THE BRAZILIAN INDIAN MINORITY: ETHNOCIDE AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to point out a number of changes which have occurred in Brazilian policy towards the Indians in recent years, and their effects on the Indian population. The theme and period covered are relevant, since they make it possible to grasp the onset of a process which may in the near future give the Indian movement a new direction, and even change the traditional relationship between Indians and national society.

Throughout the history of the country relations between Indians and non-Indians have been mainly of a violent nature. The state has focused its action on satisfying the ruling economic and social interests, which includes free access to the Indians' lands as well as to their labour. Both the Indians and the land they inhabited were originally made to submit to the legal order established by the colonizers and legitimized by right of conquest. Hit hard by periods of enslavement, wars of extermination and other manifestations of force, the Indian peoples have seen their numbers fall drastically. In the sixteenth century they were estimated at five to six million, and they have reached the present day with only a little over 200,000.

Not until this century were the foundations of Indian policy questioned, under the influence of positivism and other liberal schools of thought. In 1910 there emerged an innovative

---

This paper was first presented at a Conference on Social and Cultural Change in Brazil, held on 8-10 July 1984, at St Antony's College, Oxford.

conception of Indian affairs: recognition of their right to possession of the territories still remaining in their hands, and of their right to the independent development of their institutions and social values. This new policy was put into practice by a government agency known as the Indian Protection Service (SPI), the intention at that time being to replace religious catechizing with government protection and to guarantee the exercise of a number of basic rights by the Indians.

A few years later, in 1916, Article 6 of the first codification of civil law in Brazil laid down that the Indians were 'relatively incapable', and established the principles which were to guide the guardianship or tutelage to be practised by the State. This legal solution was aimed at setting up a protectionist intermediary which would shield the Indian communities from the abuses committed against their members and territories. It was believed that this guardianship would in practice mean offering the Indians a welfare service, which was justified by their visible vulnerability in the face of capitalist dynamics. Thus in order to have the right to protection by the State the Indians were obliged to accept limitations to their civil rights of the same kind as those imposed on youths over 16 but under 21 years of age.

For some years the SPI was able to carry out a welfare policy, but it was not long before the humanitarian premisses defined at the time of its creation were gradually left behind, and it was eventually dissolved in 1967. It was replaced by the National Indian Foundation (Funai), which has been responsible for the State's guardianship over the Indians until the present day. Funai is subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, and therefore has to submit to the developmentalist interests which determine the policies of the executive branch. Indian rights and interests are ignored in favour of the high priority given to major projects such as highways, hydro-electric power stations, land policy, etc., as we shall see below.

The Indian Population

Only approximate data are available on the size of the Brazilian Indian population. Precise calculations are made difficult by the lack of information on groups which have not yet been contacted, and even on detribalized Indians. The most optimistic estimates give a total of between 200,000 and 220,000, distributed over somewhat more than 150 groups with distinct cultural traditions, and speaking 170 different languages. They live anywhere from forests and open countryside to the outskirts of densely populated areas, and even in cities. More than sixty per cent of this population, however, is concentrated in so-called Legal Amazonia.

The Brazilian Indians represent roughly 0.17% of the total population. Despite the protection theoretically afforded by

special legislation, their rights are constantly violated in many serious ways. Without any doubt, the most serious and all-embracing of these is the land question. Of the 316 Indian reservations whose existence is recognized by Funai, sixty per cent have no demarcated boundaries, which means that they are open to encroachment and to progressive reduction of the space available for use without the risk of immediate conflict. Even the areas which have been properly demarcated (both by the old SPI and by Funai) are almost all subject to encroachment, in addition to disagreement among the Indians themselves as to their actual borders.

But it would be a mistake to think that the problem is caused solely by the Brazilian land-tenure system and its effects, which lead to a rise in the pressure on land year by year. The deliberate failure of Funai to act on issues which require swift intervention to ensure sound solutions, together with repeated violations of constitutional guarantees and the protection afforded by ordinary laws, has led to an Indian policy which is essentially anti-Indian. It is a policy which goes out of its way to destroy the viability of the existing communities in order to make the Indian peoples an undifferentiated part of Brazilian society.

