom Aldo Mongiano sighed in resignation as he told us all about the atrocious acts committed during the construction of the BR 174: "And we knew the army commander to be a good Catholic." That the death of a fellow brother, Padre Caleri, was used as an excuse to persecute the Indians even more is something that still causes pain and bitterness in the hearts of the Consolata missionaries. Padre Caleri had attempted in vain to act as a mediator between the construction workers, soldiers and Waimiri-Atroari, who started mistrusting all white men; one night he was found killed by an arrow.

Padre Caleri had rushed to the scene from the nearby Yanomami mission Catrimani that he had founded along with another Italian in 1965. His successors had more luck when the Yanomami were confronted with the highway a few years later. The two critical ethnologists A. Ramos and K. Taylor came to the conclusion in a report of their investigations that the Yanomami Indians at the Catrimani Mission "are the Indians who have benefitted most from the presence of white assistance in the area. The main concern of these missionaries is to provide medical assistance and to maintain the Indian way of life as close as possible. This they have largely achieved." After investigating some other malocas along the new highway, the two Yanomami experts concluded that this comparative study "can only lead to praise of the missionaries' work."

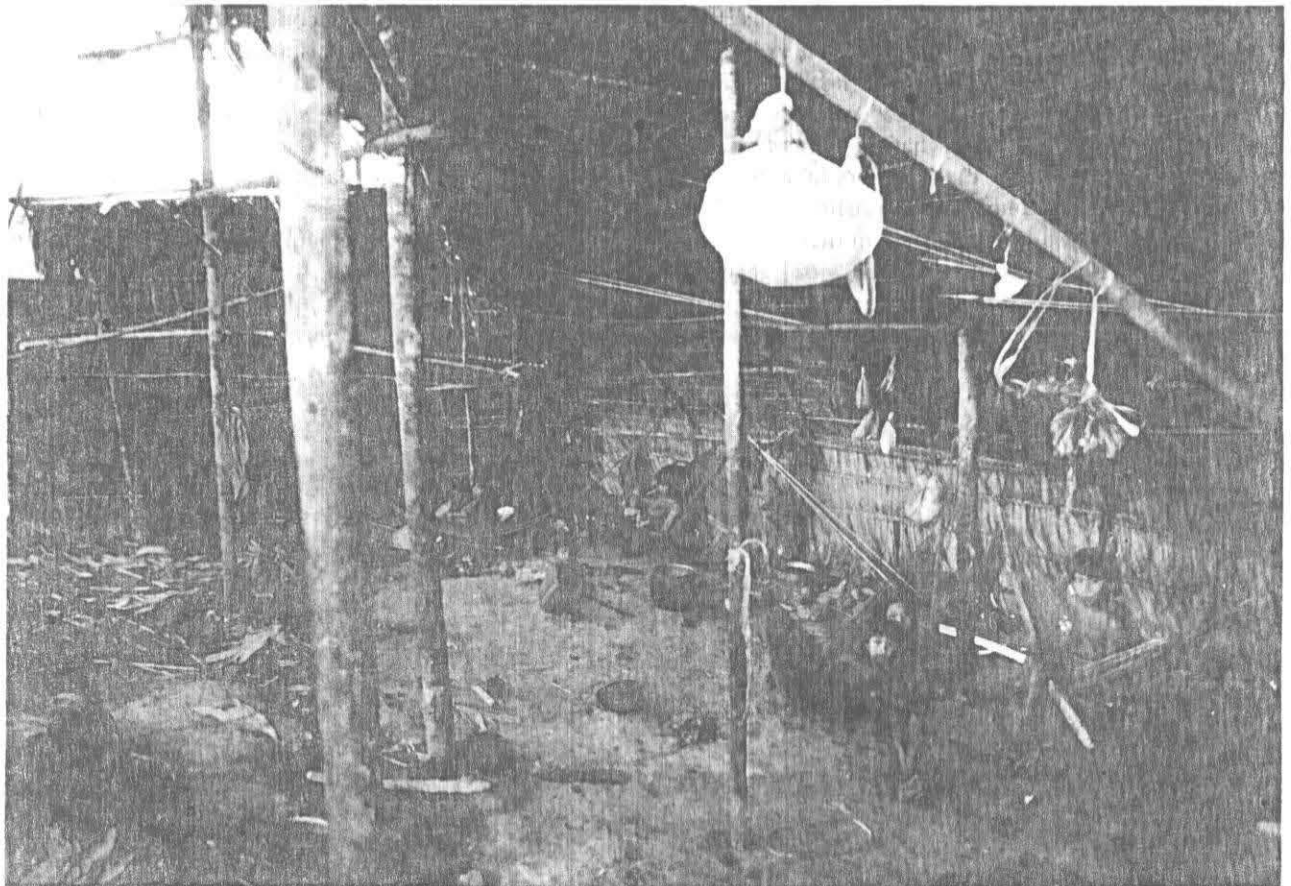
This is an amazing statement – in view of the onerous historical burden of responsibility which the Catholic Church has to bear for the sad lot of the Indians in Latin America. Padre Guilherme Damioli, the present



Funai president Romero Jucá (left) is getting the support of Indians for his financial interests: a "delegation" demands the opening of reservations for mining companies.



