

Mexico: Indians and Campesinos Massacred in Guerrero

A series of assassinations of Mixtec Indians topped with the massacre of 17 campesinos, has marked this past June as one of the bloodiest months in recent history for Indigenous and rural peoples in Mexico.

On June 10, Mixtec members of the Consejo Guerrerense 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena (Guerreran Council of 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance) Perfecto González Rufino and Alejandro Tenorio Perfecto were assassinated, followed by the murder of member Rey Flores Hernandez on June 18, 1995. Then, on Wednesday, June 28, at a site known as Aguas Blancas in the Sierra of Coyuca de Benítez, approximately 70 policemen intercepted a passenger truck traveling to Atoyac, Guerrero, and began firing indiscriminately against the vehicle and its occupants. Of the roughly 60 campesinos traveling in the truck, 18 were confirmed dead. Eight people also disappeared and 19 people are gravely injured.

In both cases, the incidents are tied to the increased level of popu-

lar mobilization in Guerrero, one of Mexico's poorest states, with an Indigenous population of about 300,000 out of 2,650,000. In the first case, the murders are the product of the intolerance of regional cacique and municipal president of Tlacoachistlahuaca, Armando Ramos. A group of Mixtec Indians began a peaceful takeover there of the municipal building on May 22 to protest corruption and government indifference towards the needs of Indigenous communities. In the second case, some of the passengers belonged to the Organización Campesina de la Sierra Sur (OCSS-Peasant Organization of the Southern Sierra), and were on their way to a demonstration in Atoyac. There, on May 18th, members of the OCSS had prevented the exit of local authorities from the municipal building during the 28th anniversary of the initiation of the Lucio Cabañas uprising.

As a result of the massacres, tensions between state authorities and campesinos in Guerrero have reached a boiling point. Peasants have formed a popular commission

for the resignation of state governor Rubén Figueroa Alcocer, who appears to have been informed of the police action prior to the incident. The coalition faces a powerful opposition that the ruling PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) deputies mounted in support of Figueroa. In addition, on July 1st, what may have been members of OCSS ransacked and attempted to burn down the municipal palace in Coyuca de Benítez, site of a number of large popular protests denouncing the incident.

Two state police agents and 8 local policemen believed to have been involved in the incident have been detained and are presently awaiting trial. State attorney Antonio Alcocer Salazar has also accused members of the OCSS, including leader Benigno Guzmán Martínez, of "engaging in criminal conduct" in relation to the June 28 massacre. He also accused the OCSS of "theft of public property, destruction of communication lines, and causing harm to society" during various OCSS activities in 1994. He did not clarify what "criminal conduct" he was referring to, however. ☺

Information from Consejo de Pueblos Nahuatl and La Jornada

Chiloé Forests

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communities and the ecological balance of the island of Chiloé. In May 28, 1994, the General Council of Caciques of Chiloé announced their knowledge of a document called: "A Study to Identify the Possibilities of Forest Exploitation in the Area known as Puerto Carmen—Big Island of Chiloé," commissioned by Los Parques, S.A. and Le Banque Colbert of France.

In the study, researchers consider the exploitation of 129,459 hectares of land located at the southern tip of the island, in the township of Quellón, with an annual deforestation of about 150,000 square meters.

This project would use up about 37% of all the forest in Chiloé, with an annual deforestation volume equivalent to 5 times the current annual serrated wood production in Chiloé and 3 times the consumption of firewood. Wood production in Chiloé would double as a result of this project.

According to these facts, the project (officially called, "Plan Astillas Puerto Carmen"), which is already being considered by the regional and provincial authorities, would become the first industrial exploitation of Chiloé's forest. This would mean the total transformation of all life forms in the island's ecosystem and a real threat to the survival of many species in it. The General Council of Caciques of Chiloé consider implementation of this project a violation of Indigenous people's ancestral rights. ☺