Park Is Sought to Save Indian Tribe in Brazil

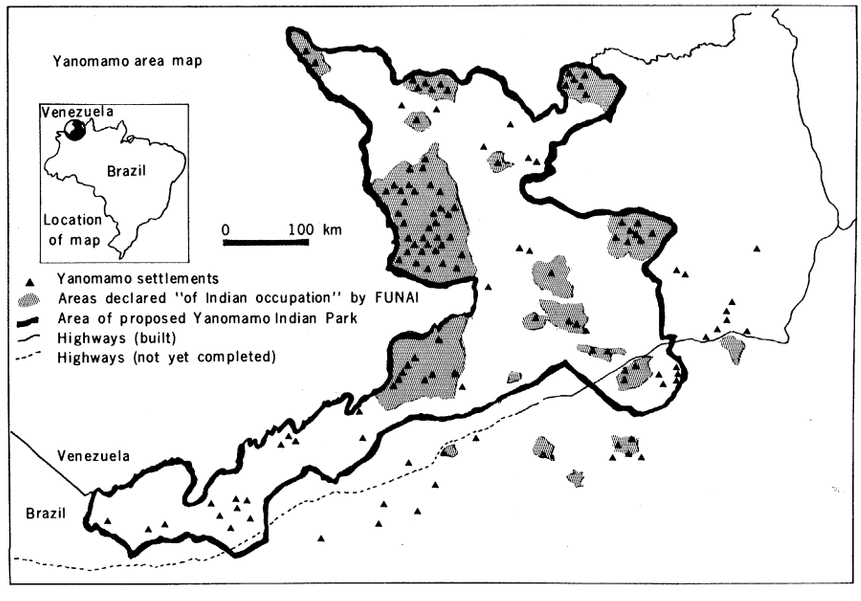
Anthropologists and others are involved in an international crusade to save the Yanomamo

The Yanomamo Indians of Northwestern Brazil and Venezuela, numbering 16,000 to 20,000, are said to be the largest unacculturated tribe left in South America. They are among the most heavily studied of indigenous peoples; they also stand in peril of being destroyed as the forces of development roll their way through the Amazon.

Recent months have witnessed a heating up of an international crusade resulting from plans by the Brazilian government to "liberate" Yanomamo territory for mining and other interests, consigning the 8300 Indians who live in Brazil to occupy 21 isolated reserves. Anthropologists and others in Brazil, the United States, and Europe are appalled at the proposal which they believe will lead to the cultural extinction of the tribe. They say some of the areas are so small they would be exhausted in 5 years by the Yanomamo.

Last June, a group of anthropologists submitted to the Brazilian government an alternative proposal to create a larger, contiguous park for the Yanomamo. The plan was thought to stand a good chance because Brazil's new president, Joao Baptista Figueiredo, has shown himself to be more conservation-minded than his predecessors, and FUNAI, the National Indian Foundation, was sympathetic. However, this fall a political battle resulted in the firing of FUNAI's director and his replacement by the former security chief of the state-owned mining company.

With this development, the Yanomamo issue suddenly achieved the proportions of a crisis. In October, two groups who have been spearheading foreign support for the park proposal, the Anthropological Resource Center of Cambridge, Mass. (ARC), and Survival International (SI) of London, presented a petition to United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim urging that an international fact-finding team be sent to the Amazon. According to Shelton Davis, head of the ARC, Brazilian anthropologists fear that unless intense international pressure is brought to bear on the government there is little hope for the park proposal. In November, large meetings, mostly student-attended, were held in Cambridge, New York, and Washington to drum up support for the Yanomamo cause. A motion in support of the park proposal was also submitted at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association last month in Cincinnati.



The Yanomamo action represents part of a much larger movement to promote ecologically sound development of the Amazon. It is also part of a movement, still rather new in international form, to preserve the existence of indigenous tribes who occupy resource-rich lands.