With their large families the Yanomami live in houses called malocas. This long house is near the mission of Catrimani.



Yanomami in a semi-completed maloca. Every few years they move on to an unused part of the jungle and build a large new house (here ten kilometers away from Catrimani).

missionary in Catrimani, feels that what he is doing is a small recompense for the historical debt. "God let these human beings survive for thousands of years in the jungle. I can't believe that it is now His will for them to be wiped out in a short time. We can't and we don't want to start a zoo for the Yanomami. Eventually the white man's world will catch up with them, but we're doing everything to slow down the pace. This way the Yanomami can gain time, time to find their own way into the future."

The Consolata fathers are pursuing a new course with this kind of missionary work. The Salesians – also Italians – until recently were doing the opposite. They wanted the Indians to get accustomed to Western culture as fast as possible, and raised their children in boarding schools. They also made shamanism out to be the work of the devil. This kind of missioning is in many respects similar to the fundamentalism as it is practised in a more extreme form by the many North American sects in the country.

In Catrimani the Consolata fathers sometimes get out of their Catholic selves, even when it comes to delicate matters concerning ethics. For example abortion, which the Yanomami frequently practice, and, under certain circumstances, killing their newborn babies. As a rule a mother should have break of about three years between births because she has to carry all of the household objects and the baby during the many migrations. Her husband is always ahead of her, ready with his bow and arrow in case of danger in the jungle such as jaguars. A



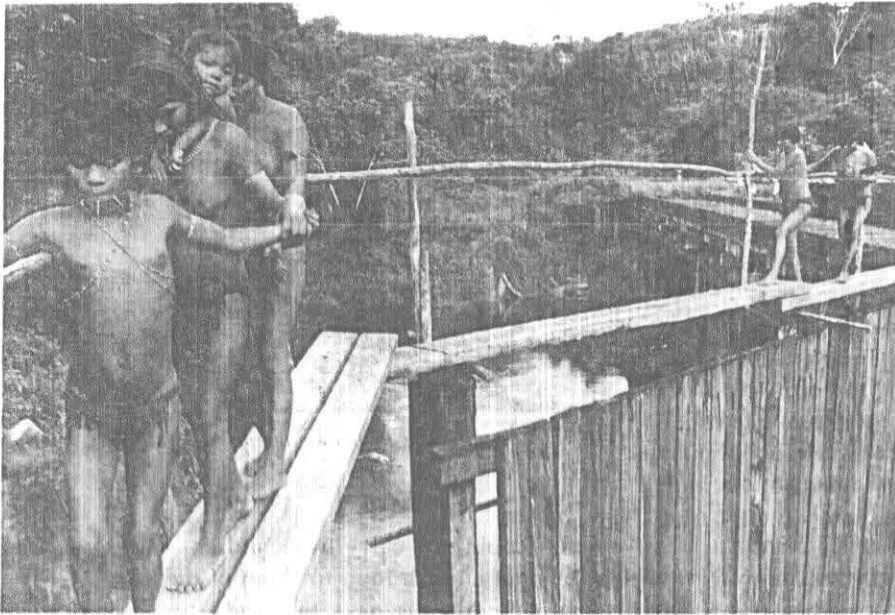
The Yanomami make their own textiles. A woman is weaving cotton in her maloca.

woman could not carry two children, and very often there is not enough food for both of them.

Padre Guilherme says that only time can change these customs, when the Yanomami notice that they do not have to migrate so often and so long as they used to. In the past mission sisters raised "countless" newborn babies, if they could get a hold of them. After a year they handed them over to their grandmothers. Such children, who were returned to their families, were no longer killed because the Yanomami accept each living being once it has lived with them for a few days. But they often have to put up with a life on the fringe of society.



A woman is recuperating from the flu in the Catrimani infirmary.



Ruined bridges have been making the Perimetral Norte impassable for years. One third of the Yanomami were wiped out because of this senseless highway project; the national debt increased by millions of dollars.



The Yanomami cultivate a variety of gardens in the area surrounding their malocas. This is a good example how the jungle can be used without destroying it.