The key concept which at one and the same time expresses and justifies this process is *integration*. The Indian Statute itself states it as one of its principal aims, and in Article 1 refers to it with the same emphasis as that given to the idea of protection:

> This law regulates the legal status of Indians and forest-dwellers and of their communities with the aim of preserving their culture and progressively and harmoniously integrating them into the national community.

Integrating means incorporating. It might be said that the first, and indeed fundamental, stage of assimilation was concretely achieved in the Constitution now in force, which states that the land occupied by the Indians 'is part and parcel of Federal property' (Article 4). The incorporation of tribal territories into Federal property represented a serious limitation of the rights of these peoples, and bore irrefutable witness to their status as dominated peoples. Whereas in the colonial period their dominion over the territory was recognized, today it is defined only as their possession. They were originally said to be different from the Europeans and their descendants, but they have now become Brazilian citizens, and their lands are state property. This compulsory incorporation was obviously aimed mainly at the land; citizenship was granted as a logical consequence of this, and at the same time as a means of submitting the Indians to the power of the state.

The second stage of integration, still in progress, aims to destroy the Indians' economic and political autonomy, and is

conducted through official policy towards them. This is expressed in a constant effort to weaken the solidarity, mutual aid and sense of collective possession of the land which constitute the organizational principles of the vast majority of these peoples. It also encourages a progressively more intense involvement with Portuguese, the national language, and with the values and norms of Brazilian society.

Day-to-day Dealings with Indians

Article 4 of the Indian Statute classifies the existing population according to three categories which indicate the degree of their relations with Brazilian society: isolated Indians, Indians undergoing integration, and integrated Indians. This classification, however, not only indicates the intensity of contact; it can also be said to reflect the trajectory forced on the communities, not only by the presence of capitalism and the inevitable introduction of commercial exchange and consumption, but by virtue of the actions undertaken by the government agency acting as guardian. It is through the day-to-day practice of the welfare service that the processes which help to undermine basic traditional relations are insinuated, by taking away from the community the time and social space it needs to reorganize its own mode of living.

The Indians classed as isolated are the so-called 'savages' who stand in the way of the advancing frontier. It is not long before the idea of 'pacifying' them arises, usually to serve business interests in the area. The presence of Indians becomes intolerable in areas opened up to capitalist exploitation, not only because of the insecurity it spreads through the pioneer camps, but also because of the additional investment of resources it makes necessary to defend the fronts which encroach on tribal territory. Most of the cost is transferred to the state, which is responsible for organizing expeditions to attract these Indians. One technique of 'attraction' is the abundant distribution to the Indians of industrialized articles. Axes, knives, scissors, aluminium containers, etc. are strategically placed so as to be easily found. After a variable period of aggressive demonstrations or indifference, the Indians usually appear for a peaceful encounter. Attracted by the apparent plenty and generosity, they believe they have come upon secure relationships which will free them from attacks and encroachments. On such occasions a tract of land is usually interdicted within the supposed boundaries of the Indians' territory. The attraction fronts provide information concerning signs of abandoned camps or villages, areas through which the Indians move, and other kinds of data which help to define the limits of the area.

This first stage of so-called pacification is conducted by experienced agents (*sertanistas*), whereas the following stages are carried out by the station heads. Their main aim at this

point is to effect a transition from the generosity of the initial contacts to a more balanced relationship of exchange. They start from the supposition that anyone who gets a present will of course be pleased and return for more. The station head's task thus is gradually to introduce exchange relations and encourage the Indians to bring in handicraft objects, in order to be entitled to receive industrialized goods in return. At the same time they are also encouraged to work alongside Funai employees, beginning by helping with cleaning jobs and doing other kinds of sporadic work. Bartering becomes more varied. Those who work are given the right to eat meals provided by the station. The first fire-arms are lent, and part of the game they catch has to be given to the station employees. The attractiveness of the shotguns is irresistible, and it is not long before they try to obtain fire-arms of their own. Even if they are successful, the ties with the station remain - as does the commitment to hand over part of the game they hunt - since they continue to depend on it for ammunition. Access to the goods sold and the medical service provided by the station are further elements which contribute to tying the Indians progressively closer to the station. Once this dependence has been consolidated, perambulating is discouraged or even forbidden, with the evident intention of making the group sedentary.

