

# CEDI

## Povos Indígenas no Brasil

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# CAPITALISM THREATENS YANOMAMI INDIANS

## Lands invaded by 20,000 gold prospectors

BY PETER BROWN

AT a Press Conference in the House of Commons, last Monday, Giovanni Saffirio, a Catholic priest denounced the way the Brazilian government had failed to do anything to protect the Indian population of the area.

He had been expelled from the northern Amazon area by the Brazilian military and accused of organising the Yanomami people to revolt against the settlers and miners that are taking their land.

He explained that he had been sent to London by the National Conference of Bishops to 'let the people of England and North America know that the Indians and the Catholic Church are being persecuted by economic and political interests.

'In Brazil the Republic is a facade, there is a civilian President but the military are still in charge and run everything.

### Contrasts

'It is a country of the most terrible contrasts. Five per cent belong to the wealthy class, 80 per cent have absolutely nothing at all and in between is a small middle class.

'There is 43 per cent illiteracy and thousands upon thousands of street children, who have no home to live in, exist on the streets.

'Amidst enormous riches, diseases like leprosy still remain and inflation is completely out of control. Political power is no longer in the capital city Brazilia but is held in the grip of the military and big business interests.

'These cannot wait to get their hands on the mineral wealth and the resources that lie in the northern Amazon area.

'The Yanomami Indians are threatened by the gold rush, by the mining prospectors and loggers, and the military drive for bases in the north.

'Part of the Amazon forest has already become a desert where loggers, in the search for valuable woods, have stripped it bare and upset the delicate balance of nature turning the earth to sand.

'Thousands of settlers, from the poorer areas of the cities, bring new diseases and pose a great danger to the Indian population. In three villages in my diocese 45 per cent of the population died in an outbreak of measles.'

'Where the Indians have

resisted the incursions of the loggers, prospectors and mining companies, professional killers have been hired to get rid of them.

'Missionaries have been accused of leading armed provocations and been expelled from the territory.'

8,000 Yanomami Indians

and one prospector had already died.

The mining companies then employed 'pistoleros' to hunt down and kill the Indians.

Ever since 1988 miners have invaded the lands of the Yanomami Indians at the rate of 200 a day. They

Their project is called the Calha Norte scheme and the idea is to create a 150 kilometre wide corridor along the northern frontier which will be 'cleansed' of Indians, militarised and colonised.

The great mining companies are planning to move in to exploit the area's natural resources but first of all they want the Indians driven out of their tribal lands.

The military are having the area criss-crossed with army forts, complete with airfields, and garrisoned by soldiers who will be allowed to bring their families.

It is planned that these areas will have shops, houses and flats, schools and health care facilities. Roads and electrification will follow.

It is visualised that this will open up the country to thousands of settlers, particularly from the south where the great ranchers want to get rid of the 'excess' population.

### Labour

The mining companies will then be able to make good use of the masses of cheap labour that will have been made available for their exploitation.

The grand design of the Calha Norte is also to defend Brazil's northern frontiers and keep out foreign revolutionaries and Marxists in particular. Also the military profess to want to keep out illegal drugs from neighbouring Colombia and Venezuela.

Hundreds of settlers have already arrived at remote northern airstrips that have been strengthened and expanded under the Calha Norte project.

This invasion poses a serious threat to the lives and health of the Indian population. The Indians have little or no resistance to the diseases which all outsiders have an immunity too.

Measles or influenza can lead to death. Hundreds of Indians die from newly introduced diseases. The problems they face have been made worse by the expulsion of health workers by the military.

It is in this situation where the landowners, capitalists and military of Brazil are moving in to dispossess the Indians and drive them from their land that the Yanomami Indians are waging a desperate battle for survival.



GIOVANNI SAFFIRIO... expelled from Brazil

still live in the northern Amazon area and they are fighting for their lives against an invasion by over 20,000 prospectors and gold miners in the last two years.

Following a 10 year campaign to gain legal recognition and protection for the lands of the Yanomami, the Brazilian Indian agency FUNAI, had issued a decree authorising the demarcation of Yanomami territory.

An emergency plan was also announced to protect the Indians, and it was announced that this plan was scheduled to start in 1988.

These developments provoked a massive rush by thousands of goldminers and prospectors of all kinds desperate to beat the deadline and get rich.

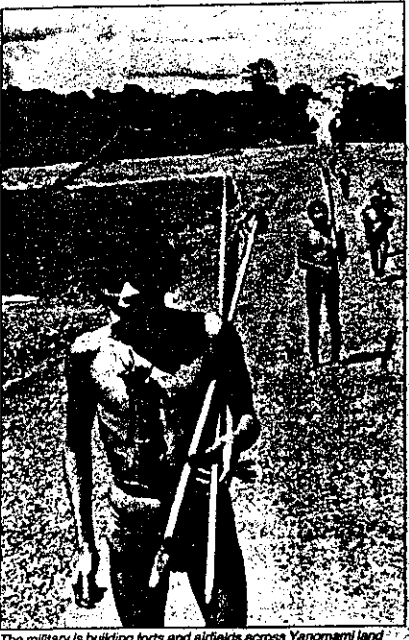
These led to a number of fierce clashes between miners and Indians. In previous clashes in 1987 four Indians

are very conscious that the Indian agency cannot stop them and they know that powerful Brazilian military and political interests are on their side.

The miners are using 130 small planes operating from the city of Boa Vista. The army is enlarging its own airstrips in the area and reportedly building two new ones. There are over 50 helicopter landing sites.

The Brazilian government has often said that it will evict the miners but this has been shown to be just propagandist talk. The only people that they have evicted have been those organisations that defend the Indians and their land rights.

Brazil's National Security Council is one of those agencies that is absolutely determined to prevent any demarcation of Indian lands within 150 kilometres of Brazil's northern Amazon frontier.



The military is building forts and airfields across Yanomami land



Neighbouring Macuxi Indians injured after a police attack on their settlement of Sant Cruz