

Island of Chiloé, Chile: Huilliches Fight Lumber Company to Save Their Forests

"In these territories (being considered for exploitation), there live around 100 families. They belong to the communities of Incopulli de Yaldad, Tugüeo de Coldita, Piedra Blanca de Coldita, and Coinco. These communities have historically been threatened by companies that have wanted to steal our land. This is why, today, we make public our complaints to demand that the authorities respect our rights and those of all of our sisters and brothers in Chiloé." **General Council of Caciques of Chiloé**

Two lumber projects threaten to alter the ecological balance of the Island of Chiloé (located on the Pacific Ocean, west of mainland Chile), endangering the livelihood and way of life of the Huilliche communities that live there. Golden Spring, a multinational company based in Hong Kong, and the companies Hawerden and Los Parques, S.A., plan to exploit a combined area of about 179,459 hectares of Chiloé's forest.

Since 1993, the Huilliches have been trying to keep Golden Spring from acquiring 50,000 hectares of land in the island of Chiloé to complete its lumber projects, and from damaging the land that the company presently owns. Golden Spring's initial goal is to export round logs to the Asian market, especially Japan, Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan. The second stage of the company's long-term plan is to build a plant in Chiloé for the production of plywood.

The company has declared that its plan for the exploitation of Chiloé's forest is ecologically sound and allows reforestation. However, the actions of Golden Spring up to now have been far from ecologically sound. Golden Spring began cutting down trees to build a road inside Tepuhueico almost two months before receiving permission

from the government agency (CONAF) that grants such permits. The damage to the land was so great and public outrage so massive, that CONAF fined the company \$20,727,562. However, the Huilliche community is not satisfied with this fine because of a series of factors. First, large companies have traditionally been able to forgo their responsibility in paying fines imposed by CONAF. Second, CONAF had originally denied Golden Spring permission to build the road based on earlier documentation that declared the area in question unfit for exploitation, but then changed its mind a few days later. Because of this abrupt change in policy, the Huilliches fear that the government sides with Golden Spring and will pursue the company's interest over theirs.

The company's intentions became a topic of hot debate among environmental and governmental agencies until, finally, in April of 1994, Judge Francisco del Campo issued an order to halt two of Golden Spring's project, namely, the widening of yet another road in Yerba Loza and the construction of a "piedraplén" (rock base) for the employment of a port in the Compu Stream in Chaildad. However, the order is useless since the widening of the road had been completed before the call to halt and the con-

struction of the "piedraplén" had been halted earlier pending a permit from the maritime authorities.

In April of 1994, CONAMA (The National Environmental Commission) and Golden Spring reached an accord in which Golden Spring agreed to commission a study of the environmental impact of its plan of exploitation of Chiloé's forest before it can continue to exploit any additional land. However, as environmental groups and leaders from the Huilliche community point out, the study should have been done before Golden Spring was allowed to buy land in Chiloé with the purpose of forest exploitation. Furthermore, Golden Spring is allowed to continue exploiting the land (135,000 hectares) that was already approved before the accord with CONAMA. Lastly, because the study is being financed by Golden Spring, CONAMA is powerless in making sure that a neutral party (like a university) conduct the study.

Golden Spring continues to this day its operations in Tepuhueico and is looking to buy more land in Chiloé. Its plan is to own about 50,000 hectares of forest in order to achieve its production goals. The Huilliche community of Chiloé is very concerned because, albeit public outcry, government intervention and the halt of some of its operations, it looks as though Golden Spring is confident it will be allowed to continue to exploit the forest in the manner they intended given the amount of money (so far, 8 million dollars out the 25 million dollars set aside for this project) they continue to invest in heavy machinery, vessels and personnel.

As if the threat of Golden Spring was not enough, the Huilliches also have to contend with plans for another project that would have devastating ramifications for their

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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

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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. ☸