

4 September 1981

728 212th Pl. SW
Lynnwood, Washington
98036 U.S.A.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CRISIS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

(A discussion by Rudy Ryser, Special Assistant to the President, on approaches to a "Crisis in Central America information Campaign" further to consultations with AL and his discussions with the CORPI Executive in Panama.)

TO: Jose Carlos Morales

As you know, since the CORPI Regional meeting earlier this year the WCIP Secretariat has issued one public statement regarding the "Crisis in Central America". Former President George Manuel issued a statement to the press from Vancouver, Canada last Spring. The statement focused on the tendency of state governments to ignore the violence and its impact on Indigenous populations particularly in Guatamala and El Salvador. Further, the statement observed that Indigenous populations were being caught between the forces of left and right and consequently they are threatened with violence from both sides. In early August I met with Lish at the WCIP Secretariat to discuss the possibility of gaining agreement within the CORPI Executive on a plan to promote wide international political support for Indigenous peoples in Central America. A more detailed description of this discussion follows:

CORPI, in conjunction with the WCIP network, should organize a worldwide information campaign during a period of six to eight months (beginning in September '81) to raise the profile of CORPI and the Indigenous Peoples generally as a political force in Central America and Mexico. The Indigenous Peoples Crisis in Entral America campaign would be designed to achieve the purpose, goal and objectives proposed below:

PURPOSE: The ultimate purpose, I propose, whould be to promote political unity among indigenous peoples within three principle sectors of Central America and Mexico so as to establish a third political force designed to rebuild indigenous political influence and control over indigenous territories and indigenous populations. The purpose necessarily argues the "intent to reestablish indigenous control in indigenous territories" and the removal of colonial influences and controls now exercised by existing state governments.

GOAL: The goal, I propose, should be to establish international recognition of the legitimate political role of indigenous populations in the stabilization of Central America and Mexico.

OBJECTIVES: 1. Establish international public awarenes that indigenous peoples in Central America and Mexico are a third political force which must be recog-

nized to play a direct role in the establishment of peace in Central America if peace and stability is indeed to be achieved.

2. Establish international recognition of CORPI as the legitimate voice of Indigenous Peoples in Central America and Mexico with-
which outside and state political forces must deal.

3. Establish political ties between CORPI and selected state governments (perhaps some southern African states and particular Western European and South Pacific States) with the intention of securing their willingness to politically support CORPI and the indigenous populations, and to present the indigenous situation before specified intergovernmental forums (i.e. United Nations, North/South meeting, etc.).

ANALYSIS:

There are at least three principal sectors of Mexico and Central America which are already principally occupied by indigenous populations. Within the first sector in excess of eleven million people indigenous to Southern Mexico (including Yucatan), the Northern two-thirds of Guatamala, the Western half of Belize and the Eastern half of El Salvador constitute the majority population. This sector primarily includes tribes and communities which made up the constituent parts of the Mayan Empire. For about five hundred years this territory has been divided into four parts colonized by Britain and Spain and now their successors controlling the governments of Mexico, Guatamala, Belize and El Salvador. The status of indigenous peoples in this territory has been divided and converted into groups of mass cheap labor supporting a system of elite neocolonialism and indigenous resource exploitation.

The second sector includes the indigenous populations located in Eastern Honduras and Eastern Nicaragua. And the Third sector includes indigenous populations primarily located in Southern Costa Rica and Northern Panama. Within each of these sectors the indigenous population is in the majority yet these same populations are denied political identity and their rights by the neocolonial governments established within their original territories.

International recognition of these territories and the majority populations within them is essential to the indigenous cause of freedom from economic, political and cultural exploitation. Such recognition of indigenous populations as the Third political Force is essential to establishing a new political order in Mexico and Central America. Indeed, as we have argued in other papers, the indigenous populations hold the greatest potential for bringing economic and political stability to the region. The indigenous population holds the balance between continued conflict and instability or normalization. As long as the neocolonial successors of Spain and Britain maintain dominance politically (whether left, right or political center) indigenous people will continue to be

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exploited for the benefit of the colonial elite. The major political alliance that makes practical sense is one between the indigenous peoples within each sector and between all three sectors. The major political action that offers the best opportunity for an indigenous role in the balance of power in the region is the securing of international recognition of indigenous peoples as a legitimate political force separate from the political factions within the colonial structure.

To achieve the proposed purpose of an intensive "crisis in Central America" information campaign (an its goal and objectives) I propose that CORPI and the WCIP organizational network undertake a series of public activities ^{as scheduled} directed at achieving support and high level understanding among the

1. international press (particularly in Western Europe, selected third world countries and North America),
2. selected non-governmental organizations registered with the United Nations, and,
3. no fewer than ten selected nation-state governments (my immediate suggestions include: Vanuatu, Tanzania, France, Zambia, Uganda, Norway, Nigeria, Lesotho, Barbados and Canada).

The public activities should include planned and coordinated news conferences initiated by CORPI (in Geneva, Oslo and Cancun during the next two months) and the regional representatives of the WCIP network, within their respective regions.

A "policy document" which exposes the situation of indigenous peoples in Mexico and Central America (this document should also include proposals for the political role of CORPI and the Indigenous sectors) should be prepared in advance and used (handed out) at the news conferences in all the regions. The document should be sent to selected NGOs seeking their commitment for support (economic and political) and their willingness to widely distribute the document and future CORPI (and WCIP) communications on the issues in Central America. CORPI should make direct ^{appeals} to selected nation-state representatives (serving as ambassadors or High Commissioners) as well as directly to selected nation-state foreign ministers and heads of state requesting the establishment of communications links and future political (and (perhaps) economic) support. During the early months special emphasis should be placed on potential supportive countries which intend to participate in the North/South meeting in Cancun in October.

The planned campaign should be detailed enough to provide guidance and clear direction to the WCIP Secretariat and the WCIP network. ^{Complete} Information and clear directives are essential to the achievement of success. ^{on a timely basis}

I look forward to your comments regarding this subject.

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GOAL: The goal, I propose, should be to establish international recognition of the legitimate political role of indigenous populations in the stabilization of Central America and Mexico.

OBJECTIVES: 1. Establish international public awareness that indigenous peoples in Central America and Mexico are a third political force which must be recog-

nized to play a direct role in the establishment of peace in Central America if peace and stability is indeed to be achieved.

2. Establish international recognition of CORPI as the legitimate voice of Indigenous Peoples in Central America and Mexico with-which outside and state political forces must deal.

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