The Yanomamo are only among the latest in line to be sacrificed for Brazil's economic "miracle," a decade of some of the most rapid exploitation and development to be seen anywhere in the world. Because of its vast size the Amazon is "the most complex biotic resource in the world," says ecologist Howard Irwin of the New York Botanical Garden. But, according to one estimate, 25 million of its 200 square million miles have been leveled to make way for agriculture, ranching, forestry, and mining.

According to those pushing the park proposal, 26 tribes have been "destroyed" in the past decade—meaning that 30,000 people have suffered death or displacement. While Brazilian laws pay lip service to Indians' rights to their lands and livelihoods, in practice Indians are placed on reservations too small for tribal survival or resettled in villages where they are forced to abandon their own patterns of life.

The Yanomamo are seminomadic people who live in several hundred isolated villages—each village containing one large dwelling—and practice farming and hunting and gathering. They also fight a lot and are the object of much controversy among anthropologists. Those of a Marxist bent attribute their warring to competition for food. This country's leading Yanomamo expert, Napoleon Chagnon of the University of Pennsylvania and author of a book, *The Fierce People*, is said to be more sociobiologically inclined. He believes Yanomamo aggression is related to their practice of infanticide, which leads to a shortage of women that is rectified by invading each others' villages. To radical anthropologists such as Robert Wasserstrom of Columbia University, however, this is a "sterile academic debate." They say Yanomamo aggression is a result of internal pressures created by out-

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Human Rights for Tribal Peoples

Closely involved in the crusade to create a unified park for the Yanomamo is a group called Survival International founded 10 years ago by Robin Hanbury-Tenison, an adventurous, gentle-mannered, and cheerful Englishman who has made it his life's work to assist tribal peoples in gaining control over their lives and cultural existence.

SI's headquarters are in London where it has been eking out a poverty-ridden existence with a full-time staff of two. SI may be said to have recently come of age—that is, it has a record of performance over the past decade that has persuaded the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to contribute $60,000 and $30,000, respectively, for operating expenses. SI also recently opened an office in New York City, headed by David Hinkley who also works for Amnesty International.

Relying on information provided by a network of anthropologists and local groups around the world, SI acts as a link between indigenous tribes and potential benefactors—mostly international charities such as Oxfam—from which money is procured to help tribes become self-supporting and to stave off the encroaching forces of "civilization." "There hasn't been action of this sort on an international scale until Survival International came into existence," says Hanbury-Tenison, who was in this country in October to attend the opening of the New York office and raise funds for SI.

Hanbury-Tenison points out that there are 300 million tribal people in the world, most of them, if their cultures are still intact, in imminent danger, which makes them "the world's largest oppressed minority." They are threatened all over the world by timber and mining interests and deforestation, as well as exploitation for labor and prostitution. National government policies cause them to be hustled onto preserves or forced into shantytowns, policies which, if not downright genocidal, certainly result in widespread "ethnocide." The economic power behind it all is supplied by multinational corporations that, even when they make claims to a social conscience, "shelter themselves behind the laws of the country whose people they are violating." The worst immediate consequence of the invasion of tribal lands is disease: Brazilian Indians, for example, have no immunity to the common cold. As soon as they are exposed to outsiders they are decimated by viral and parasitic diseases. In Yanomamo territory the biggest killers are colds, venereal disease, malaria, and measles.

According to Hanbury-Tenison, SI's tiny budget and low visibility is attributable to the fact that international concern for vanishing tribes is relatively recent; environmental pollution and wildlife protection are venerable issues by comparison. Hanbury-Tenison finds it ironic that destruction of Indians still "doesn't have the same emotional appeal that clubbing young seals on the head has."

He emphasizes that SI's philosophy does not mean creating human museums analogous to wildlife preserves, but is based on considerations of human rights. He adds, though, that indigenous populations have much to teach us about benign and resourceful uses of their environments. "They have intense scientific knowledge of their environment which should not be lost," yet "a wealth of alternatives are being ruthlessly and blindly eliminated at the very moment we are beginning to question some of our attitudes toward this rather fragile planet we live on."

