

Dear Friend,

The World Bank is negotiating with the government of Brazil to underwrite a so-called "development" project that will involve the extermination of thousands of American Indians in the state of Mato Grosso and the territory of Rondônia. These tribal people are illiterate, unorganized and unable to even understand the menace which hangs over them. Nevertheless, with your support it may be possible to avert this human catastrophe.

At issue is a project called Polonoroeste which proposes to build 1500 kilometers of all-weather road between the cities of Cuiabá and Porto Velho, together with feeder roads and other infrastructural inducements to the development of intensive agriculture, at a total cost of well over one billion dollars. The area affected contains more than a dozen Native American societies, many of which have only come into contact with our own transnational society during the past 15 years. Most seriously threatened are the Nambiquara Indians who inhabit the valley of the Guaporé River.

These people, who make no pottery, go stark naked and sleep on the bare earth, have been numbered among the most primitive Indians in South America. They are extremely proud, however, of their ability to live comfortably where Westerners can only survive with the aid of cumbersome equipment, by employing a profound knowledge of the environment rather than material possessions. American missionaries made contact with the first of some 20 loosely-affiliated villages in 1964. There followed a wave of speculation in which real estate was sold and resold, in clear violation of the Brazilian constitution, which holds that lands inhabited by Indians are the inalienable property of the federal government. Over 70% of the area has now been deforested, partly with the aid of the infamous Agent Orange, used in Viet Nam. Grass has been planted in the ashes of the millennial forest, and cattle are now being fattened there for the eastern market.

In the course of this conquest of the Nambiquara by Western commercial interests, little blood was shed. But the Indians were exposed to diseases such as measles, influenza and tuberculosis, which they had never before known, and for which they had no adequate treatment. Two-thirds of them died. Several proposals to set aside a decent reservation were rejected, and although a few tiny pieces of land were surveyed in 1979, none has yet been registered, as the law requires. A semi-official project undertaken in 1975 and '76 demonstrated that the Nambiquara can be given the assistance they require in order to survive at a cost that does not exceed the annual income of a middle-class American family. Federal policy has been inconsistent, however, and ranchers treat the Indians as only a minor nuisance, in the certainty that they will soon be extinct.

When the World Bank became aware that there were Indians who would be adversely affected by the project it intended to fund, it consulted leading authorities on Brazil's Native American population. It was advised that the Indians could be incorporated into the overall project, with special plans to meet their special needs, at a cost that was miniscule in proportion to the total capital to be expended. The World Bank accepted this idea, but Brazil balked, claiming that how it treated its conquered Indians was an internal affair. After consideration, however, it presented a compromise proposal. If the World Bank would loan the money necessary to finance the Polonoroeste project, Brazil's own Indian service, the Funai, would undertake a collateral project among the Indians. Brazil stipulated, however, that the Funai would not accept any financing from the World Bank, that no outside anthropologists would be utilized to plan or monitor the work, and that

World Bank personnel would only visit the Indian areas in the company of Funai employees. The World Bank accepted these conditions.

The Funai (an acronym for National Indian Foundation) was founded in 1967 to replace the Indian Protection Service (SPI), which was rife with corruption. No one in the SPI was ever prosecuted, however, and SPI employees were guaranteed jobs in the Funai. In less than three years, the first president of the Funai was fired for corruption. He was replaced by the man who found him corrupt, a puppet of the Minister of the Interior, who had a personal interest in Nambiquara land. The third president compromised until he was ineffectual; the fourth took a firm stand and was relieved of his duties in less than eight months. The current president, João Carlos Nobre da Veiga, comes to the Funai from the Security and Information agency, which helps sustain Brazil's right-wing military government by means of internal espionage and intimidation.

Brazil's avowed policy is to "integrate" Native American minorities into the national society, whether they want to be "integrated" or not. The Funai sends expeditions to "pacify" autonomous villages with blandishments and bribes. Sometimes people with tuberculosis are included in these "pacification" teams. Without Western medicine to combat Western diseases, the pre-contact population of these villages is commonly reduced to 10% in 10 years.

In theory, the Funai provides medical and social assistance to "pacified" Indians. In fact, the Funai is rendered ineffectual by a ponderous bureaucracy which is predominantly White and middle-class, and which is said to consume 80% of the annual budget. Positions of authority are typically retained by ex-military men. Recently, 38 Funai employees, including doctors, anthropologists and educators, were fired for opposing Funai policies which they saw as a threat to the survival of Brazil's Indians.

A careful consideration of the Funai's place in Brazilian society makes it clear that inefficiency and corruption are the factors which best serve what is seen as the national interest. Brazil wants to get rid of her Indians. Machine guns and gas ovens are bad for public relations, but if the Indians die of "natural causes," who will complain?

In short, Brazil's real Indian policy is one of genocide through institutionalized neglect, and this policy is implemented by the Funai. If the World Bank allows the Funai to take care of the Indians while it makes possible a billion-dollar "development" of their lands, it will be an accessory to this genocide. In the guise of financing development to improve conditions in the Third World, it will be helping a powerful nation exterminate thousands of people who are considered undesirable precisely because they are members of tribal societies.

But the World Bank does not have to make this loan, and it can certainly demand as a precondition that Brazil comply with the provisions of Geneva Convention 107, which sets forth principles for the treatment of tribal minorities. The establishment of a reasonable and adequate reservation is long overdue; and a program of medical aid, education and economic development, tailored to the special needs of the Indians, can be run by honest and competent people at a very small cost.

Please write to the President of the World Bank, 1818 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20433, and express your concern over the impending loan to Brazil for Project Polonoroeste. Also, please make four copies of this letter and send them on to other people who are concerned about human rights. Do it now; there is no time to lose! By keeping this chain letter going, you can help save lives; without your assistance, Brazil's Indians will be condemned to extinction.

Sincerely,

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