

FILE: IWGIA Document

AUG 14 1978

GUATEMALA 1978:

# THE MASSACRE AT PANZOS

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# 33

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GUATEMALA 1978 : THE MASSACRE AT PANZOS

Copenhagen 1978

News of the massacre at Panzós reached IWGIA in the beginning of June. We were about to issue our IWGIA NEWS-LETTER No. 19 and therefore barely managed to include a short report on the matter by Jens Lohmann.

However, we felt that the importance of the May 29th events, in all their horror and bestiality, was such that any information about what had happened, why and how it happened, should be as widely publicized as possible.

We therefore are extremely thankful for the abundant material sent to us by a friend from Central America (for obvious reasons he prefers to remain anonymous) and we immediately decided to use it for our next IWGIA Document.

Apart from the introduction, the material consisted of reports, interviews, testimonies, official statements, protest declarations, etc., that had either been published in the Guatemalan press or issued by various organizations, trade unions, church bodies, etc. It also included a few articles from international newspapers and magazines.

From this material we have compiled a Document that illustrates the situation at Panzós, before and after May 29th. We have reproduced the explanations given by the official authorities and the confrontation of these unsustained and glib accusations with the interviews of some of the victims as well as the information collected on the

## FOR FURTHER READING:

The interested reader is referred to a recent outstanding publication on the situation in Guatemala:

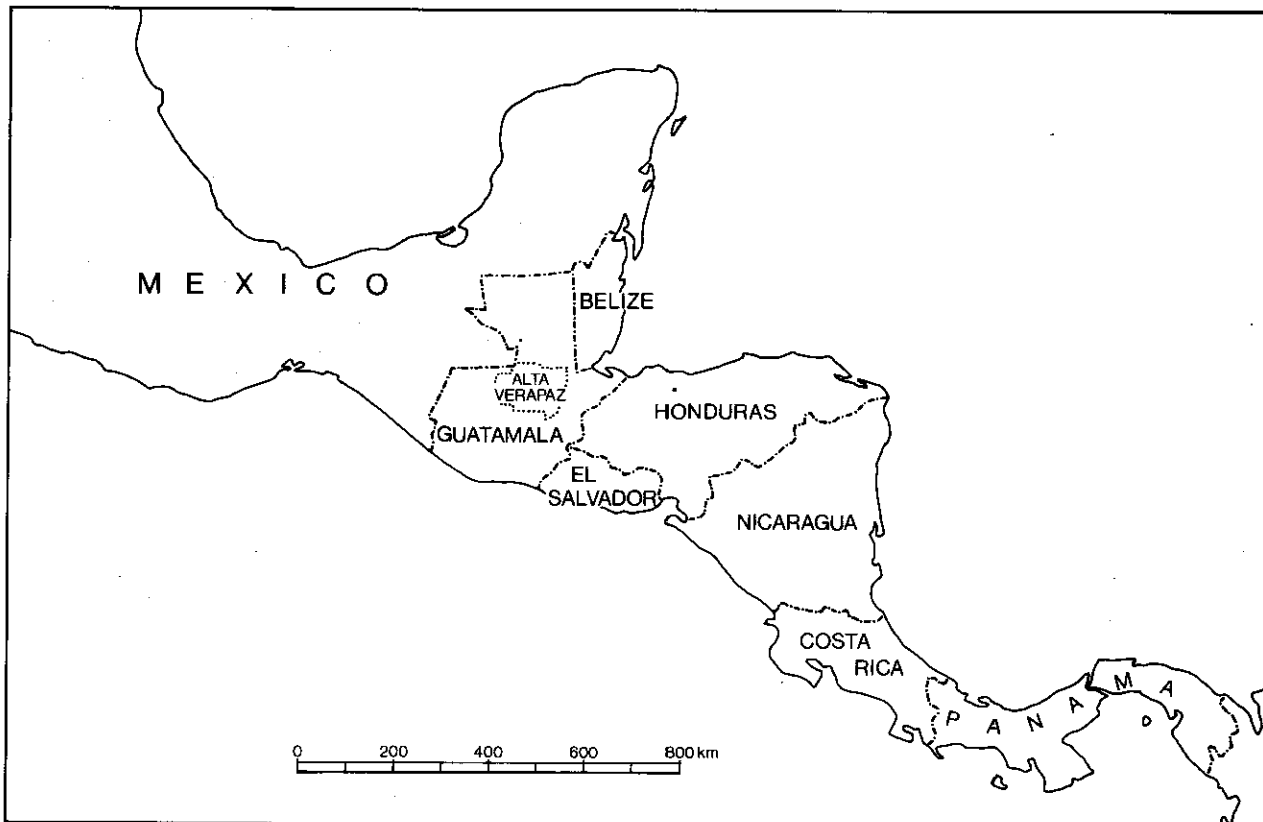
Roger Plant: GUATEMALA UNNATURAL DISASTER  
Latin America Bureau  
London 1978 (ISBN 0 906156 01 7)

In AKWESASNE NOTES, Vol.7, Number 1, Early Spring 1975, there is an excellent special section on the Indians of Guatemala. One of the essays, The Situation of Indian Peoples in Guatemala, is written by Antonio Pop Caal, a Kekchi from Cobán, Alta Verapaz.

spot by the various organizations, etc., speaks for itself: this material leaves no doubt as to where the responsibility should be placed. Of paramount interest are the very detailed and indignant declarations made by ecclesiastical authorities and the "Comité Pro Justicia Y Paz": they show how the Church in Guatemala is beginning to assume its primary purpose: the protection of the humble. As in other Latin American countries, it now at last speaks up against the oppressive State.

The Document shows the tremendous impact the massacre made in Guatemala, and how people of different creed and convictions rallied and rose in protest. Panzós has already become a symbol of the oppression endured by the Indian peasants all over Latin America. Panzós will never be forgotten, but Panzós may happen again unless the world opinion is kept informed and sensibilized. It is IWGIA's hope that Document No. 33 may contribute to this.

international press agencies released news reports on the incident. Thus, this carnage committed against peasants is no longer a news item of strictly local interest, but it has acquired international dimensions. At the same time, there has been a general outcry in Guatemala demanding an exhaustive inquiry as well as condemning the violence used against the peasants. Far from quietening down, this outcry is increasing with each passing day; the State institutions, official bodies, labour organizations, student unions, etc. which demand to know the whole truth behind the incident are now very numerous. The information released initially loses credibility as the tragedy experienced by our Indian fellow countrymen pierces the minds of the Guatemalan people in all its horror. The Panzós massacre cannot continue to appear as it has been the case so far: in some ways partially understandable, in other ways completely obscure. It is imperative to get to the bottom of what happened.....



to protest the Panzós massacre and also to commemorate the first anniversary of the assassination of labour lawyer and university professor Mario Lopéz Larrave. Something new in the march was a visible presence from the Christian sector: Catholic and Protestant groups marched in their own part of the demonstration. Newspapers said that 60,000 or 80,000 people marched on this day and called the demonstration the largest since the days of Jacobo Arbenz (President of the Republic 1951-1954).

On Wednesday, June 7th, a Spanish nun working in the Alta Verapaz diocese, Sor Raymunda Alonso Q., was deported to El Salvador, allegedly for "meddling in politics". This decision by the Government caused widespread indignation and protests.

On Tuesday, June 13th, the "Comité Pro Justicia y Paz" organized and celebrated a large public Mass in honour of the victims of the Panzós tragedy.

#### "EL GRAFICO" 2.6.78

##### PANZOS GOES BEYOND OUR FRONTIERS

The Panzós tragedy, in which an as yet unknown number of Indian peasants living in the villages of the Polochic River valley were killed, has made an impact beyond the frontiers of this country producing echoes abroad. The name of Panzós, a modest town placed on the banks of Lake Izabal, has suddenly become world famous for such unhappy reasons.