Indian attraction stations are usually staffed with around ten to fifteen agents, but this number is reduced as soon as the group of Indians involved becomes accustomed to the new type of contact. In general terms, it can be said that the large staff used on attraction fronts serves to ensure their own protection. Once the aggressive disposition of the Indians has been neutralized and the station has been fully equipped with the necessary infrastructure there is no longer any need for such a large staff, and all but three or four agents are withdrawn.

It is undoubtedly true that from the standpoint of protecting the community it is always advisable to reduce the number of outsiders in the area, but this step in dealing with the Indians also marks the start of a new stage in relations with them. Each year sees the allocation of funds to implement agricultural projects, backed up by the justification of promoting a rational use of the land, diversification of productive activities and production of marketable surpluses, which in turn create resources with which to meet the group's new needs. Once the station staff has been cut down, with the withdrawal of manual labourers above all, these projects can be implemented only if the Indians also take part.

The intensification of contacts with the frontier leads to a diversification of consumer needs and an increase in their volume. In this apparently irreversible process the Indians undergo a new rhythm of work and production, under a centralized management which is foreign to the community. They lose their initial surprise at the notion of commodities to be bought and sold, and these then become a necessity. Their fear of interruptions to supplies or even the termination of bartering makes them

submit to the authority of the welfare agency, thus preparing themselves for future obedience to the state.

According to the official classification, Indians like these are said to be undergoing integration. This stage customarily entails the appointment or legitimizing of leaders who are more compliant to the administrative requirements of the tutelary agency than to those of strengthening the community. From then on, authorized mobilization centres on the figure of the station director, who usually focuses his actions on pre-empting any parallel attempts to lead autonomous movements.

These are the ways in which the state bureaucracy seeks to appropriate the existence of the community, which is only entitled to protection if it conforms and subordinates itself to the mainstay of all its work: the administrative rules. Appropriating the existence of the community means keeping it under control. The reservation thus becomes the seat of a higher power, which seeks to maintain its own sphere of authority by producing order in a permanent struggle against the 'saboteurs' within and the 'enemies' without.

As this process goes on, the group will more often than not have had to face a loss of land, depopulation, and the disappearance of resources which are fundamental to survival. Many of them will have been incorporated into the regional labour market as wage-earners. But their participation in Brazilian society remains limited, above all because they have very little access to information. It is very unusual indeed for them to have heard of the Indian Statute, and they are ignorant of any rights they could lay claim to. The actual text of the law is seen as subversive, prone to incite agitation, and hence undesirable. In the name of security and the proper enforcement of official guardianship freedom is restricted, while at the same time it is made evident that the intention is to assimilate the Indian populations, but in a subordinate position, without access to knowledge which would enable them to intervene in the process.

The communities which usually suffer this type of compulsion are those in areas exposed to the advance of the agricultural frontier, which has been exceptionally accelerated over recent years. To complete this brief overview of the Indian question over the last few decades, let me mention some examples of what is happening in Amazonia.

Integration and National Development Projects

A good illustration of this phenomenon is the cyclical expansion of the national economy which began in 1968, after more than five years of contraction. This phase, known as the 'Brazilian miracle', entailed a remarkable growth in gross domestic product of more than ten per cent a year, as well as coinciding with repeated violations of Indian territorial rights, depopulation and disorganization of various groups. In 1970 the government

announced its National Integration Programme with the aim of settling Amazonia, mainly be building two major highways - the Transamazonian Highway, and the highway between Cuiabá and Santarém. In addition to integrating the region with more developed centres, the government also planned to reserve a 100-kilometre wide tract of land on either side of the Transamazonian Highway (in the Estreito-Itaituva section) for animal raising and settlement projects.