In Catrimani no preaching is done and therefore there is not one single "converted" Christian among the Indians. The main concern of the missionaries is to help them survive physically. It is frightening to observe how the Indians wage a new battle against the foreign diseases every day, even though it is ten years back since their intact way of life was disrupted. Many of these diseases can be kept under control by carrying out series of vaccinations, at least within the radius of the mission. With only eleven malocas and 360 inhabitants it is small, but it takes several days to cross this area on foot. Measles and whooping cough are among those diseases which have in the meantime become controllable.

But now there is a new plague raging among the Yanomami: malaria. Children are often the victims. The many stagnant pools created through the construction of the highway are the cause of this disease, as well as the gold diggers combing the jungle. Many of them brought in resistant pathogens after the umpteenth

wave of the disease. The nursing staff and the missionaries are also subject to these attacks. Padre Guilherme fought against his fourth bout of malaria this year in July. The costs for medical care in Catrimani have soared as a result of this epidemic. Caritas of Switzerland has provided 70,000 francs for the next three years so that Catrimani can continue helping with basic services.

But just this year the cost of flying from Boa Vista to Catrimani has doubled to 500 dollars. However the Perimetral Norte, which passes by Catrimani, is to be repaired so that the mission and the Yanomami can at least benefit from the highway, after it has caused them so much harm.

The BR 210 has turned out to be a white elephant, as so many projects in Brazil. It was hardly completed when the jungle began to grow over it again. From Catrimani there are still seventy kilometers of highway going west, but nothing can be seen of them now. The missionaries are keeping the highway open to the east.

They own a 1941 Berna truck which they use to reach some of the malocas. And then this indestructible rattling old vehicle is forced to halt in front of a ruined bridge. On the other side of the river a second vehicle waits to go on for a few kilometers more until the next broken bridge, where a third car waits. Now the bridges are supposed to be repaired again, but not the last section going in the direction of the Boa Vista-Manaus highway. This gap is to remain to prevent settlers and motorized gold diggers from penetrating into Yanomami territory.

In addition to combating diseases, the most urgent task is defending oneself against the garimpeiros, the gold diggers. They swarm through the jungle like ants in search of gold, and wherever they make a strike veritable legions follow in pursuit of wealth. The discovery of uranium and cassiterite in the Serra dos Surucucus had disastrous results because this is the most important environment of the Yanomami living on the border to Venezuela. In 1975 over 500 garimpeiros illegally invaded the reservation. In the end they were turned back by the federal police – only to make way for the construction crews of a government mining company.

This new mine is still not in operation. But instead a military garrison is being erected in Surucucu. It is part of a plan called Calha Norte, which many observers consider the worst threat to the remaining original inhabitants of Brazil. In 1985 the Indian Mission Council (CIMI) of the Catholic Episcopal Conference exposed the secret plans for this “northern rim.” The Brazilian

Security Council had worked out a plan in a doctrine for national security that aimed to contain the frontier territory and to make economic use of it. To carry this out all Indian reservations are to be removed in a 150 kilometer long strip of land along the northern borders. This area is to be made secure by setting up garrisons so that mining companies can exploit it. Behind all this there is military thinking which is convinced that the Indians are not reliable citizens to prevent the country from being infiltrated by guerilleros coming down from the neighboring states. And, so goes the argument, reservations could induce Indian demands for autonomy or rouse desires for secession among their tribal brothers in Venezuela, Peru and Guayana.

The Indian Mission Council, to which the Consolata fathers also belong, says that the Calha Norte “is large scale, calculated genocide.” But it is still not certain whether all the parts of this plan will really ever be carried out. Up to now a stop has at least been put to surveying most of the Indian reservations in these areas, though this has robbed the Indians of an essential claim to defend their rights. Moreover the neighboring states might also be induced to catch up with Brazil in developing the frontier regions.

For some time now reservations have been reduced in size, or not even respected. Instead of creating a Yanomami park, as so many well-known ethnologists have demanded, the Indian authorities divided up the land into 21 separate reservation areas. This has cut up their migration territories. Scientists have figured out that the Indians require 765 hectares of jungle to main-



This monkey was shot down from a 40 meter high tree by an arrow through the heart.



After being bitten by a poisoned snake, Claudio had to have his leg amputated. The missionaries had him fitted with an artificial leg and now he is once again a real hunter.

tain their ecological way of life. But the authorities are planning reservations which in some cases comprise only 100 hectares per head. And then attempts are also being made, with economic criteria in mind, to sign over these areas to individuals and not to entire racial groups.