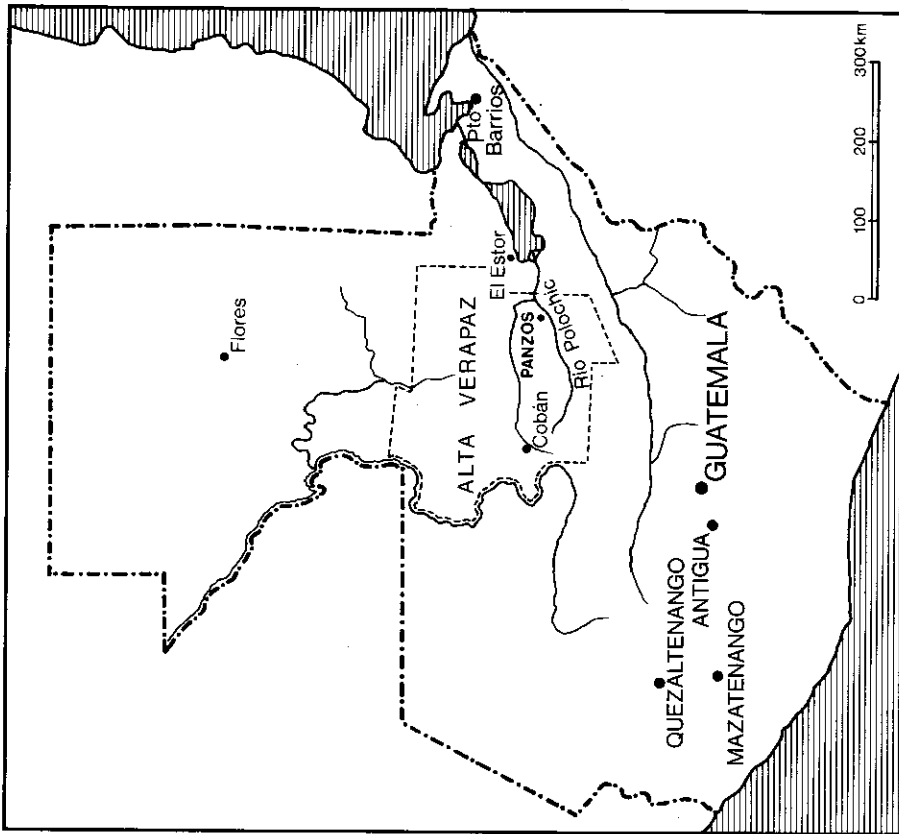
Yesterday, it was mentioned in an article published by the daily "El Imparcial" that information on the bloody events of May 29th was broadcast by radio stations in different parts of the world, such as the BBC in London, the Voice of America (USA), the Voice of Germany, and the Spanish National Broadcasting Company. Likewise, a number of

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Translated from the Spanish by Kjeld K. Lings  
Maps drawn by Jørgen Ulrich

# GUATEMALA



chapels and oratories occupied by troops; personal vengeance flourish, as well as a number of other kinds of abuse and outrage.

5. As a result of all this, a climate of worry, anxiety and panic has been generated among the population all over this department.

6. Owing to our Christian commitment and our prophetic calling as the people of God, we vigorously condemn, regret and protest against the recent slaughter committed at Panzós, as well as the state of permanent persecution and massacre in which the northern part of Quiché lives. Likewise, we condemn all acts of violence and all attempts on human lives, from whatever quarter they may come.

We demand respect for the dignity of human beings. To this end, it is imperative that measures be taken immediately to correct the causes which have given rise to the events that Guatemala and the world deeply lament.

Santa Cruz del Quiché, June 5th 1978

### REPERCUSSIONS

Besides the numerous declarations, statements and protests emitted by various organizations and individuals on the topic of Panzós, Guatemala has seen a chain of different events following the massacre.

A few examples: on Thursday, June 1st, 12,000 - 15,000 marched and demonstrated through a rainstorm.

A further demonstration was held on Thursday, June 8th,



violence with killings, kidnappings, torture, housebreakings, intimidations, etc., in recent years.

2. The villages located in the Ixil area (Chajul, Nebaj, Cotzaj), El Ixcán, and the Reyna area, have been the most affected spots. Over the last three years, more than a hundred people have disappeared or been murdered. The extermination of community leaders and catechists has been carried out systematically and relentlessly.

3. We believe that the basic factors causing this situation are the following:

a) The greed for land on the part of those who hold power in the social, economic, and political spheres, and who tend to amass more and more.

b) the constant exploitation of the working people and peasants, who are mainly Indians, and who have no means of defence whatsoever at their disposal.

c) The fear felt by those in power that the most humble and deprived part of the population should become aware of their rights as human beings and children of God.

4. We can document the above with the following facts:

a) More than five thousand families live in the Ixcán sector of the Transversal Strip in the northern area. For more than eight years, they have been waiting for their title deeds, having received nothing but promises and deceptions so far.

b) More than 40 people have been killed, kidnapped or have disappeared among the inhabitants of Cotzaj; more than 20 at Chajul; at least 15 at Nebaj; and by the dozen at Ixcán and in the Reyna area.

c) Army troops have occupied the whole area. There are armed groups, "blacklists," and no personal security for the citizens; farms are burnt down by arson; women raped; civil authority disregarded or non-existent;



#### INTRODUCTION

On Monday May 29 a number of Indian peasants were killed by the Guatemalan army in the region of Panzós, Alta Verapaz. According to the official version, soldiers fired in self defence, killing 34 and wounding 17. Other versions describe the incident as a massacre of unarmed peasants and say that 60 or perhaps 100 or even more were killed, including women and children. Both sides converge in seeing land tenure problems as the origin of the tragic event.

Panzós is a town near the Polochic River, 300 kilometres N.E. of Guatemala City, 150 kilometres E. of Cobán and about 40 kilometres up the river from El Estor. Kekchi-speaking Indian peasants have occupied the surrounding area for perhaps 100 years. Recently some large landholders have moved in and have been given title by the government land reform agency, INTA (National Institute for Agrarian Transformation). They have also employed intimidation, legal manoeuvring, arrest and murder of peasant leaders. Some of these peasant organizations are affiliated with PASGUA (Autonomous Trade Union Federation of Guatemala).

Until recently the area was of little value owing to its isolation (although at one time timber was exported.) However, it is now near the boom area of Guatemala. The large nickel operation of EXMIRAL, a Canadian-American firm, lies to the northeast. Petroleum is already being extracted in modest amounts and further exploration is being undertaken. A projected oil pipeline to the port town of Livingston will pass not too far from the area. And the construction of a new road through the north is making land much more valuable.

Significantly, President-elect Romeo Lucas and the Defence Minister are both from Alta Verapaz and have large properties there as do other prominent military figures. Lucas' assumption of the presidency will be a symbol of the army's interest in being in on the action in the boom area.

Guatemala's high level of politically motivated violence is well known: 20,000 killed between 1966-1976 according to Amnesty International. It is probable that much, even most, of this killing has not come directly from the army or police but from right-wing paramilitary groups (which may, however, employ off-duty soldiers and police.) But there is a pattern of military repression of peasants precisely in the isolated northern departments of Quiché and Alta Verapaz in particular.

In general we incline to accept the peasants' version of the incident and find the official version suspect for a number of reasons. It does not seem reasonable for a group of peasants to attack an army outpost with machetes. Or to take women and children with them.

The Panzós massacre has provoked a general indignation in public opinion. Every day numerous organizations have made their own statements in the papers. The provincial of the Dominican order made a strong statement, since Panzós is part of a parish staffed by Dominicans. Twenty-four religious organizations, headed by the Conference of Religious Orders of Guatemala (CONFREGUA), have issued a critical statement

day, here in Guatemala, Panzós reveals that some are willing to kill in order to hinder that justice and equality.

#### 6. We Appeal for Solidarity with the Just Struggle of Peasants and Working People

Thus, our words are necessary, although not all-important. The essential thing is to side with the oppressed and exploited in their legitimate struggle for justice and dignity, here and now in Guatemala; we must stand beside them and support them in their efforts, offering them our resources and skills. We want to add our denunciations and protests to those made by the organizations of workers, peasants, settlers, students and religious groups.....

Participants in the Pre-Puebla Gathering and  
"COMITE PRO JUSTICIA Y PAZ"

Guatemala, June 3rd 1978

#### THE QUICHE DIOCESE

##### STATEMENT ON THE PANZOS MASSACRE AND THE ACTS OF VIOLENCE IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE DEPARTMENT

On the occasion of the incident at Panzós, which has caused indignation among the population of Guatemala and plunged more than a hundred homes of our brothers and sisters into mourning, the Bishop, jointly with the priests and nuns of Quiché Diocese and "Acción Católica de Santa Cruz del Quiché," declare as follows:

1. The Panzós massacre is no isolated case. It is rather another step in the escalating violence which has been raging all over the country for years. Quiché Department has been and still is suffering from this situation of permanent

YOU WHO ADD HOUSE TO HOUSE AND JOIN FIELD TO FIELD, UNTILL NOT AN ACRE REMAINS, AND YOU ARE LEFT TO DWELL ALONE IN THE LAND" (Isaiah 5.8). Jesus himself confirms this as he severely condemns the greed of the rich insatiabiles in a specific way (Luke 12.16-21), and he says: "How hard it will be for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10.23). Obviously, he said so because the wealthy enrich themselves on the hard work of the poor, who are deprived of their right to "be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, sharing it in brotherhood" (Genesis 1.28). Glib accusations of communism and subversive activities are very often made by those who hold wealth and power in Guatemala against catechists, missionaries and all those who fight together with the working class for fundamental rights.

