

meeting in Santa Fe (see photo and story in SAIIC Newsletter, Winter, 1986) to find he was victim of a smear campaign by fundamentalist missionaries. Members of the New Tribes Mission branded Biraci a communist and ordered him to leave his own village. He refused. According to Biraci, the state police intervened and "want to take away my right to be an Indian." He feels that the goal of the missionaries is to discredit him as a representative of UNI in the eyes of his own people.

The New Tribes Mission, whose headquarters is in Sanford, Florida, operates seven centers in the Acre region, with the stated purpose of converting Indians to Christianity. As widely reported in the media, in 1985 the New Tribes and its sister organization, the Mission Aviation Fellowship, were implicated in a plot to smuggle precious stones to the United States.

According to Biraci, UNI in its five years of existence has taken "a strong commitment to the Indian cause." UNI has also opposed fundamentalist groups working in Indian communities. According to *Porantim*, the monthly newspaper which covers Indian issues, The New Tribes was temporarily expelled from Colombia and Venezuela for trafficking in precious stones. They have strong political connections in Brasilia, as evidenced by the fact that a former minister of justice was also involved in the smuggling incident.

Changes in FUNAI—But for the Better?

Following a threat by FUNAI President Apoena Meirelles to resign if structural changes in the agency responsible for the welfare of Brazilian Indians were not made, Minister of Interior Ronaldo Costa Couto announced in February a major decentralization of the agency.

One concrete change will be the dispersal of FUNAI's bureaucracy in Brasilia into six regional superintendencies, maintaining only a skeleton administrative staff of 50 in the capital. Another change still not finalized will be the transformation of the agency into a special secretariat directly under the President of Brazil or under the National Security Council.

Neither change is likely to achieve significant gains in the level of Indian participation in decisions affecting their own survival. Decentralization of FUNAI may play into the hands of state and local politicians such as Governors Gilberto Mestrinho of Amazonas state, Angelo Angelim of Rondônia, and Getúlio Cruz of Roraima, who have said they will not recognize new demarcations of Indian lands in their states and have attacked the "huge" areas being allotted to Indian reserves.