Begun in 1970 and finished in 1973, the gigantic Transamazonian development in now considered one of the biggest mistakes made by the Médici administration. The number of families actually settled along the road fell far short of the target of 500,000 in five years; in 1980 only 10,037 had been moved in and even they were living in bad conditions. The settlement project was a failure because the region's 'empty spaces' remained unfilled, contrary to the plan, and also because the settlers were not given the necessary conditions in which to settle. The region was hardly made attractive by lack of financing, transport and technical assistance, and by the presence of tropical diseases such as malaria.

The Indian groups in the region, however, were seriously affected. As soon as preparations to start building had begun, the government requested Funai to undertake the urgent attraction of any Indians to be found along the proposed route. According to Funai, there were in the area twelve isolated tribes, nine assimilated tribes, and eight in intermittent contact.

The Parakanã are a tragic example of the groups by then in contact. These Indians had been 'pacified' in 1900 when their territory was crossed by the Tocantins Railway. At that time they were one thousand strong. Fifty years later, the SPI contacted them again, and by that time one quarter of their members had been lost to infectious disease. They took refuge once more in the forest, but were contacted again and transferred to the Pucurui reservation when the Transamazonian highway was being built. But their troubles were not yet over. Around this time, the government established a programme involving the construction of several hydro-electric power stations in the Amazon Basin. One of these, in Tucuruí on the River Tocantins, was started in 1975. This gigantic development was designed to generate power for three large mining projects. A large part of the Parakanã territory was to be flooded by the Tucuruí reservoir, meaning that the group which had just been contacted would have to be transferred yet again, with the aggravation that the new site chosen to settle them was already being encroached upon by local peasants. In their new villages they found themselves without fish - a major source of food for these Indians - due to their absence in the nearby streams.

Lack of action by the government and the violence which is characteristic of the frontier areas had by 1982 led these Indians to lose approximately half the population which had accepted contact with Funai. There were little more than 170 of them left, without any motivation to reorganize their lives, and

divided into two groups with little inter-tribal contact. At the same time, about 100 'wild' Parakanã were attempting to approach one of these villages.

After being removed several times, the Parakanã will still have to face unforeseeable changes in the region's ecology. The Tucuruí Dam will lead to the flooding of 2,160 square kilometres of forest. But the hydro-electric power programme in the Amazon Basin is not limited to Tucuruí - all told, 21 new power stations will be built by 1995, affecting about 30,000 Indians. And the region is also a target for large mining projects. Since 1967 the region has been discovered to contain the world's biggest high-quality iron-ore reserve, Brazil's second biggest manganese reserve, and a considerable amount of copper, bauxite, nickel, tin and gold. In 1979 the 'Grande Carajás' Project was launched, covering part of the state of Pará, Maranhão and the north of Goiás, with an estimated cost of 63 billion dollars. In addition to mining and metallurgy, which will absorb ninety per cent of the resources, the plan also included forestation projects, which were to occupy 2.4 million hectares with eucalyptus reforestation, as well as agricultural projects along the railway to be built as a means of conveying the minerals to the Atlantic. Many mouth-watering advantages were offered to investors: electric power supplied by Tucuruí, subsidized costs for aluminium projects, transport infrastructure, and a whole range of fiscal and tax incentives such as income tax exemption for ten years.

In the wake of these events, Funai announced in 1982 that it would implement a programme aimed at the welfare of the Indians located along the Carajás-Itaqui railway. The World Bank (one of the agencies financing the Carajás Project) passed resources on to Funai to protect the Indian territories, and recommended that their boundaries be officially demarcated.

These projects had a major impact on the Indians. The Montanha Gavião saw their land being invaded by the building sites connected with the construction of the Tucuruí power station. Threatened by government agents, the Indians were obliged to abandon their land without any compensation. The Mãe Maria Gavião faced equally serious problems; with roads being built across their land, as well as the Carajás-Itaqui railway and encroachment, they have had to deal with the pollution of their water sources. Forest clearing has led to a drastic fall in brazil-nut production owing to the elimination of the insects which pollinate the brazil-nut tree. This is an especially worrying problem, since this tree provides the Mãe Maria Gavião not only with a major source of food, but also with funds as a result of marketing the nuts.