5. Why Does the "Comité Pro Justicia y Paz" State its Opinion ?

We state our opinion because it is our principal duty as Christians. In this land of ours, where exploitation, injustice, discrimination, misery and speculation are coupled with the hunger, sweat and blood of the poor people in the cities and countryside, love and charity have only one possible translation in Christian terms: STRUGGLE FOR THE JUSTICE AND DIGNITY OF ALL GUATEMALANS AND SUPPORT FOR THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLE. We voice our opinion seeing that, today, in Guatemala, the Lord God's question can be heard everywhere: "CAIN, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO YOUR BROTHER?" (Genesis 4. 9-11). Jesus taught us to have pity on the crowd and not only give them the bread of his word of faith, hope and dignity, but also the bread which satisfies bodily hunger (John 6.1-9). The development of human history has made us understand, thanks to the inspiration from the Holy Spirit, that what is required is not to offer gifts but to live on the fruit of our work sharing it with equality and justice. We state our opinion because to-

as has the Church-related "Comité PRO JUSTICIA Y PAZ." Various political parties, and even the Council of State, a consultative body to the government made up of representatives of business, industry and agroindustry, have called for thorough investigations.

NEWS REPORTS

"LATIN AMERICA BUREAU" 2.6.1978

PEASANT MASSACRE IN GUATEMALA

According to eye-witness accounts which have just reached us over 100 peasants were killed, including at least 25 women and five children, when soldiers opened fire on a demonstration in the Guatemalan town of Panzós in the province of Alta Verapaz, near the Belizean border, on Monday 29th May.

Hundreds of Indian peasants from the villages of Cahaboncito and Chichipate had marched on the town of Panzós to protest to the mayor at moves by large landowners to oust them from land which they had worked and lived on for the past 40 to 100 years. Like many Guatemalan peasants, their families have had traditional rights to the land although holding no legal title.....

Alta Verapaz has seen increased repression against peasants by government forces in recent years ever since oil and nickel have been discovered and exploited in the region, and where further major finds are expected. A new road and an oil pipeline linking the oil fields to the west (where

the Basic Resources - Shenandoah Oil consortium hold the concession) with the nickel plant (owned by EXMIBAL, the Guatemalan subsidiary of the Canadian-US International Nickel Co., INCO) and port to the east, will also cross the province. The value of land in the area has consequently increased dramatically and speculators with the necessary wealth and/or influence have been quick to secure land there. In the process, peasants who have worked the land for years have been evicted, forceably or otherwise, by the new landowners, usually with the help of the army and local authorities.

Alta Verapaz is one of the areas which has been most affected in recent years by Guatemala's endemic political violence. The vast majority of the victims are peasants who are assassinated or who simply "disappear". The root cause of this violence is a grossly inequitable system of land tenure in which two percent of landowners own over 70% of the land. The mass of the population lives at or below subsistence level on tiny plots of land or as migrant labourers on the large estates under inhuman conditions.....

"NEWSWEEK" 19.6.1978

GUATEMALA: MASSACRE AT PANZOS

The 700 Kekchi Indians, descendants of the Mayas, marched on the Guatemalan village of Panzós late last month in a desperate protest against their eviction from traditional farm lands. Some of them carried machetes, the tools of their livelihood in the corn and sugar-cane fields. But at the town hall they met soldiers who, after some pushing and shoving, opened fire on the Indians with Israeli-made Galil assault rifles. "The shooting came from the rooftops, from the windows, from the houses around the square," a young protest leader recalled last week. "People were falling and

longer is willing to accept gifts, only justice, sooner or later would have to teach them a brutal lesson. This is the immediate explanation of the meanness and bestiality committed by the army, the Government and the landholders against our Kekchi peasant brothers and sisters at Panzós.

3. Why is this Kind of Repression Necessary?

The power elites are not willing to give up their interests depending on the large-scale investments by foreign companies in the tourist trade, hydroelectric power, roads, industry, plantations and farming, mines, oil and in the land speculation in the towns and cities as well as in the countryside. Panzós is situated between Rubelsanto (oil) and El Estor (nickel), and not very far from the great Transversal Highway in the north; it is in the middle of the Polochic River valley, and in this area, the peasants have been exploited for years by the coffee plantation owners, rice growers, and cattle ranchers who are more or less overtly supported by INTA and other local power groups. The repression takes place when the working people begin to defend their legitimate rights.

4. In what Way does the Government and the Army Justify this Repression ?

According to the Government, subversive elements have taught the peasants slogans such as "The land belongs to God and to those who work on it.". In the old books of the Holy Bible, it is clear to read that no one can claim perpetual ownership of the land which God meant for justice and freedom: "THE LAND IS MINE, SAYS THE LORD, AND YOU ARE COMING INTO IT AS ALIENS AND SETTLERS" (Leviticus 25.23). Landholders and the military in Guatemala, together with bankers, manufacturers and traders, behave as if the land and natural resources belonged to them eternally and exclusively. However, Isaiah prophesized: "SHAME ON YOU!

with an excessive show of force. However, this army is combing out the area, using humanitarian appearances to cover up its wish to frighten people into not telling the truth.

## 2. Yet Another Act of Repression

The repression on the part of the Government and the army against the workers is of no recent date. At least since June 7th 1975, the northern part of the Quiché department (especially the Ixil area) has been subject to a constant military siege, which got worse after the earthquake. No one can sleep undisturbed any more at Nebaj, San Juan Cotzal, and Chajul. From about the same time, the Ixcán area has been suffering similar conditions, as is evidenced by the frequent protests and reports from the peasant organizations there.

In the month of January 1976, peasants at Chisec, Alta Verapaz, were murdered by ranch guards, who were later acquitted by the local court. In the capital, the model squad of the police has broken up strikes and repressed the workers. Frequently, in 1977, the police have terrorized the slum dwellers living in the ravines, not even refraining from robbing them of personal belongings; thus, they contradict the alleged aim of preventing crime.

On May 1st 1977; on October 20th 1977; at the march of Ixtahuacán and Pantaleón on the capital; on May 1st this year, as well as at the recent miners' strike at Oxec and that of the enamel and steel workers, at the Chixoy project in Alta Verapaz itself, as well as at the Aguacapapa project, the working people have made it clear that now is the time when they say that they have had enough of centuries of exploitation.....

Those who do not want to accept an honest and conscious working class aware of its rights and of the justice that must be attained in Guatemala, and which no

everybody ran." Several terrified women clutching children jumped into the swift Polochic River and drowned. "We only went peacefully to see the mayor," said a stunned survivor. "If we had gone to attack, we would not have taken our women and children."

REGRETS: The government announced that 38 Kekchis had died in a "peasant uprising instigated by leftist guerrillas, Cuba's Fidel Castro and religious groups." Catholic priests and university students sympathetic to the Indians' cause put the toll at more than 100 dead and organized a rally in Guatemala City last week at which 80,000 demonstrators shouted, "Towards! Towards!" outside the government palace. Spokesmen for the military regime expressed regrets. "Someone high up in the U.S. State Department compared Panzós to Kent State, and I agree with him" said Jorge Lamport-Bodil, Guatemala's ambassador to the U.S. "Someone got nervous, maybe on both sides, and overreacted."

Most of the land now in dispute flanks the "Transversal Strip," where a crosscountry road being built from the Caribbean to the Mexican border traverses territory that once only the Indians cared about. In the past two years, say lawyers who assist the Indians, entire thatched-hut communities of Indian peasants have been scattered by developers seeking a share of oil and nickel deposits and of the booming real-estate market along the road. "What happened here is the eternal story of the Americas," a foreign diplomat in Guatemala City told NEWSWEEK's Marliese Simons. "The Indians are driven off the good land by the settlers who grab whatever they can by any means."

Gen. Kjell Laugerud, Guatemala's President, is said to own large estates in a "Zone of the Generals" along the strip, while Gen. Romeo Lucas, the President-elect, owns more than 78,000 acres. "Traditionally the army here has been on the side of the people with power and wealth," explained

Vice President-elect Francisco Villagrán. "If this time the army would not take sides, but mediate between the rich and the poor, we would advance a hundred years." Judging by the massacre at Panzós, however, the army was by no means ready to play peacemaker.

(Steven Strasser with Marlise Simons  
in Guatemala City)

"EL IMPARCIAL" 31.5.1978

#### CONFLICTING VERSIONS ON WHAT HAPPENED

From the official viewpoint and that of the peasants

The most contradictory versions on what happened at Panzós, Alta Verapaz, clashed this morning when new information was published about the bloody confrontation which is said to have produced no less than about 100 killed and 150 wounded.

A group of peasants who managed to get away from Panzós have given details about the clash with the army. They have arrived in Guatemala City after having crossed the mountains, escaped in canoes and swum across the rivers, besides using other awkward means of transport.

In the meanwhile, approximately fifty dead bodies are being buried today by their relatives at the village community of La Soledad and the neighbouring villages, where the victims came from.

Dozens of peasants have gone deep into the mountain woods trying to escape from the army troops which virtually are going through the area "with a tooth comb."

Hundreds of peasants' homes have been deserted, and the inhabitants of Panzós have closed their doors with rocks and mud, afraid that another clash may be imminent.

The army is using combined airborne forces from the military bases at Zacapa, Puerto Barrios and Cobán, for pursuing the fugitives.

and that they be given due protection.

