

GENOCIDE AND ECOCIDE IN AMAZONAS/LATIN AMERICA

The nature of Latin America is composed of different types and forms e.g. mountains, plains and deserts, where plants, animals and insects are parts of an ecological system, an equilibrium preserved since very long ago.

Man, here represented by the Indian, was and is well adapted to the actual environment and constitutes no threat what so ever to the delicate balance of nature. On the contrary, he is part of this very balance.

With the colonization the exploitation of the peoples and nature of Latin America started. The span of time between the first stage of colonization and up til now, presents innumerable examples of the extinction of entire indian folk groups and the devastation of nature. As an example of organized persecution can be mentioned the rubber-boom beginning at the end of the 19th century and going on up to about the time around the outbreak of the first world war. The number of indians tortured and killed during this time amounts to tenths of thousands. An illuminating example is presented by the fate of the Huito-tribe, which was reduced between 1900-1912 from formerly about 50.000 to about 7000 members. After the rubber-boom the extermination and persecution of indian folk groups continued with ever more refined methods. Well documented are the innumerable /see below/ attempts of extermination that have been directed towards individual tribes, attempts where among other means of destruction also biological weapons have been used, for example the deliberate spreading of smallpox and mass poisoning with arsenic/mixed with flour/. Conventional weaponry from hunting rifles to machine-guns and even bombing with napalm have been used/for documentary references see appendix/.

In the middle of the 19th century the indians represented almost 52% of the entire population in Amazonas - today they don't exceed 3 or 4%, figures that cannot be explained by reference to an increase in white frontier colonization in Amazonas.

However, the extermination that goes on is not simply a physical one. As a direct result of the activities of christian mission, a cultural and social break-down process is taking place among the indian peoples in all parts of Amazonas and other parts of Latin America as well.

The above mentioned effectively repressive methods for braking down cultures and social systems, thus eliminating expected resistance against the continuing exploitation have been practised ever since the 16th century. Consciously or unconsciously the christian mission has largely contributed towards creating the conditions necessary for the exploitation of land, nature and people. Regarding this, there are numerous reports from different parts of the continent concerning different indian cultures. The completely strange and new social environment and situation of life into which the indians are forced is either the characteristic slum areas around the larger cities of Latin America, already overcrowded by poor farmworkers and unemployed, or some form of humiliating serfdom in the farming areas. That these conditions are not unknown, by those responsible, is well illuminated by an official resolution of the World Council of Churches, the Barbados Declaration /1971/, which recommended the complete and immediate abandonment of all missionary activity in those areas of Latin America where indian cultures and social system were still in existence.

The reason was the complete absence of a single example where an indian folk group, as a result, had obtained a better social situation.

It is obvious that an acceptable solution regarding the indian peoples, in line with the UN Declaration on human rights / see particularly articles 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13,15,17,18,20,22,23,26,28,30./ is not compatible with the methods and goals of the christian mission, which though still is carried on!

While the indian peoples are victims of a physical extermination, and a social destruction, nature in these areas is in the process of radically destructive changes. In Brasil, for example, instead of allowing social, economical and political changes, those in power are trying to solve the problem with the landless masses, by means of a levy of completely devastating, modern technology. The ultimate result will be the devastation of vast forest areas in Amazonas being cleared for cultivation. As is well known, this plan has caused alarm and anxiety among a large number of leading biologists who seriously stress that the stratum of vegetable mould available, being very thin is not fit for continuous cultivation. At the same time they stress the enormous risks of biological devastation as a result of soil erosion and biological impoverishment caused by toxin while clearing the vegetation. There is also the outspoken risk of farreaching global effects. An agrarian reform involving the cultivation of hitherto unused acreages by these now landless appears to be a natural and in the long run unavoidable solution.

At the same time, the natural resources of Amazonas are going to be heavily exploited by enterprises, national as well as multinational. A network of roads is being built all over Amazonas. It is less than probable that the development that follows will take into consideration ecological connections, the necessary care of the environment and respect for the UN declaration on human rights.

The problems with which the indians are confronted are thus of several kinds: a/ direct physical extermination, where the worst element is that some of the governments of the countries concerned, all members of the UN, headed by the military dictatorship of Brazil, have failed to prevent the persecution and extermination of different indian tribes. As far as Brazil is concerned, there are well documented cases where the government is to be held responsible for sanctioning and directly contributing to such actions. Furthermore in this country, laws have been passed recently /1970/, completely contradicting the UN declaration on human rights, article by article. For instance the law legalizing the movement by force of entire indian folk groups. This law is a direct parallel to the one passed in the congress of USA in 1830 which legalized the deportation of indian tribes from the eastern parts of the country to the areas west of the Mississippi. A high swedish official of the Red Cross, member of a small groups travelling in the Amazonas on behalf of the organization afterwards made the following mild remark describing the situation: " We/?/are doing the same faults towards them/the indians/ as did our forefathers in the 19th century". As characterization of the actual ruthless and indefensible situation, this remark is far to insufficient to be acceptable, coming from an expected thorough investigation carried out by a humanitarian organization.

b/ A coming ecocide of the very nature from which they live and feed themselves, thus physically eliminating their very existence.

c/ Cultural and social breakdown, where the christian mission is of crucial importance providing the very conditions for the destruction of the various indian societies.

d/ Destructive individual implications of the breakdown.

The impact of completely foreign norms and values, ethnocentrically introduced without respect or consideration of the existing norms and values in the societies in question. This serves to create a state of frustration leading to the break-down of customary and personal relations (family as well as religious e.g) Resultantly there occurs strong feelings of alienation, lack of identity and finally the complete loss of selfrespect. In the final phase, what remains to the individual are the substitutes liquor and drugs , ending up with death in the slum.

- Since the indians are not regarded as citizens in the legal sense in a majority of the Latin American states, they must be characterized as stateless thus falling not only under the competence but the directresponsability of the UN (I) provided that the organization is interested in retaining the respect of the world.

APPENDIX

DOCUMENTATION:

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For further documentation see the international press
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SWEDISH INDIAN

ASSOCIATION