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Peru

Massacre at Bagua

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On June 5, 2009, world environment day, Awajun and Wami defenders of the environment were massacred in Peru. I will start by pointing to a difference between "modernity" and indigenous cosmology: The civilised world sees the past as something exceeded. "Primitive" has pejorative connotations. The modern, the most recent, is the best.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/PERU90.jpg>]

In my language, Quechua, "Ñ'auqa" means "forward" and "past" at the same time. "Qhepa" means "later", in place and time. Now we see that "progress" is leading to the extinction of the human species through global warming and many other forms of attacks on nature.

Who are the Amazonian people?

The Peruvian Amazon population comprises 11 per cent of the total population. It inhabits the most extensive of the three natural regions of Peru, the North, Centre and Southeast. It speaks dozens of languages and consists of dozens of nationalities.

The inhabitants of the South American rain forest are the indigenous peoples least contaminated by the "civilization" whose current stage is neoliberal capitalism.

They were not conquered by the Incas, or the Spanish invaders. The indigenous rebel Juan Santos Atawallpa, harassed by Spanish troops, fell back into the jungle, among these peoples, one of whose languages he had learned, and the colonial forces failed to defeat him. At the time of the exploitation of rubber capitalism entered the jungle and reduced to slavery and massacred native populations, for this reason many of them have kept themselves until today in voluntary isolation, wanting no contact with "civilization".

The Amazon peoples do not share the religious prejudices of the "civilized world" which lead to covering the body although the heat is intense. The strong moral offensive of the religious missionaries and laws that defend such prejudices have meant that some of them do cover parts of the body, especially when going to cities.

They feel themselves at one with Mother Nature and deeply respect it. When they cultivate they do not grow a single product. Clearing a place in the forest, they put down different plants of different species, together, imitating nature. Avocado and pumpkin, besides bananas, maize, manioc (cassava), edible fruits. After a period of time this place returns to nature and another place for cultivation is opened.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/PERU91.jpg>]

They go out to hunt and gather, when they see something worthy of being hunted they do so, they go to their vegetable garden, if something is ripe they gather it, if they see that there is work to be done, they do it and they go home. You cannot say whether they are working or taking a walk. They drink water from rivers and streams and also eat fish.

They inhabit collective huts. There are no "parties" or elections; your social organization is the community. It is not a boss who leads but the collective, the community. They have lived there for millennia before the European invasion, millennia before the Constitution of the Peruvian State that never consulted them when drawing up its laws and which now attacks them with the aim of exterminating them.

Multinational companies

This gentle life as part of nature is now threatened by the voracious needs of the multinational enterprises: oil, gas and mineral extractors. Predators of forests.

These companies, as devotees of the neo-liberal religion, don't mind aggression against nature or the extinction of the human species, all that interests them is to get the most money possible in the shortest time possible. They poison river water, uproot trees, kill the Amazon rainforest, mother of the Amazon peoples.

There is abundant Peruvian legislation that protects the indigenous peoples, including Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) which has the status of constitutional law since it was approved by Congress. This Convention stipulates that any provision concerning indigenous territories must involve consultation with the communities. There are also environmental protection laws.

But Peruvian law is just a small obstacle to the big companies who through bribery succeed in putting at their service the entire Peruvian state: President, parliamentary majority, judiciary, armed forces, police and so on. The media are also in their hands.

At the service of these companies which are his masters, Alan Garc a (the current President and leader of the ruling APRA party) has developed the theory that as small farmers or indigenous communities do not have capital to invest, they should give free passage to big predatory companies like mining companies in the sierra and the extractors of hydrocarbons in the jungle. Throughout the national territory they must allow free passage to the big agribusiness companies that kill the ground through monoculture and pesticides, which only produce for export and not for the internal market. According to him this is the policy required for Peru to progress.