Cobán, June 2nd 1978

#### "COMITE PRO JUSTICIA Y PAZ"

##### STATEMENT OF THE "COMITE PRO JUSTICIA Y PAZ" OF GUATEMALA ON THE PANZOS MASSACRE

The "Comité Pro Justicia y Paz" has Christian groups all over the country among its members. The Committee has invited the numerous individuals and associations, unions or organizations who take inspiration from the life of Jesus Christ, to the Assembly held in order to adopt the contributions of Guatemala to the forthcoming bishops' convention in Puebla (Mexico). With regard to the deliberate slaughter of poor Indian Kekchi peasants in the Panzós region of Alta Verapaz, the Assembly participants and the Committee jointly declare:

#### 1. The Incident

An official version has been given by the army, supported by the Government, which seems untrue and full of contradictions. The very fact that journalists were not allowed to go to the town immediately, shows that the truth was meant to be concealed. Likewise, the Red Cross ambulances from Cobán were not admitted into Panzós at the time they arrived.

Despite the widespread confusion and terror at this moment, we are inclined to join the greater part of public opinion in believing the version given by victims of the aggression which the army and landholders have committed.

.....

It is obvious that the wounded peasants do not want to be "taken care of" by an army which massacres them

- The bodies of the peasants who died in hospital have been taken out on the orders of military officers; no autopsy was performed.

- In recent days, the ambulances which went to aid the wounded, have met with serious difficulties on the part of the army, whenever they have tried to do their duty.

#### IV. Conclusion

1. Based on our own direct inquiry on the scene of events, the present version contrasts sharply with the army's official version. Thus, we demand the competent authority to conduct an unbiased inquiry immediately, by appointing a mixed commission with representation from the various social spheres, in order to shed light on the incident and find those responsible.

2. The regrettable events at Panzós are only a small link in the long chain of conflicts in which so many Guatemalan peasants live. At the same time, they are a typical case which alerts us about what may happen in so many other places around the Republic, owing to the same conditions of injustice and neglect.

3. Faced with the real possibility that things at Panzós will continue in a climate of violence, which we regret and condemn, we demand

- a) that two unsettled problems at Panzós be solved:
  - 1) Permission should be given immediately to the peasants to harvest and sow their plots, lest the sufferings they have already gone through should be followed by a situation of hunger and misery.
  - 11) A just settlement of the controversy over the legal possession of the land, which motivated the conflict, must be found.
- b) a cease to the unjustified threats to the lives of local leaders, catechists and organizers of cooperatives,

Other peasants with bullet wounds and fractures are hospitalized at El Estor, Izabal and Zacapa.....

#### "EL GRAFICO" 2.6.1978

##### THE SCENE OF EVENTS

The word Panzós derives from the Kekchi language "Pan" (wheat bread) and "Zos" (frost), thus meaning "Wheat Bread with Frost."

The town normally has 7,000 inhabitants, but now appears half-empty. Thirty per cent of the population has gone away.

Mayor Overdick calculates that two thousand people have left the place. Yesterday, many people were still leaving on the "Rutas de Polochic" vans, and trucks or pick-ups were also used for the exodus.

At a distance of 300 Kilometres north of the capital, Panzós in bygone days was an important river port in this region; a rough route leads to Cobán, and the tropical forests were abundant in wood.

Now, its inhabitants employ themselves in agriculture and particularly in growing maize (corn). However, great paddocks are used as pastures for a few dozen head of cattle; the land is in the hands of a very small number of landholders.

Founded on the banks of the deep and swift Polochic River, Panzós and particularly the neighbouring villages, farms and hamlets, are inhabited by Kekchi Indians, who in most cases do not get to learn Spanish and only speak their mother tongue.

It is the people of this race who now are claiming for themselves the land they have been cultivating for decades, but which suddenly has been taken over by landowners who acquire supplementary title deeds in order to legalize their claims on these properties.

Panzós belongs to a number of towns located in the Polochic valley in the north of this country; among these are El Estor, La Tinta, Telemán, etcetera.....

"LA NACION" 3.6.1978

PANZÓS: WHO IS TO BLAME ? (by Irma Flaquer)

..... Moreover, we all know that the Indians who live in Alta Verapaz (as well as in other departments) do not speak any Spanish...

Perhaps what happened is that those who gave the orders to open fire simply reacted out of panic, facing a crowd of people who spoke without being understood. What may very well have been a peaceable attitude - a simple wish to read a letter from FASCUA - may have been interpreted as a lynching or something. What is really obvious is the fact that there was no communication. If the mayor had read the letter, the peasants would probably have gone off from the scene of events without further ado.....

"EL GRAFICO" 7.6.1978

MASS EXODUS OF INDIANS

..... Yesterday it was reported that many small Indian communities situated in the mountains of this region are being abandoned in an exodus of dozens of Indian families.

Peasant leaders have arrived in Guatemala City and have been interviewed by EL GRAFICO. They say that it is the presence of police units and army troops which makes them prefer to leave their homes.

The presence of military forces at different points in the region, together with the constant overflying

the soldier, who fell wounded on the ground. Immediately, his fellow soldiers thought that they were all being attacked by the peasants, and they started to blaze away; some of them climbed onto the town hall building and shot from there on the crowd of men, women and children. At the same time, there were trigger-happy individuals at different spots, some even from private houses, who joined the general shooting, firing at those who tried to run away in different directions. Among those who joined in were Panzós councillor, Mr Manuel Macú, and some local policemen.

The utterly terrified peasants, trying to escape in turmoil, found death in the park, in the streets, in the neighbouring cornfields, and some who got seized by panic flung themselves into the river and drowned before reaching the other side. The dead bodies left behind in the park, together with some of those found in other places, were removed until 3 p.m.. Then they were buried in a common grave made with a road tractor, without the legally prescribed autopsy being undertaken beforehand. Two truckloads of bodies (vehicles belonging to the Panzós town council) ended up in the common grave.

The number of deaths exceeds a hundred, but the exact figure cannot be established.

### III. Subsequent Events

- Forces.
- The town of Panzós was occupied by the Armed Forces.
  - The troops and armaments were notably reinforced.
  - The Armed Forces entered Cahaboncito. By their very presence, they intimidated the peasants, who preferred to spend the night in the woods.
  - The land in question was cordoned off by military forces.
  - Peasant leaders, catechists and organizers of cooperatives were still being threatened.



AT THIS STAGE

- The villagers of San Vicente decided to ask the authorities why they were still being killed and maltreated.

- The Cahaboncito settlers resolved to go up to town on Monday, May 29th, in order to acquaint themselves with the contents of the document which had arrived from the capital.

- On the 29th, peasants (both men, women and children) from San Vicente, Cahaboncito and various other communities, went to Panzós in a joint demonstration.

- At the town centre, it was already known that this demonstration was going to take place. Previously, a certain panic had spread owing to rumours that armed peasants were coming to kill the "ladinos" (Spanish-speaking towns-people) and set fire to the towns of Panzós, Telemán and La Tinta. On closer investigation, however, these rumours turned out to be completely unfounded, because among the peasants, no one has ever planned or even thought about such a thing, as they themselves told our committee.

- The peasants arrived peacefully, although they were carrying machetes and sticks. Many of them have the habit of carrying a machete at all times; others had planned to go back to work after the demonstration was over. Besides, there can be no doubt that they instinctively felt they might be in danger.

II. The Massacre

They gathered in the park of Panzós, where the town mayor, some ranchers and troops were waiting for them. The peasants asked to be allowed to speak, but no one would listen. One of the soldiers then shouted a few words. One of the peasants, who was standing near him, thought he was being offended, not understanding any Spanish, and attacked

of Guatemalan Air Force helicopters, have caused fear among the population.....

"LE MONDE" 9.6.1978

(by Jean-Claude Bahner)

..... The Panzós massacre reveals three issues: a) the situation of the Indians, b) the acuteness of the land problem, and c) the climate of escalating violence. Perhaps more distinctly than any other country with a large indigenous population, Guatemala is still deeply divided in two worlds: The Indians essentially live in the countryside and mountains, and the other inhabitants, mostly with Spanish traditions, generally live in the towns and cities in the east and on the Pacific coast. The indigenous population, deliberately kept on the fringe of official society, and which represents almost 60 per cent of the six million Guatemalans, is the main victim of underdevelopment. The Indians are even more exposed than the rest of their fellow citizens to poverty, illiteracy, infant mortality and under-nourishment. Always treated as nobody's children, they are also the first to suffer from the glaring disproportion in the distribution of wealth and land. While a minority of five per cent receives more than half of the national income, the majority of the rural population must content itself with a per capita income of 70 quetzales (1 quetzal equalling 1 dollar.)

The ousting of the aboriginal population from the land started during the Spanish conquest and still continues inexorably. The Indians have only been allowed to cultivate very tiny plots in the highlands or work as farmhands for a ridiculously small pay. Out of 1.3 million agricultural workers, more than half have no permanent employment. Every year they go down by the tens of thousands with their

families to the large estates near the coast, where they get temporarily recruited for less than 2 dollars a day, when it is time for harvesting coffee, cotton and sugar-cane. Mr José Castañeda, chairman of the Indigenist Institute of Guatemala, is of the opinion that "actually, our whole economic system is based on the poverty and exploitation of our indigenous people."