The Suruí of the Sororó River and the Assurini of Trocará Reservation have also been jeopardized by the small size of the land officially designated to them. The territory occupied by the Assurini of Koatinemo reservation and by the Arawetê, both of which groups were contacted in the 'seventies, is to be flooded when the Xingu hydro-electric complex is built, but Funai has so far taken no steps to guarantee their rights. Finally, the

Kaiapó territory, including six reservations, is still suffering encroachment by farmers and prospectors as well as the pollution of the water used in their villages.[1]

Around 25,000 Indians are now estimated to be living on mineral-rich land. The nearly twenty million hectares scattered throughout Legal Amazonia, which covers the states of Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia and Mato Grosso, and the federal territories of Amapá and Roraima, include a total of 26 Indian reservations, the biggest of which has about eight million hectares and is inhabited by the Yanomami, occupying a vast area of tropical forest on the frontier between Brazil and Venezuela. These Indians are thought to have around 203 villages on Brazilian soil, most of them concentrated in the Serra dos Surucucus region.

Their survival began to be threatened in 1974, mainly because of the building of Highway BR-210 (known as the Northern Perimeter Road), which crosses the south of their territory for 225 kilometres. A few years later thirteen villages were reduced to eight small family units circulating on the roadside, while two epidemics of measles drastically reduced other groups in number. In 1975 prospectors began to encroach upon the Serra dos Surucucus, clashing with the Indians and leaving behind them a trail of influenza, measles and venereal disease.

Between December 1977 and July 1978, Funai issued four directives breaking up the Yanomami territory into 21 new areas forming a kind of archipelago. This step prevented the Indians from having access to larger tracts of land which were essential for hunting, fishing and gathering; it also made it impossible for them to make the traditional journeys for matrimonial, economic and ceremonial purposes, while at the same time placing the villages even more at risk from contamination by contagious diseases. Following a three-year-long national and international campaign for the creation of a National Yanomami Park, the government interdicted a continuous tract of land measuring 7,700,000 hectares, and proudly declared the problem of protection solved. But, as is well known, interdiction is a provisional step which can be suspended at any moment, and it has negligible significance as regards real guarantees of land tenure.

From 1983 onwards new dangers arose for these Indians and other populations in the area. The federal administration, legislating by decree once again, opened up Indian lands to private Brazilian enterprise for prospecting and mechanized extraction of mineral resources, hitherto permitted only in the case of state-owned corporations, and even so only when the minerals concerned were considered strategic from the standpoint

---

[1] Lux Vidal, 'Ameaças de Carajás e outros projetos', *Aconteceu*, Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação, São Paulo, 12 April 1983, pp.36-7.

of national security. Even in areas for which special resources have been allocated the situation is practically the same. In 1981 the government announced a programme to develop the North-west of Brazil (Programa Polonoroeste), aimed at increasing levels of production, income and employment. This plan to dynamize the region along the route followed by the highway between Cuiabá and Porto Velho (BR-364) included paving the highway, opening up 3,500 kilometres of local roads, and developing and settling new areas in the states of Mato Grosso and Rondônia. The Ministry of the Interior, which was in charge of the project, intended to ensure that this regional development would be consistent with protection of the Indian communities, including the welfare services provided for them.

The most important aspect here would, of course, have been to make an official demarcation of the Indian territories involved and guarantee their protection, above all in the case of these states, where pressure against the Indians' presence had always been intense. And it could have been foreseen that the situation would worsen as a result of the increased drive to introduce business development, as well as the large numbers of immigrants and major settlement projects included in the plan. The resources allocated for the 1981-85 period totalled 26.6 million dollars, part of which would come from the regular Funai budget (60%) and the rest from the Polonoroeste Programme (40%). According to Funai, by 1983-84 four million dollars had been spent thus far. Although these funds were well below the amount set aside for annual spending, it would have been feasible to undertake official demarcation of the Indians' territory, at an estimated overall cost in 1980 of 3.2 million dollars (for an area of 2.5 million hectares, with a perimeter of around 4000 kilometres).