To implement this policy, legislation has been introduced in order to adapt to the Free Trade Treaty of the Americas (FTAA) with the USA. This legislation was a flood of decrees against the communal organisations of the indigenous peoples of the sierra and the jungle that impede the imperialist pillage and opened the doors to the depredation of nature with the poisoning of rivers, sterilization of soil with agro-industrial monoculture, use of pesticides and razing of the jungle by the extraction of hydrocarbons and timber. For lack of space I have not made an analysis of these laws, whose details can be found on other sources.

Indigenous reaction

Of course the indigenous peoples of the sierra and the jungle reacted against this attack and have carried out many courageous struggles. But there is no doubt that the least contaminated indigenous people, who have better preserved the indigenous principles of love of nature, collectivism, and "good living", are those of the Amazon, who are at the head of the struggles.

The biggest organisation of indigenous peoples in Amazonia is the Inter-ethnic Association of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDASEP) with strong support in the North, Centre and South of the Peruvian Amazon. It demands the withdrawal of the laws which affect their lives by contaminating rivers and promoting logging.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/PERU92.jpg>]

Its method of struggle is blocking of roads and river transport, much used by the multinationals, and the occupation of installations and airfields. In August 2008, they won a great success in pushing Congress to reverse the anti-Amazonian laws.

Massacre at Bagua

This year they began to struggle on April 9. The government used all sorts of manoeuvres to avoid debating with them and stopped Parliament from discussing the unconstitutionality of a law when the parliamentary commission charged with studying it had found unconstitutional.

June 5

On June 5, world environment day, Alan Garcia turned his anti-ecological fury against the defenders of the Amazon. He employed the specialised repressive force used in the repression of social movements, the Special Operations Directorate (DIROES)

They attacked the Awajun and Wami comrades who were blocking a road near the village of Bagua. The massacre began at 5 am, launched from helicopters and from the ground. The number of victims is not known. The police did not allow treatment for the wounded, who were taken prisoner, nor were the families allowed to recover the bodies of the dead.

Our Amazon comrades defended themselves with spears and arrows, and then with weapons taken from their aggressors. In their anger they stormed an oil installation where they captured a group of police officers who were led into the forest where some were executed. In Bagua, the people stormed the APRA office. The police killed several villagers including children. The government decided to suspend civil rights and a curfew from 3 pm was introduced. With this excuse, the police went into houses to arrest those who had sought refuge. The number of people detained is not known and they have no access to lawyers. Hundreds of deaths are spoken of.

Solidarity

Since June 11, there have been demonstrations against the massacre in several Peruvian towns: in Lima 4,000 people marched and there were clashes near the Congressional building. In Arequipa, more than 6,000 marched, while in the district of La Joya the Pan-American highway was blocked. In Puno activity was paralysed and the APRA office attacked. There were demonstrations in Piura, Chiclayo, Tarapoto, Pucallpa, Cusco, Moquegua and many other towns.

Abroad there were numerous protest actions outside Peruvian embassies in, for example, New York, Los Angeles, Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Greece, Montreal, Costa Rica, Belgium, among others. The person responsible for Indigenous Affairs at the UN has protested, while the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has also intervened. Foreign newspapers have denounced the massacre, like La Jornada in Mexico. Anger has been increased by Alan Garcia's statements to the European press that indigenous peoples are not first-class citizens.

The Amazon comrades and their supporters are demanding the derogation of decrees 1090 and 1064 and other laws opening doors to the depredation of the jungle. Although the parliamentary commission responsible for the issue has decided on the abrogation of some decrees it found unconstitutional, the Chamber chose not to discuss this and to "suspend" them, as APRA wished. The government has created a "committee of dialogue" from which the representative body of the Amazonian indigenous population, AIDSESEP, is excluded. AIDSESEP's leader has had to seek refuge in the Nicaraguan embassy because the government has accused him in relation to the events of June 5.

The Amazon struggle must continue, demanding respect for the rain forest. The Amazonian natives know that what is at stake is their own survival. We hope that the world population becomes aware that they are fighting in defence of all humankind, the Amazon jungle is the lung of the planet.