Even though it still is timid, a growing awareness is beginning to spread among the Indians. Especially some of the younger generation are no longer willing to bend their necks without a murmur. Last year, there even was an attempt to organize an Indian party, which, however, was quickly crushed by the authorities; but the communities are especially beginning to defend themselves against the important land-owners who are seizing their land. Conflicts are occurring more frequently than ever, and the situation is particularly tense in Alta Verapaz, as the bloody events at Panzós have shown.....

#### OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

"EL GRAFICO" and "IMPACTO" 31.5.1978

##### PRESS BULLETIN from the GOVERNMENT

In relation to the tragic events at the town of Panzós, Alta Verapaz, the Government of the Republic announces that it has undertaken the relevant inquiries into the matter. The Government is now able to inform:

1. that it has been confirmed that the military

however, no one has been granted a permanent title deed so far.

On the contrary, some landowners have been trying for quite some time to take the land in question away from them; they resort to semilegal manoeuvres and all sorts of pressures, without excluding violence.

#### 2. Recent Events

During the last week before the tragic and regrettable incident, a number of acts of violence were committed within this climate of frustration, weariness and provocations. The unusual presence of a contingent of the Armed Forces in the town gave rise to numerous cases of suspicions, threats, and intimidations.

Under these circumstances, the following events took place:

a) The peasants at San Vicente were tilling the plots on which they had been allowed to sow, as they, on Friday 26th, were visited by a detachment of soldiers coming from Cobán. The soldiers, behaving correctly, talked to them and invited them along to a meeting with the land-owners to be held at the Panzós town hall, on Saturday 27th. On the Saturday, the peasants turned up for the appointment. The soldiers picked ten of them for the talk with the land-owners. No agreement could be reached, however, and a respite of ten days was imposed, while waiting for a decision from the competent authority.

b) On the same Saturday, two peasants living at La Soledad were killed and others ill-treated.

c) The Cahaboncito community received a written message telling the people there to go to Panzós in order to hear the contents of a document just arrived from Guatemala City, which dealt with their land tenure problems.

"Consequently, it is up to the Government of this Republic to tell the population the truth of what happened at Panzós. Besides, it should concentrate on the relevant agency for giving information, since it is distressing that many officials have given contradictory versions on the Panzós tragedy, thus confusing public opinion both here and abroad....."

#### G. RELIGIOUS BODIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

##### DIOCESE OF LA VERAPAZ

##### PRIESTS AND NUNS OF LA VERAPAZ DIOCESE MAKE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IN CONNECTION WITH THE PANZÓS CASE:

Our first statement was published on May 30th this year. In that we both condemned the massacre of our brothers and sisters and demanded that the authorities make a full investigation in order to find those responsible.

An inquiry committee of ours has visited the scene of the incident, and after listening to their report, we have reached the following conclusions:

#### I. Background

##### 1. General Situation

For several years, groups of peasant families have been occupying uncultivated land in the Panzós district and sowing crops there.

The said peasants have approached INTA so as to put things in order and get the situation legalized. Some have received promises, others, provisional title deeds, and yet others, permission to sow and harvest. Quite unaccountably,

garrison of the aforementioned town was actually attacked by a crowd of peasants who had been mobilized by subversive elements. For some time, the latter have been inciting them to occupy land illegally in this region, and in the Indian communities they have stirred up hostility against the army;

2. that the members of the military garrison acted in legitimate self-defence against aggression, since no detachment can be an object of armed attack without resisting and defending itself;
3. that the responsibility of these events bears on the leaders of extreme left-wing organizations, who seek to use the landless peasants as instruments for their own political goals; they are not concerned about any kind of consequences this may have, including the loss of valuable human lives.

Once again the Government condemns the method of violence for resolving real or supposed agrarian conflicts. For the purpose of giving a solution to the need for land, technical assistance, credit facilities and access to the consumers markets, the Government of the Republic is carrying out its agricultural schemes through the relevant agencies. Thanks to these schemes, it has been possible to hand over thousands of acres to needy peasants who are now forming part of the productive life of the nation.

##### "EL GRAFICO" 1.6.1978

##### HANS LAUGERUD: "THE EVENTS AT PANZÓS WERE INEVITABLE"

The prevailing situation at Panzós, Alta Verapaz, had been reported since January this year, declared Señor Hans Laugerud, first vice-chairman of the INTA (National Institute for Agrarian Transformation), at a press conference

yesterday. Since that time, he said, the INTA had disclosed the existence of a perfectly timed plan to incite the peasants of the northern transversal strip to invade land, by means of false promises and without respecting anybody's property.

He said that INTA had already given a warning note about what was going on and what could eventually happen, because the situation was getting more and more serious. Throughout this period, peasants in this region were being egged on, not only to occupy land belonging to people holding legal title deeds, but also that of other peasants to whom INTA had granted possession...

During his press conference, Señor Hans Laugerud said that the ones to blame for what happened at Panzós, Alta Verapaz, are the unions who, behind the scenes, push the peasants into committing illegal acts by filling them with false promises and deceit. He went on to add that the peasants do not know about regulations and by-laws, and so they are easily cheated by leaders who egg them on and who make them think that they may take possession of the land they have been working on for years, even though somebody else is the legitimate owner...

Behind this situation, he said, there is a wicked hand which stirred up the crisis at Panzós. It was all completely staged by political parties with a left-wing ideology, and who also are responsible for what happened in that town.

"PRENSA LIBRE" 2.6.1978

MAJOR ARCHILA SEES MEDDLING BY FIDEL CASTRO BEHIND THE EVENTS AT PANZOS

Our Government will have to take the necessary steps to make international organizations give their verdict

#### F. POLITICAL PARTIES

"EL GRAFICO" 1.6.1978

Yesterday, the Christian Democrat members of the Guatemalan Parliament declared that they are "deeply concerned by the events at Panzós, Alta Verapaz...", in which dozens of peasants died and many more got wounded.

In its declaration to the press, the C.D. party goes on to add that "it has found it important to send the Executive a request asking that such an incident be duly investigated, seeing that the version given in a simple news release is not sufficient."

These MPs also say that "an exhaustive inquiry must be conducted into this incident, in which so many Guatemalans, especially peasants, have died. A matter of such a serious nature cannot be solved by giving simple explanations, and it cannot be excluded that an act of irresponsibility was committed....."

"EL GRAFICO" 2.6.1978

"The MLN Party (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional) publicly condemns those who provoked and executed this massacre. We demand that a full investigation be made in order that the perpetrators and originators of this crime, which once again has plunged the national family into mourning, be punished with the full weight of the law....."

violent death of the Panzós working people and the distress it is causing their families. We hope that the competent body will duly punish the guilty persons, irrespective of their rank or grade, in order that this dark night, which has descended on Guatemala, may disappear, and a time of justice, freedom, peace and respect for all may follow..."

The APG "once again expresses its deep concern and anxiety, because the problems of the nation are not solved within an adequate and balanced social framework, taking the population's needs into account and adhering to the principle of legality, which ought to reign in this country..."

"Within this situation, which had seriously deteriorated in recent months, and owing to the intransigence of certain spheres, who do not want to open the doors to a true democracy, it came to a tragic act of repression last Monday. It only shows the extent of inability there is to solve the problems which grieve the nation, as well as the existing servility toward the classes which have a strong hold on political power."

The APG feels that "the immolation of dozens of peasants, the mourning of humble families together with the frustration of this generation of country people in their fight for survival in the present circumstances, without a doubt represents the kind of sacrifice which is now becoming more frequent for obtaining a different social structure of a more acceptable, solid and developed kind..... It is not easy to avoid mentioning the responsibility of the authorities for maintaining respect for human rights and lives, as well as its constitutional obligation to ensure the security of the citizens. Likewise, it should not be forgotten to emphasize that the Government should do all it can to further the progress of the large numbers of have-nots, since the interests of the community must prevail over private interests....."

as to who is responsible for the Cuban interference in Guatemalan affairs, which has now caused acts of violence like that of Panzós. This is what Major Rolando Archilla, the President's Undersecretary for Public Relations, said yesterday when he was asked by journalists about this topic.

He reminded his listeners that on earlier occasions the OAS has adopted sanctions owing to Fidel Castro's meddling in the affairs of Latin American countries.

He added that Cuban interference in the affairs of other countries is evident. A clear example is that of her participation in wars in Africa.

When he was asked in what way it can be proved that Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro interfered in the problems which gave rise to the Panzós incident, the official replied that proofs will be brought forward at a convenient time.....

#### "EL GRAFICO" 2.6.1978

THE MAYOR SPEAKS: "LAND TENURE PROBLEMS HAVE TRIGGERED OFF EVENTS"  
Mr. Walter Overdick points out that the authorities have done nothing to solve the problems.

The competent authorities have done nothing to solve the land tenure problem in this region, said the mayor Mr. Walter Overdick, during an interview with EL GRAFICO. This is, essentially, the background for the bloody events of last Monday, he said.

