

## PEHUENCHE LANDS STILL NOT SECURED

### CHILEAN GOVERNMENT FACES "1000 MORE QUINQUENS"

Ten members of the Mapuche Indian Nation were arrested in front of the government palace Thursday, Feb. 7, during an anti-government protest against their anticipated expulsion from land they have lived on for years. The protest was organized by the National Council of Indigenous Peoples (CNPI) in support of the 22 Pehuenche (a branch of the Mapuche) Indian families who face the expulsion order.

A recent judgement determined that the territory, an agricultural zone south of the Chilean capital, belongs to a group of families called the 'the Gallatue Society.'

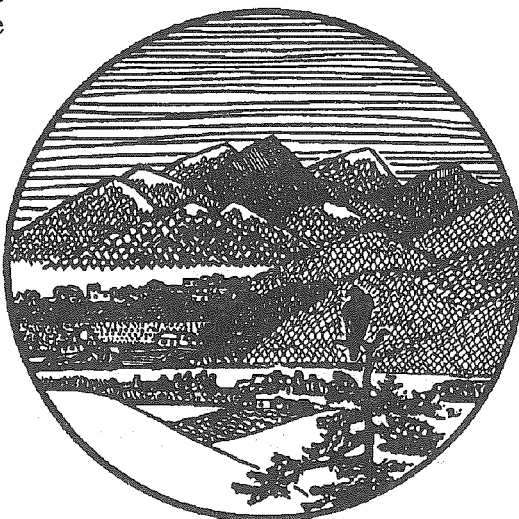
CNPI protested the police "repressive measures," and demanded that the government give a "justifiable explanation for this shameful action." While the police dispersed the crowd, several ministers and members of the Gallatue Society were negotiating a possible expropriation of the lands where the Pehuenche Indians live and work. "We view with profound disdain the fact that 500 years after Europe invaded our continent, we are still being robbed of our ancestral lands," said a statement read in front the National Palace.

Representatives from Mapuche and Aymara organizations, as well as other Indian groups, took part in the demonstration. They blame the slow resolution of the problem on the "inefficiency and lack of political willingness on the part of the the negotiating commission" which is addressing the issue. A committee for the defense and solidarity of Indian tribes is proposing that Mapuche representatives negotiate alongside those who claim to be the rightful owners of the territory.

Eduardo Boeninger, General Secretary to the President, has announced the government's offer to purchase the territory from the Gallatue Society for five million dollars. Although the territory is not "economically exploitable" explained Boeninger, "the offer is based on our desire to resolve this conflict to the satisfaction of the Indigenous community."

Faced with an eviction order from the Chilean Supreme Court, the 22 Pehuenche Indian families living in the Quinquen Valley are hoping for an agreement between the government and the landowners which will allow them to stay on their ancestral lands.

Officials are trying to beat the March 2 deadline set by the Supreme Court for the eviction of the Pehuenche from the 333,450



acres of the Cordillera Valley located some 385 miles south of Santiago. The Pehuenche Indians say they have occupied the lands, rich with forests of araucaria pine trees called "pehuen" in their language, since time immemorial. The Pehuenche got their name from the trees which are also their source of income.

The Gallatue firm, which got its name from a river that flows in the area, claims it owns the valley and brags of land titles to prove it. Gallatue, which obtained the eviction order from the Supreme Court, has refused the government's offer to buy the lands for five million dollars. The bi-monthly magazine *Página Abierta* has accused Gallatue owners, Gonzalo Lledo, Miguel Lamoliatte and Mauricio Mettas of trying to profit from the negotiations.

The government of President Patricio Aylwin wants to turn the Quinquen Valley, whose name means 'place of refuge' in the Pehuenche language, into a national park and reserve. In the early 1970s, the socialist government of Salvador Allende set up an agrarian reform program which expropriated the Quinquen lands from Gallatue and recognized the Pehuenches' right to the land. But the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship gave back the lands to the firm in 1974, and later authorized it to exploit the araucaria forests. Last year, the Aylwin government declared the araucaria tree a national monument and once more prohibited its exploitation all over Chile. As a result of this decision, the state gave Gallatue six-million dollars in compensation and paid the firm another five-million to conserve the forests as a national patrimony. But Gallatue is asking ten-million dollars for the lands, a sum considered "excessive" by the government and "immoral" by the Pehuenche, politicians and ecologists.

Government experts say a police eviction of the Pehuenche would elicit criticisms locally and abroad, particularly in consideration of the upcoming quinqucentennial. Local Indigenous groups waiting for the government's decision describe the case as the "robbing of their ancestral lands which began five hundred years ago." Should Gallatue and the government fail to reach an agreement, Aylwin, backed by the ten parties of the ruling democratic coalition, will have to urge congress to pass the bill expropriating Quinquen. Jorge Arrate, acting president for the Chilean Socialist Party which is the second strongest group in the coalition, has accused the government of acting with timidity on the case. Fernando Quilaleo, President of Ad-Mapu (the national Mapuche organization) has called on the government to solve the case this year. "But Quinquen is only one of Chile's problems. Between the Chilean state and the Pehuenche Indians, there are a thousand more Quinquens," Quilaleo said.