Of all the groups included in the Polonoroeste Programme, eight had already had their land officially demarcated beforehand, and twelve had not. By early 1984 the Rio Branco Indian Station had been designated, as had part of the area reserved for the Nambikwara and Pareci. Most areas, whether demarcated or not, are still undergoing encroachment, some of it dating precisely from the period in which the Programme was being implemented. Serious cases are now occurring: in the area set aside for the Gavião and Arara of Rondônia, where there are 350 families of encroaching settlers; in the area demarcated for the Cinta Larga, twenty kilometres from one of their villages, where the Mato Grosso state government is building a hydro-electric power station in violation of the Indians' territorial rights (in addition to which the latter are also under continuous threat from land speculators, road-builders and prospectors); in the area interdicted for the Cinta Larga, where there is a mining company with 150 employees in constant clashes with the Indians; and in an area reserved for the Uru-eu-wau-wau (a group which is still isolated), with encroachment by settlers and mine-workers. Most of the resources were allocated for building projects and administrative costs, but very few for immunization, combatting

malaria and tuberculosis, and improving the health-care services, which are gravely deficient, with hair-raising child mortality rates (around 58% for the Cinta Larga of Serra Morena reservation).

These are only a few examples, and many more could be given to show the current situation throughout Legal Amazonia. In the rest of the country, the Indian populations are in no less dire straits, although different causes are involved.

The Legal Menace

In areas where land concentration is high the Indian question takes a different form and leads to the creation of legal alternatives.

As already mentioned, the Brazilian Constitution defines the land occupied by Indians as belonging to the Federation. It also stipulates that they have the right to permanent possession of the land they inhabit, as well as the usufruct of the land and the sole right to make use of the natural resources and utilities it contains. This legal privilege is guaranteed to those who qualify as Indians under the terms of the law. However, as soon as they are integrated into the national community they enjoy the same legal rights and duties as all other Brazilians, and thus lose their other rights, among them the right to own land. This, at least, is the expert opinion of a number of Brazilian jurists.

The Indian Statute refers to the hypothetical cases in which the franchise can be granted - the Indian concerned can himself apply to the judiciary for his release from tutelage, providing he is at least 21 years old, knows Portuguese, is qualified to engage in some kind of useful activity, and demonstrates a reasonable understanding of the habits and customs of his fellow Brazilians. The franchise can also be collectively requested, providing a majority of the members of the community agree and their integration is underwritten by Funai.

Although there are Indians who perform legal actions like any other Brazilian citizens, in practice there has never been a formal suit to obtain franchise. It must be assumed that they are afraid they will lose their rights to the land and be transformed into rural proletarians.

In 1977 the government announced its intention to speed up the process of integration and franchise affecting Indian communities. Several groups protested against the attempt to alter the Indian Statute by decree, in order that the franchise could be granted by unilateral government decision. Most people were of the opinion that the government's attitude was aimed at intimidating the leaders of the Indian communities.

In 1981, when the mobilization of the Indians began to show greater solidity, Funai returned to the franchise question, but this time announcing its intention to grant it to Indians who possessed an identity card, a voter's card, and a reasonable level

of schooling. Forty thousand individuals were estimated to be eligible for this franchise, which would in fact have been compulsory. It was clear at the time that the target of this measure was the emerging leadership and the members of the communities in the east, northeast and south of the country, who were in close touch with the rest of society and lived in areas subject to constant disputes over land ownership. There followed a fresh wave of protests, and Funai's initiative was silenced once more. But it resurfaced in 1983 as a private member's Bill presented by a member of the government party which is still working its way through Congress.

Again in 1981 Funai ordered the preparation of a document containing 'indicators of assimilation', arguing the need to clarify doubts as to the definition of 'assimilated Indian', 'Indian undergoing assimilation', and 'unassimilated Indian'. The commission charged with this task was given ten days to make a complete list, with specific instructions from its superiors not to include any justifications or explanations of the indicators involved. The final report covered four sets of items: (a) indicators mentioned by the scientific community; (b) indicators mentioned by the Indians; (c) those given by Brazilian society as a whole; and (d) those given by Funai. The list included everything from generic titles referring to representative cultural elements to biological features such as blood group, epicanthic eyefold, miscegenation, etc.