That day, he tells us, at about 8 o'clock a.m., I was informed by the assistant mayors that some 700 peasants were on their way to town. When I got to the town hall, the peasants were approaching through all the streets.

The soldiers had been there for three days and I don't know who sent for the troops, he stated. The peasants went over to the detachment....

A soldier told them in Kekchi that five or ten of the peasants present were allowed to enter the premises, but from the middle of the crowd people were pushing, and it came to a hand-to-hand clash between soldiers and peasants.

These peasants were following extraneous slogans, he revealed, since they have always been peaceable. On top of that, he said, there were many men in the crowd who were outsiders, even though they wore peasants' clothes, and they were the ones who instigated it all.

But this is really the end of a number of demonstrations held by the peasants. For three months, they have been demonstrating in groups of 200 or 300, said the mayor.

This is all a result of the apathy displayed by the INTA leadership, he added, because they have not speeded up the solution to the serious problems in the region owing to the land shortage. The peasants are constantly demanding land and consequently they have occupied private as well as communal property.

On top of that, said the mayor, our peasants have got racist ideas put into their heads from the people from outside who are egging them on. Now they demand that positions of authority be held by Indians, and they even demand that the President of the Republic be an Indian. They do not want to have anything to do with the "ladinos" (Spanish-speaking mestizos) and have even threatened them.

Furthermore, he said that regrettably many of the dead bodies had had their faces torn by bullets and it was not possible to establish their identity. He added that on the scene of events 34 people were killed, and one more died at the local health centre.

Among the victims are six women and two young teenagers. He denied that those wounded had been thrown into the Polochic River. Four wounded who tried to cross the river were found dead on the banks.

While it was all happening, only he and his

of demagogic measures or offers aimed at the urban middle classes, in order to create confusion with a democratic mask.

7. The University of San Carlos has found the ongoing repression to be an issue of national importance and harmful to our reputation abroad; this University itself has been one of the victims, as its student members and teaching staff have been attacked. Therefore, for the protection and security of Guatemalan citizens, this Council RESOLVES:

a) to condemn emphatically this genocide, which has shaken our people and once again covered our country with blood, and plunged more Guatemalan homes into mourning;

b) to send this resolution to international organizations: CSUCA, the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, Amnesty International and people's organizations here and abroad.....

c) to demand a stop to the repression unleashed over this country, especially in the rural areas, where this kind of act is committed in an attempt to crush the population's most basic demonstrations for survival. All that is achieved in the end is maintaining the privileged position of a few at the cost of many innocent lives.

Guatemala, June 1st 1978

#### E. JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATIONS

"LA NACION" 3.6.1978

THE APG "HOPES THAT THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PANZOS TRAGEDY WILL BE PUNISHED, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR RANK OR GRADE"

"The Guatemalan Journalists Association (APG)

shares the widespread feeling of strong condemnation of the

practise such things.

4. Within the official institutions which, according to the Constitution of the Republic, were meant to pay attention to, respect and protect the basic human rights, are the police and the national army. However, these very bodies not only mean a heavy burden on the economy of the country, but they also are the instruments used by the upper class and the exploiters of the people to keep them in a state of misery, exploitation, fear, hunger, discrimination and death. It is the army and the paramilitary organizations in particular and the Government in general who are responsible for this sort of atrocities. Their unscrupulousness has reached such extremes that when modest and honourable peasants are forced into doing military service after being hunted and captured like animals, they are turned into executioners of their own class and racial brothers and sisters.

5. So it is not strange that on May 29th, in a deliberate action by members of the national army, peasants were massacred at Panzós, Alta Verapaz, allegedly because they assaulted the garrison of that town. Genocide is already a daily phenomenon all over the country, and official circles have attempted to justify the one now suffered by the humble settlers of Alta Verapaz by presenting an implausible and awkward version of the incident. Certainly, no one can believe that agricultural workers, accompanied by their wives and young children and only carrying their farming tools, would dare to confront the machine guns, fighter planes and helicopters of the army.

6. This bloody event in the rural area of Guatemala is not an isolated case. We remember the recent massacres committed in El Salvador by the army of that country, as well as the much talked-of murders committed at the Los Horcones ranch in Honduras. We see a clear tendency in Central America towards terrorizing people's organizations, especially those of the peasants, and, simultaneously, launching a number of

treasurer were there at the Town Hall, he went on to add, since the only municipal policeman had run away terrified.

At 4 p.m. on Monday, the dead bodies were buried in a common grave after some of them had been identified.

Overdick said that only a just distribution of the land in this area will be enough to prevent more acts of violence of a similar nature.

"EL GRAFICO" 3.6.1978

THE GOVERNMENT PROMISES TO INVESTIGATE PANZOS TRAGEDY

Although the Government has declared that last Monday's bloody incident at Panzós, Alta Verapaz, was provoked by Indian peasants attacking the military garrison, it is now determined to undertake a thorough investigation of the case until those really responsible for what happened are found. This statement was given yesterday by Major Rolando Archilla, Undersecretary for Public Relations of the army....

What the Government will do now, according to Major Archilla, is inquire into the background of the matter and find out who are the instigators of the peasants. There is no doubt that the latter were egged on and sent to attack the army, with the tragic consequences which are now widely known.

The official sees no need to set up a specific commission to investigate the incident, since the authorities will be in charge of the matter and will be able to clear up all the details.....

discontent is to be found. However, it is not only the uncertainty of this situation, but also the numerous cases of abuse committed by roving military policemen and assistant mayors appointed by the municipal council. Another factor in this is the large number of people who have disappeared, and, in a number of cases, nothing is known about their whereabouts....."

STATEMENTS OF SOLDIERS AND MILITARY SPOKESMEN

"EL GRAFICO" 1.6.1978

WOUNDED SOLDIERS FROM PANZOS INCIDENT SPEAK

Three soldiers from the Panzós detachment, in Alta Verapaz, who got wounded during the serious incident last Monday, yesterday told journalists their versions of what happened. They have been taken to the military hospital here...

Their ranks and names are, Corporal Bartolo Rodríguez, 22 years old, Sergeant Pablo Sicán, 24, and Second Sergeant Pedro González, 23 years. All three bear wounds inflicted by a steel blade or knife. None of them has been hit by gun bullets.

Sicán, a native of Granados, Baja Verapaz, told the reporters that last Monday he was doing sentry duty at a corner of the military outpost at Panzós, at about nine o'clock a.m., as a crowd of people drew near.

"They all shouted words in their dialect," he says, "and I could not understand what they were saying. All of a sudden I heard the <whistle> of several shots and I realized that I was being attacked together with the other sentries at the garrison."

When asked whether he knew that the outpost was going to be attacked, he revealed that he did not. He was also unaware about whether people had been gathering on the

SUPREME GOVERNING COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS DE GUATEMALA

Faced with another attempt on the dignity of Guatemalan citizens, now at Panzós, this Council communicates to the people of this nation:

1. The history of our country has been a gory one, in which the power of certain minorities has been evident all along, as they have taken possession of natural resources, ruthlessly exploited the working classes, and handled public affairs as they wish and please.

2. The repression exercised by the very people who, according to the Constitution, ought to have an obligation to ensure peace and order, in recent years has been a clear feature of their work method. It is intimately connected with the keeping of this nation in economic, social and political dependence, coupled with the subjection of the majority of Guatemalans, who are poor and exploited by a minority, which has no hesitation in using any means in order to remain in their privileged position.

3. Unlawful detentions, persecution, kidnappings, citizens forced into exile, assassinations and intimidation systems encouraged by official spheres, are continually suffered by our people. This situation has been worrying conscious citizens hoping that those who could put an end to this state of affairs, would cease to allow, prompt and even



CUNOR states that "residents of Santa Maria Cahaboncito, near Panzós, turned up at the local "Bufete Popular" to ask for legal advice. They told that in the early morning of April 7th this year, the assistant mayor came to the house of one of the villagers and tried to rape a young girl. She managed to slip away. When the other villagers heard about the incident, they gathered outside the mayor's office in order to ask for an explanation. The assistant mayor armed himself with a machete and tried to frighten them away, causing a riot. On the same day, six military policemen went to the homes of six of those who had reported the incident and took them away to the military outpost at Quinch, where they were tortured.

On the following day, the villagers went to the Panzós mayor's office in order to find out about those who had disappeared, but all the mayor did was to send for some soldiers who fired into the air and frightened away the protesters. The Legal Advice Centre helped to file a complaint in court, but nothing has come out of it. Those taken away by the military police did not reappear, and no one knew what was going to happen to them. The Legal Advice Centre also helped the mother of the young girl who had been attacked to lodge a complaint."

According to CUNOR, there are "continual conflicts, attacks and assassinations at the smallholders' villages of La Soledad, Santa Maria Cahaboncito and Chichipate, which are the most important rural communities; the victims are generally the group leaders. On this background, the peasant leaders have felt obliged to seek protection from the constant attacks by organizing themselves in a way that can defend them against the aggressors. On a number of occasions, they have requested the central government to find a definitive solution to their problems, basically by distributing State owned land to the poor peasants in the region. Their efforts have brought no result so far, and this is where the root of the general

outskirts of Panzós...