This would be a way finally to get rid of the Indians, who are nothing but a bothersome obstacle on the road to exploiting undeveloped wealth. They would become settlers; they would soon increase the multitudes of uprooted Indians in the slums of Boa Vista and Manaus or add to the number of Caboclos, those poor settlers along the river banks who have forgotten their Indian origins.

The French ethnologist and botanist Pierre Grenand, of the Amazonas Research Institute (INPA) in Manaus, thinks that nothing much has basically changed in the relationship between whites and Indians since the land was conquered by the Portuguese in the 16th century. The lure of the legendary Eldorado promising untold wealth overnight still glitters in each project undertaken in the Amazonas. Fire is set to the jungle and herds of cattle graze there instead. But these "green mansions" will soon be turned into a red desert: the fragile equilibrium of nature will rapidly be destroyed without a humus buffer and the countless microorganisms to change dying material to new living matter. People like Grenand hope that it will slowly dawn upon the Brazilians that they could learn something from the Indians as to how the ecosystem of the rain forest can be used without destroying it. But Grenand believes that this will



Children start practising with a bow and arrow at an early age.

only come about when the fixed idea of quickly making a lot of money disappears from people's minds.

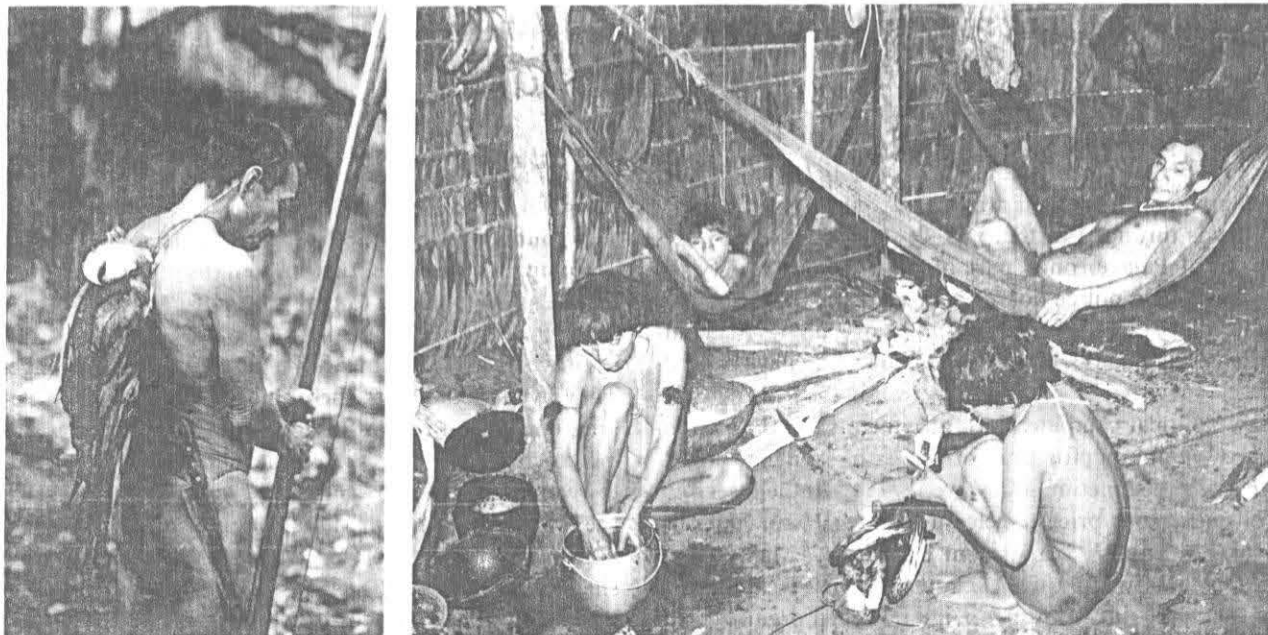
Of all the forces required to change the attitude towards the Indians (and the environment of the rain forest) the Catholic Church with its CIMI is perhaps the most important. The fathers of the church are exerting pressure right now on many of the Brazilian members of parliament as they are drafting a new constitution. One of these members, who is most favorably disposed towards the Indians, is José Carlos Sabóia of the government party PMDB from Maranhão. He shows little optimism in regard to the new constitution: "The Indians represent a total of 1.5 per mille of the population of Brazil and with their votes they're not going to elect any deputado. But the millions will who hope to find their fortune in the vast jungle."

