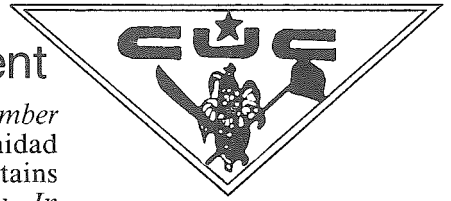


GUATEMALA

Few Gains Under New Government



Rigoberta Menchu, Quiché from Guatemala, is a member of the Peasant Unity Committee (CUC, Comité de Unidad Campesina). She narrated the film When the Mountains Tremble and has written the book I, Rigoberta Menchu. In December, 1986, she made the following comments on SAIIC's radio program, South and Central American Indian Update, which is heard in northern California on KPFA, 94.1 FM, at 8:00 p.m. the third and fourth Fridays of each month.

After 33 years of military rule in Guatemala, we now have an elected civilian president. We had hoped before the election to bring about concrete changes for the Indian people, who in Guatemala are over 75 per cent of the population. Now, after the civilian government has been in power for nine months, the situation continues to be very complicated. The killings and the disappearances have not stopped. The numbers may not be as high, but the fact remains that there are continuing abuses of human lives. This is the principal concern.

Now Guatemala is living through more profound misery than we ever experienced in the past because of the destruction of the land and the massacres. There are now thousands of people displaced from their land who are dependent on their land for their survival. Our cultural roots as well as our material survival are based on the cultivation of corn and beans.

Up to this point, none of our demands, even the most fundamental, have received any response from the Guatemalan government. There has been no clarification of the fate of the more than 36,000 who have disappeared, nor has the government identified or punished those responsible for the disappearances. And there is tremendous frustration among the Indian

Yes, I find myself alone
everyday life confronts me with
the reality of mourning in my soul
the fibers of my being broken and torn from the injustice
the struggle that springs from the blood of innocent people
the collective martyrdom of our journey
the shadows that amass on our journey
the ringing of the bells of our being.



Yes,
I am alone
but I feel the strength
of all the widowed women of the world
protesting
for men
for women
for children
the violation of the right
to live.

—Calixta Canec, Cakchiquel Maya, refugee in California

people because hunger and misery remain unchanged.

We understand also very well the causes of the struggles of our brother and sister Indians of this country and the Indians of other continents. We have a great historic responsibility to unite so that one day our future generations will be able to live in peace. And I can tell the people of the United States that you also have a part of the responsibility in our struggle, since much of your salary goes to finance this war being carried out in our communities.

This struggle of Indian people is not just a struggle of words. It is like the way we grow our corn. First we cultivate the soil, then we find the right seeds, and then we care for the plants so that they bear fruit. Our struggle goes step by step, looking forward to making a change.

Radio Show Features Guatemalan Indians

Peggy Berryhill (Muskogee Nation) recently completed a radio documentary on the crisis facing Indians in Guatemala which will air in March on "Horizons," which is broadcast on many public radio stations. She made the following comments to SAIIC about her work.

I've found that radio is a tool to help communicate new or little-known information about Indian people, especially contemporary issues. It is a way to combat stereotypes and to empower people. It is important to get Indians and non-Indians thinking beyond their isolated problems, whether in Oakland, Juneau, or in Guatemala. We have to understand that there are connections.

SAIIC: What motivated you to do a radio documentary on Guatemala?

I think Guatemala is one of the least reported stories. Nobody has been aware of what is going on there.

I had a dream. I was in a hilly community in a pickup truck with another journalist, being strafed by an army helicopter. They were trying to drive us to a safe house. Once we got to the house, the army suddenly came in and killed everyone. I woke up. My heart was beating, and I was terrified. The dream was so vivid, so frightening. Where was this army from? I didn't know then what this dream meant.

In doing the interviews with the Guatemalan refugees for the documentary, I saw where the dream had come from. During the interviews, I heard this same story. The dream was a reality in Guatemala and someone wanted that known. It was someone's dying wish to have their story told, and it came to me. To me radio is the Indian story-telling tradition, and this dream was the vehicle. And if I'm the vehicle for this dream, then the story's being told.