It is next to impossible to do a decent interview because other journalists are moving about in the small ward. Besides, two plain clothes army officials are recording it all.

However, the statements made by 22-year old Corporal Rodríguez, are possibly the most specific of those of the three wounded soldiers. Like the other two, he was performing his sentry duty at the garrison. At about nine o'clock groups of men started to attack the barracks.

They were all armed with rifles, pistols, machetes and clubs, remembers the corporal, who has served in the army for 16 months. They came in large groups.

They shouted that they wanted land and that it was time to do away with the army. They were shouting in the local language, but they also said things in Spanish, says Bartolo Rodríguez.

He added that the sub-lieutenant of the outpost tried to avoid the attack, but they started to slash at us and shoot.....

"PRENSA LIBRE" 1.6.1978

**GUERRILLAS AND MEMBERS OF RELIGIOUS ORDERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PANZOS TRAGEDY, SAYS DEFENCE MINISTER SPIEGELER**

"The peasants were shouting threats as they attacked the military garrison at Panzós, and the Catholic Church has been meddling in the whole question." Thus declared the Defence Minister, Gen. Otto Spiegeler, during an interview with journalists held yesterday afternoon at his office.

He said that missionaries of different religious creeds, together with people belonging to the EGP (Poor People's Guerrilla Army) are the instigators of the violent

incidents which recently have occurred in the region.

The Minister explained that the subversive groups and religious missionaries use tape recorded messages and address the peasants directly in order to encourage them to claim the land. To this end, they generally use the Kekchi language for their messages and thus indoctrinate the peasants and rouse them to revolt.

The day the incident took place at the town of Panzós, the instigators of the havoc organized some sort of march in which they recruited people for the purpose of creating problems in this place, according to the information given by Gen. Spiegelel.

He said that this explains why they took women and children along, who were unaware of the real intentions of the instigators.

When they arrived at the place of the incident, they started to shout, "The land belongs to God and those who work it," "Death to the rich," and "We don't want the army here." These are the slogans they have been taught by the guerrillas and the monks and nuns, according to the Defence Minister.

"EL GRAFICO" 2.6.1978

"NO ORDER WAS GIVEN TO OPEN FIRE"

Colonel Valerio Cienfuegos is the operations officer of the area, based at Cobán...

During an interview he acknowledged that there have been land occupations at Telemán, where the peasants took possession of private properties, but later on they left them when the army convinced them that they had been misled.

However, the situation at Cahaboncito has been different. Here the land invaders are still holding the

4. The Panzós massacre will go down to the long and tragic history of repression in Latin America, because it can only be compared with the massacres of Tlatelolco (Mexico 1968), and Santa María de Iquique (Chile 1907).

.....

To all trade unions and peasants, students and people's organizations:

AEU urges you to condemn the Panzós massacre as strongly as this situation requires, as well as to notify immediately all international organizations of which you are members!

AGAINST REPRESSION AND FOR THE APPLICATION  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS!

Guatemala, May 31st 1978

D. UNIVERSITY BODIES

"LA NACION" 2.6.1978

"THERE HAVE BEEN EARLIER CASES OF REPRESSION AT PANZOS"

University has received numerous reports in Alta Verapaz

The Northern University Centre (CUNOR) at Cobán, of the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, has tried to study thoroughly the motives for the outbreak of the bloody incident at Panzós. It points out that the Legal Advice Centre ("Bufete Popular") at Cobán knows about earlier cases in which peasants living in the region have been victims of abuse, threats, and attacks, which all ended in the regrettable incident last Monday.

As an example to illustrate this situation, the

C. STUDENTS UNION

ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (AEU)

TO THE PEOPLE OF GUATEMALA: THE TRUTH OF THE PANZOS MASSACRE

On the basis of the detailed information and statements by six peasants, who have been interviewed by the entire press in the form of newspapers, radio and TV, the least the AEU can do is to make the poignant story known to public opinion here and abroad, as it is told by six witnesses and victims of the unbelievable massacre of peasants, committed by the national army at the town of Panzós, Alta Verapaz....

Facing such an abominable crime the AEU declares:

1. The version of the incident provided by the national army, as expressed in two bulletins, has been totally refuted.

2. Once again, the essentially repressive character of the present regime is made clear; together with its predecessors since 1954, it is responsible for the death and disappearance of more than 30,000 Guatemalans. The statements by General Kjell Laugerud, set forth a few days ago concerning his Government having respected human rights, have been shattered to bits by the events at Panzós. There could be no better epilogue to four years of constant violations of human rights than a slaughter of peasants of such magnitude as that of Panzós.

3. The Panzós massacre also proves that the national army follows a very coherent and permanent course of action, when "dealing with" land possession conflicts. We remember the Sansiritsay case, in which dozens of peasants lost their lives in an operation led by national army staff.

the occupied properties, and this is where the problem was hatched.

Regrettably, he added, organizations like FASGUA have deceived the peasants. Some time ago, certain representatives of this organization even took in the peasants' documents, pretending to be INTA officials.

These workers and peasants unions have only done their best to put strange ideas into the peasants' heads, he went on to add. One of the slogans is "The land belongs to God and the people are God, therefore the land belongs to the people...."

At no time any order was given to open fire, declared Colonel Glenfuegos, but the soldiers had to defend their lives, facing this ambush which had just been prepared.....

PEASANTS' TESTIMONIES

"LA NACION" 31.5.1978

MORE THAN 100 KILLED AT PANZOS

"The army killed more than a hundred of us; and a great many more, both men, women, and children, drowned as they tried to escape by swimming across the Polochic River. Flavio Monzón, a leader of the MLN (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional), told us that the President of the Republic and the Ministers of Defence and the Interior had authorized them to murder us..."

This is what six peasant leaders from the municipality of Panzós, Alta Verapaz, told LA NACION last night.

For personal security reasons, they refused to reveal their names during the interview in this city, having managed to escape from the place where many of their friends and acquaintances found death...

"We are going to ask the President for an audience, in order to tell him what really happened at Panzós. To this end, we have already requested support from workers and students organizations. Actually, there is not a word of truth in the army's press release, because we haven't attacked anyone and they certainly did kill us....."

"EL IMPARCIAL" 31.5.1978

The group of peasants which escaped from Panzós met the press yesterday afternoon at the office of FASGUA (Autonomous Trade Union Federation of Guatemala)...

The peasants pointed out that they have been cultivating the lands at La Soledad and other villages, but in recent months, the government of Ydígoras and INTA have given these lands to influential estate owners in the region by means of supplementary title deeds.

As they have obtained the supplementary titles, the landholders have attempted to oust the peasants with violence, but until yesterday they had had no success, it was affirmed.

This situation has been causing tension for months, especially owing to the presence of a military detachment, which is at the orders of the landholders, according to the peasants.

They went on to add that last Monday, the peasants were called by the mayor of Panzós who was to hand them a letter. However, they did not want to go there alone because they were afraid of being beaten, tortured, kidnapped or made to disappear, as has been the case of some other

On the basis of the above, the CNUS

CONDEMNNS

the massacre of our peasant comrades at Panzós, and places the responsibility for it on the army detachments which without any risk for themselves acted against the peasantry. A similar responsibility rests with the MLN landowners who encouraged this bloody incident;

likewise, the CNUS blames the INTA for its land policy which exclusively helps the agrarian capitalists and landowners;

.....

DENOUNCES

.....

the constant rumours that the army will demand the FASGUA (Autonomous Trade Union Federation of Guatemala) and CNT (National Union of Workers) to be banned and closed down, as the only way to check the unitary process which is in operation through CNUS and prevent the unions, peasant and working class organizations of this country from developing and getting stronger;

SUPPORTS

the peasants of Panzós unreservedly and declares to them that the only way to resist repression from employers and Government is through organizing the peasants, workers and people, maintaining a permanent mobilization and building up an alliance between workers and peasants...

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR TRADE UNION COOPERATION (CNUS)

Guatemala, June 1978

peasants; the proof of this can be seen from the small number of title deeds granted to the peasants, together with the poor quality and quantity of their land.

3. The Panzós massacre is not the result of a subversive plan, as said by government spokesmen, but it derives from the situation of exploitation, misery, repression and shortage of land in which the peasants in the northern areas are forced to live, especially in the two Verapaz departments. In this region, there are places where the peasants are paid in kind by the landowners, to whom they sell their labour, and, in other cases, peasants have to pay for the temporary plots they are given by working a certain number of days for the landowner without getting any pay for it. Landholders in these places are so powerful that any citizen wanting to go along a local road will be asked by bodyguards or henchmen to explain where they are going and for what purpose; many times people are turned back...