This vast area of the Amazonas forest makes up 57 per cent of Brazil's total surface and it is where most of the country's natural resources are to be found. "An area like that can't allow itself the luxury to remain economically undeveloped just because of a half dozen Indian tribes," the governor of Roraima proclaimed when uranium was found in Surucucu. But the laws are not to blame for pushing the Indians into the background. Indeed they are quite the opposite: on paper Brazil gives its original inhabitants better protection than in the USA. Yet official laws are hardly regarded in this incredibly huge country; those that are in power make on the spot changes as they are needed.

To assure the well-being of the Indians, a government department was created for them, The National Indian Foundation (Funai). It can be traced back to Marshal Rondon, a private philanthropist who founded the Service for the Protection of Indians (SPI) in 1910. But the good intentions behind the SPI were gradually perverted to the point that it had to be dissolved in 1967. At that time a government investigation committee had exposed the SPI's part in massacres of Indians, in poisoning campaigns by using infected clothes and sugar mixed with arsenic. The Funai was to mark a new beginning for government Indian policy.

But at the very best – so claim the critics – the Funai can settle conflicts between whites and Indians, though almost always to the advantage of the former. The existence of the Indians is at least acknowledged through the Funai. Many fazendeiros, lumberjacks and gold diggers would prefer not having the Funai. Seen this way, the Indian Department sometimes acts as a buffer between intruders and the original inhabitants. However, there are innumerable cases on record in which the Funai does not even perform this buffer function. For example, when it confirms in writing to a cattle-breeder or a mining industrialist that an acquired territory is "free of Indians." At times like this the provisional clauses of the Indian statutes do not apply. Where the economic development of reservations is concerned, the Funai often works together with those firms showing an interest.

The Funai, for example, recently published a splendidly illustrated book on the Waimiri-Atroari, together with Eletronorte and the Government Mining Department. Eletronorte built the power station Balbina north



For us a valuable exotic bird, but for the Yanomami the Arana is just daily game. Every bit of the bird is used: the meat is eaten and the feathers are made into ornaments.

of Manaus, and just now it was discovered, before the first damming of the water, that the reservoir will be a third larger than was originally planned. This means that parts of the Indian reservation will be flooded. The Mining Department for its part is interested in the large deposits of tin in the reservation. Not one word is mentioned in this beautifully colored book about the tragedy of the Waimiri during the construction of the highway, nor about banishing the rebellious former Jesuit Egidio Schwade from the reservation. Schwade, with the backing of the Indian Mission Council, wanted to protect the rights of the Waimiri-Atroari and was no longer tolerated by the Funai. The Funai can now continue with their trusty old method of buying the Indians with small gifts at "alluring outposts" especially set up for this purpose. The usual procedure of the Funai could easily be recognized again this summer when it came to exploiting mineral resources in the Indian reservations. The legal situation is unequivocal. Article 198 of the still valid constitution states: "Territories where original inhabitants live cannot be sold. These inhabitants have the permanent right of ownership. Their exclusive right of use for any natural wealth... is acknowledged." But in reality a "higher national interest" is invoked when interests clash.

The Mining and Industrial Department opened the Indian reservations for the *garimpeiros* in May of this year so they can search for mineral resources. Brazil urgently needs foreign exchange, and thus higher national interests are involved than the protection of the Indians. When numerous ethnologists and intellectuals, who support the Indians, protested against this move by the Mining Department, it had to revoke this decision for the time being. But then the Funai obstructed the plan. A delegation of Indian leaders was quickly

flown to Brasilia. On July 5th they demanded in front of running television cameras, and in the presence of the Funai president, that the reservations be opened for the mining companies; the Indians really had enough of being excluded from economic development. Romero Jucá Filho, a 32 year old economist who had become president of the Funai through good connections (he had previously never had anything to do with Indians), declared in a cynical tone that the Indians had asked him to demand tribute from the mining companies. And they wanted the Funai to hold this money in trust. Everyone knows in Brazil in whose pockets such cash winds up, if it ever begins to flow at all.

The Indians are not familiar with terms like unity and political organization. Most of the few attempts made to unite and represent Indian interests have failed or have been "refunctioned" to suit the whites. After four hundred years of ruthless and violent colonization, only 200,000 Indians are left of the original five million. All signs point towards a continuation of this policy of decimation. A few missionaries, ethnologists and enlightened citizens are trying to fight against this oppressive trend. There is still some hope and in this connection I remember a video recording made by the Diocese of Roraima which showed the events in and around the maloca Santa Cruz: a policeman beats up an injured white man, his own relative, as this man tries to protect the defenceless Indians by standing in front of them. His name is Esteban and he is a descendant of that French prisoner who escaped from Cayenne and who later founded the town Normandia. "Many white people think the same way as I do, but are afraid to talk," says Esteban. "The Indians have a right to this land, and I'm prepared to shed my blood for their cause."