The Indians living on desirable land were greatly disturbed at this development. They feared they would have to present proof of their Indianism. This had in fact occurred with the Tinguí of Alagoas, who had put on their head-dresses, feathers and other adornments to dance for Funai agents in order to prove that they were Indians, in this case because they were accused of failing to fulfil Funai's requirements for recognition as such. Other groups of Indians were also submitted to this test to show their 'degree of Indianism', and most failed. Indianist associations then began a campaign to protest against the racism inherent in the procedure, and shortly afterwards the 'indicators' were shelved.

It has already been pointed out that the Indian population in Brazil is a very small one when compared with the country's total population. It is made up of small groups spread out over vast geographical areas, and has rarely been mobilized beyond local or regional limits at any point in history. It can even be said that until recently these peoples had no kind of programme for the defence of their overall interests, although the intense land concentration had transformed almost all the reservations into scenes of high tension and conflicts for the possession of the land. Protest against the crimes and abuses suffered by them was thus for a long time the task of isolated groups of intellectuals, and it is only in recent years that their problems have begun to take their part in the broader context of popular struggle, although as yet in a timid manner.

Since 1975, however, a number of organizations which support

the Indian cause have begun to appear. The first and certainly most militant of these arose on the initiative of a group of Catholic missionaries, the Conselho Indigenista Missionário or CIMI. In addition to criticizing Funai, they started bringing together Indian chiefs from different parts of the country. In 1977 they were prohibited from entering Indian areas, but this was not enough to make them give up; in six years of activity, they were about to hold thirteen assemblies of Indian chiefs. Other groups of Indianists began to appear from 1977 onwards, mobilizing public opinion through lectures and publications and rapidly becoming effective channels for protest and lobbying. Almost all of them kept in constant touch with politicians and jurists in an effort to have them join the movement. There are now about twenty such associations, in all the main cities of Brazil.

The Indians Organize

The first systematic attempts at mobilization by the Indians took place almost simultaneously in two different parts of the country. A group of about fifteen young Indians belonging to seven different groups who were attending college in Brasilia were surprised by an order from Funai in early 1980 telling them they were to go back to the schools located near their villages. One month before, these students had decided to set up an association aimed, amongst other things, at facilitating solutions to the large number of problems they had to face in a big city. They had informed Funai of their plans and asked for support, but this was denied them. At the same moment, a number of leaders meeting in Mato Grosso do Sul were coming to a similar conclusion, and decided to found an association to improve their chances of defending themselves against the threats to their land. Not long after, in a Terena village in Mato Grosso do Sul, the Union of Indian Nations (UNI) was launched, as a result of a merger between the association created by the students in Brasilia (UNIND) and the projected Federation of Indian Peoples in Mato Grosso. The aims of the new body were to represent its member communities and to promote cultural autonomy, self-determination and mutual aid between nations. They also declared their intention of fighting to guarantee the inviolability and official demarcation of their lands, and to recover the territories they had lost. Lastly, they said they would attempt to organize legal and economic assistance for projects they intended to carry out, as well as for help to obtain recognition of their rights.

Acting under orders from the President of Brazil, Funai refused to recognize this organization, arguing that serious problems would arise if the Indian nations were to join together in a single body with the support of people who were prepared to encourage them in disputes with Funai. It was as a result of these events that the idea of trying to bring in a compulsory

franchise arose within Funai, as well as the document on 'indicators of Indianism' referred to above.

In 1981 the UNI held an Assembly of Indian Leaders in São Paulo in which 73 village representatives took part. One year later the First National Meeting of Indian Peoples was held, this time with 228 leaders representing 49 nations, distributed as in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Region	*No. of Leaders*	*No. of Tribes*
Centre-West	121	13
North	33	17
Northeast	44	15
East	18	2
South	12	2

Despite all the obstacles, most of which resulted from the lack of funds and the difficulty of maintaining contact between the various areas, in April 1984 the Second National Meeting of Indian Peoples was held, with 450 leaders from over fifty nations. This event received the support of former Xavante chief Mario Juruna.