The landowners and agrarian capitalists in the region have exerted pressure on the military detachments in order to make them commit the massacre. Besides, this region is well suited for that sort of thing since it is situated at a long distance from the capital, and also because of the weakness of local organizations as a result of the systematic repression suffered by the peasantry in the Verapaz departments. It is being intended to frighten the peasants lest they should get organized, claim the land which is theirs, as well as a pay which would be more in accordance with the profit made by the large landholders. On the other hand, it is an answer from the employers and the government to the mobilization initiatives of the people.

Whenever an act of repression is committed, the Government covers it up with that old smoke screen of theirs called "a subversive plan." This has been the refrain of all the reactionary governments which have held political power in Guatemala.

peasants before...

They explained that they have "nothing to do with the guerrillas, but they are only fighting for their plots which have belonged to them and their parents for more than 50 years, and which they still cultivate today."

They also told the reporters that some 1,500 peasants are involved in this problem and that a march on Guatemala City is being organized for the purpose of informing the President of the Republic about the problem: "Obviously he has been wrongly informed by his advisers, who have spoken about an attack on the military detachment and about guerrilla influence on the peasants."

"IMPACTO" 31.5.1978

"WE WERE ONLY GOING TO HAND A LETTER TO THE MAYOR WHEN THEY BEGAN TO SHOOT"

These were the words of one of the peasants who was there at Panzós, in the morning of May 29th. Together with five others he escaped off the roads; they quickly found a canoe which took them to Mariscos near Cahaboncito. From there to Guatemala City they arrived by bus. Our reporters interviewed them at the central office of PASGUA, at about 7 p.m. yesterday.

The peasants did not want to reveal their names. They fear that reprisals will be taken against their families, but they did not object to having their photos taken.

According to the dramatic story they told us, one of them had arrived at Panzós carrying a letter for the mayor of that town. By means of this they requested him, on behalf of the peasants living at La Soledad, to help them sort out the situation in a land tenure conflict...

"Having heard that army troops had been patrolling around there for three days, we decided to go together all

of us to deliver the letter, lest something should happen to us," said one of our informants...

"The thing is that we were afraid. On the 26th, seven peasants had been spied on and shot at. Again, this had to do with claiming the land....."

"LA NACION" 7.6.1978

PEASANTS DECLARE THAT THEY DID NOT KNOW WHO SHOT AT THEM

Six peasants from the Panzós region, who have been admitted to the military hospital owing to the serious wounds and fractures they had received during the bloody events of May 29th, all told us that they had gone to town in order to "buy salt and gas." At least this is the statement they gave through the interpreter, who was an army officer.

FASGUA leaders visited the peasants committed to the military hospital, for the purpose of seeing their state of health and "take them out and get them admitted to some other centre where they would be safer." However, the conversation with the peasants was minimal since they speak no Spanish, and an army officer acted as interpreter; it was not possible to go deeply into details...

The questions asked by the reporters were answered with simply "yes" or "no..." They actually seemed timid and distressed, speaking very little indeed.....

power in this country attempt to block the rights of the peasants, who demand land for themselves and their families in order to survive...

WE CONDEMN

the slaughter committed by the army at Panzós, and the repression, persecution and torture of which the peasants are victims in the regions of Ixcán, El Estor, Tecpán, San Martín Jilotepeque, San Marcos, southern coast, etc., and which is carried out by paramilitary and similar gangs.

WE REJECT

the biased statements by government officials who want to accuse the trade union movement of being "subversive." Exactly the same is what Somoza of Nicaragua says when he massacres people in the cities and in the country.....

Guatemala, June 1978

CENTRAL NACIONAL DE TRABAJADORES (CNT)

(National Union of Workers)

Autonomy - Unity - Solidarity

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE UNITY OF TRADE UNIONS

FACED WITH THE PANZOS MASSACRE, THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE UNITY OF TRADE UNIONS (CNUS) DECLARES TO THE PEOPLE OF GUATEMALA, TRADE UNIONS, WORKERS ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRESSIVE GROUPS:

1. ....
2. The colonization policy really does not bring about any land reform. It is implemented by the government agency INTA (National Institute for Land Reform), which over the years has been used for the benefit of the interests of agrarian capitalists, landowners and government officials. The latter have made use of their office to take over land in order to enrich themselves and not benefit the landless

landowners, and others are running away due to the risk of being unjustly and illegally arrested by the members of the security forces of this country. Faced with all these acts of repression on the part of the landholders, ranchers, and the repressive forces against the peasantry, we, the trade unions, cannot remain silent or sit back and do nothing, but, on the contrary, we must close ranks in unity, strengthening our organizations and mobilizing ourselves in order to stand up to the repression which is generated by the exploitation inherent in capitalism. It is worth mentioning that in an evening paper, one news item has stood out saying that, from the elections up to now, there have been more than 70 cases of kidnapping, tortures and murders on common people, most of them taking place in the countryside.

3. Until the Panzós slaughter took place, INTA washed their hands saying that many farmers and landowners are giving the peasants grounds for taking the case in their own hands and for claiming the land that is theirs. At the same time, however, a high official of the said organization set forth a prefabricated answer, saying that "agitators had a hand in it"; nobody believes this sort of thing since it is an old and hackneyed manoeuvre of our government officials. This institution INTA has been an instrument for agrarian capitalists and landowners to satisfy their voracious appetites, but it has also helped the officials themselves of the successive reactionary governments to obtain plots and title deeds by unlawful means, and, eventually to get rich.

INTA really is among those to blame since its slow bureaucracy, favouritism and corrupt administration have allowed the estate owners to take possession of increasingly larger extensions of land, and to oust the peasants who cultivate it and who have been its true owners for many generations. With their land colonization policies and birth control schemes, the governments which have held political

#### STATEMENTS OF UNIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

##### A. PEASANTS UNIONS

"LA NACION" 1.6.1978

A MIXED COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO PANZOS INCIDENT IS CALLED FOR  
The Peasants Federation of Guatemala (FCG) has publicly called on the Government of the Republic to form a commission of inquiry to be made up by representatives of the Journalists Association of Guatemala, the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, Labour organizations, the Catholic Church, and the Government itself. The purpose is to shed light on the circumstances surrounding the recent bloody events at Panzós.

Likewise, the FCG demands once the inquiry is over and the truth has been found, that those responsible be prosecuted with the full weight of the law. The Federation also condemns the incident and "calls on all army soldiers not to shoot at their peasant fellow men, reminding them that they, too, have been peasants, and their families will continue to be peasants."

"LA NACION" 1.6.1978

##### COORDINATING COMMITTEE OF SETTLERS CONDEMNS PANZOS INCIDENT

By means of a press bulletin, the Coordinating

Committee of Guatemalan Settlers has condemned the incident which took place on May 29th in the Panzós area, between peasants and the national army.

As is now well known, about one hundred peasants died and many were wounded. "This is not the first time" the settlers protest, "because there have been precedents at Sansare, Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez, Ixcán, Sansirisay, Chaal, San Juan Cotzal, Huehuetenango, San Marcos and all over the highlands, whenever the peasants have fought and stood up for their rights."

"We, the working class and its organizations, must realize once and for all that this bloody incident means that our police and army are not defending us and never will defend us. They are an instrument for the rich to safeguard their interests and maintain oppression and exploitation, murdering us when we perform our struggle to defend our rights," says the Committee.

In the same bulletin, the settlers emphatically protest against and condemn "this slaughter committed by the national army on exploited, rural workers." It goes on to say that "the best answer that working people, peasants, settlers and students can give to these murderers of the people, is to fight actively in our organizations every day against exploitation and repression."

The settlers mention that "the army once again has proved to be a defender of the landowners and the class holding economic power....."

## B. WORKERS UNIONS

### "PRENSA LIBRE" 2.6.1978

#### CETEM ORDERS EIGHT DAYS OF MOURNING FOR DEATH OF PEASANTS

The emergency committee of municipal workers (CETEM) has ordered eight days of mourning for the death of peasants at Panzós, Alta Verapaz, and they have placed black ribbons on the town hall building.

Also, the members of CETEM took part in the protest demonstration held yesterday because of the recent tragic events at Panzós. They called on the Government to prosecute those responsible for the incident.

#### THE NATIONAL UNION OF WORKERS (CNT)

WE, THE NATIONAL UNION OF WORKERS (CNT), AUTONOMOUS AND UNITARY, DECLARE TO ALL WORKING PEOPLE AND PUBLIC OPINION:

1. . . . .
2. The Panzós massacre is one of the most recent repressive acts against the peasants and their organizations. Workers organizations and the peasants themselves have reported and denounced kidnappings, torture and murders: In the Ixcán region, more than 70 leaders of cooperatives have either disappeared or been murdered, and the army is virtually keeping the peasants living in the area in a state of siege; at the town of El Estor, seven peasants were shot as they were on their way to a meeting of their organization; last month, at San Martín Jilotepeque, a peasant named Isidoro Aj Uj received a bullet fired by a landowner, who is still at liberty today and has not been made responsible; at Tecpán, the peasants belonging to the local Peasant League ("Liga Campesina") have been imprisoned on the orders of the