Headman of Namunkurá village, Mario Juruna had a rapid political career and soon became the most vocal representative of the Indian cause in Brazil. In 1977 he created a press sensation through his habit of taking a portable tape-recorder with him to meetings with Funai officials, to record the promises they never kept. He was elected chairman of the jury of the Fourth Bertrand Russell Human Rights Tribunal in 1980, but the Ministry of the Interior forbade him to leave the country. The Federal Appeals Court, however granted habeas corpus (by 15 votes to 9), and he at once went to Holland to chair the final session of the Tribunal. In 1981 he joined the Democratic Labour Party (PDT), the only Brazilian political party to include in its manifesto the problem of the Indian minority. In 1982 he was elected Federal Congressman for Rio de Janeiro with 31,805 votes.

As part of his work in Congress, Mario Juruna recently presented before the House of Representatives two Bills which are designed to deal with the Indian question in a new way. One of the Bills has already become law, creating the Indian Committee as one of the House's Standing Committees, and thus opening up a new debating forum on the Indian question. Under the terms of the proposal, the Committee will receive and investigate accusations of violations of Indian rights and propose legal measures to guarantee real protection of Indian communities and of the eco-systems of their reservations. The Indian Committee is already operational under the chairmanship of Mario Juruna. The other Bill asks Congress to approve a number of innovations in the structure of Funai: the creation of a Managing Council made up of

persons appointed by Indian communities, recognized as Indianists who have full knowledge of the situation of Indians in Brazil; the creation of an Indian Council with five Indian leaders, as a watchdog to keep a check on the actions of the Managing Council; the creation of Indian Councils to work with Funai's regional agencies all over the national territory; and lastly, the direct subordination of Funai to the Presidency, thus eliminating its existing link with the Ministry of the Interior. This Bill has recently been approved by the House of Represenatives and will soon be read in the Senate.

The oscillations of the military dictatorship ruling Brazil since 1964 make it difficult to forecast the future of the Indian movement, but a number of aspects can be sketched. Despite the adverse circumstances it is undeniable that the cracks in the ruling system opened up by the struggle for democracy are beginning to be used strategically for the mobilization and organization of growing numbers of Indians. In recent times they have begun to make more frequent demands, and some of these campaigns have had promising results. Last May, for example, the president of Funai was forced to resign by pressure from the Indians of Xingu Park.

Since 1971, when a road was built across the Park, the Txukarramãe have been demanding that a tract be designated to set off their land from the neighbouring farms. Throughout the intervening years they have grown tired of hearing Funai agents make unfulfilled promises. In March 1984, they finally decided to intercept the ferry which crosses the river Xingu, thereby interrupting traffic between Brasilia and Manaus. The president of Funai refused to negotiate with the Indians, who in reprisal demanded that the Minister of the Interior dismiss him. After some days of negotiations in Brasilia, with the support of the leaders of the other Xingu tribes and of Congressman Mario Juruna, the Txukarramãe succeeded in having the Funai president replaced, as well as obtaining a tract of land fifteen kilometres wide by 100 kilometres long, and recovering 180,000 hectares of land they had previously lost. They also forced the closing of a road linking a number of farm properties and passing through the Park, and obtained the right to control the ferry and a promise that studies would begin to change the route of the Brasilia-Manaus highway. The new president of Funai appointed as his chief-of-staff Marcos Terena, one of the founders of the Union of Indian Nations when he was a student in Brasilia. Megaron, a Txukarramãe leader and one of the main negotiators in the Xingu crisis, is the new director of the Park. His assistants, Indians from different tribes, will be sent by him to head the Indian stations in the area. This step will bring the Park under the administration of a staff of Indians for the first time in Brazil.

There can be no doubt that non-Indian Brazilians are being led to reconsider the Indian question, and perhaps will learn to accept Indians as valid interlocutors with an identity of their own. It is possible that these are the first steps towards the constitution of a new Brazilian nation, in which pluralistic

projects will definitively mark the disappearance of over four centuries of the domination and extermination of some peoples by others.

CARMEN JUNQUEIRA