Because of its reputation and selectivity, SI has managed to get funding for all the projects it has promoted. "I could get funding for a hundred projects tomorrow," claims Hanbury-Tenison, "but the problem is the organization's not there to pay for next week's postage."

Photo by C. Holden

Robin Hanbury-Tenison

SI puts out a quarterly review that lists the projects for which it has gained funding; all grants go directly to the people involved. The projects amount to a handful a year and include the following:

- £400 to the Andoke Co-operative in Colombia to establish a rubber-collecting cooperative "to free the Indians from the debt-bondage system in which they have been held for many years."
- £50,000 in a joint project of SI, the World Wildlife Fund, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, for animal conservation and socioeconomic development for indigenous people of Siberut in Sumatra.
- £6,800 for health and education services for Paraguayan Indians and attempts "to change existing stereotyped attitudes" toward Indians held by the non-Indian population.

Money has also gone for cattle cooperatives, financing an Indian newspaper, well-digging, and an Indian grammar textbook. Land acquisition is probably the most important single need of indigenous populations who are accustomed to collective ownership of land and who quickly degenerate when forced onto individual plots and homes.

Hanbury-Tenison, described by *Time* magazine as "England's most famous contemporary explorer," recently was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Geographical Society for leading 150 scientists in a 15-month-long expedition in the rain forests in Borneo. But for his organization, just as for the English aristocracy, no amount of respectability and recognition necessarily guarantees needed cash.—C.H.

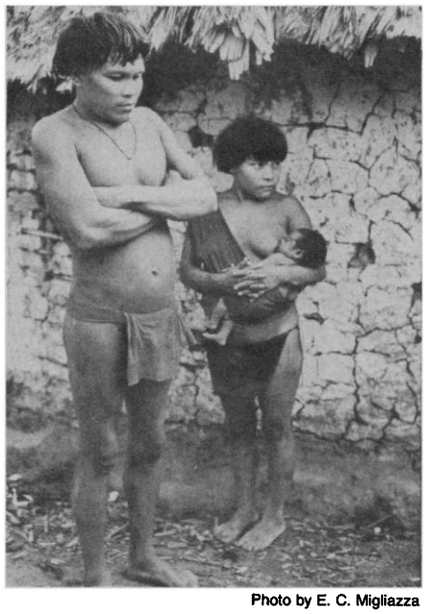

Photo by E. C. Migliazza

A Yanomamo family

side encroachments over the past 50 years.

The Indians are now threatened by mining interests—substantial deposits of uranium and cassiterite (for tin) were found on their lands in 1975—and by construction of the northern arm of the Transamazon highway. Highway construction has been temporarily halted as the difficulties of imposing agriculture and resettling coastal residents in the Amazon have become evident. But the highway has already caused considerable damage, mainly in the form of diseases which have been brought by workers and which decimate Indian populations that have no immunity even to the common cold. Furthermore, deforestation accompanying highway construction is said to encourage the population of blackflies which bring onchocerciasis or river blindness—a phenomenon documented by Robert Goodland of the World Bank and Howard Irwin in their book *Amazon Jungle: Green Hell to Red Desert?*

Anthropologists believe the proposed park could successfully isolate the Yanomamo from outside influences. At 16 million acres, it comprises about 50 percent more land than the government's plan. It could become the only area in Brazil where Indian populations are flourishing outside the famous Xingu National Park in the southern Amazon.

Preserving the Yanomamo has considerble support in Brazil. The Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (like the AAAS) held a conference on it that was attended by some 2000 people. The Brazilian Anthropological Association and the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops, as well as groups of Brazilian scientists, artists, intellectuals, and journalists support the proposal as attested by a recent petition to the government that bore 5000 signatures. In a larger context, Brazilians have the support of the growing movement of indigenous peoples throughout the Western Hemisphere.

The leaders of the international campaign to save the Yanomamo compare the situation in Brazil to the situation in the United States a century ago in the Dakotas. When gold was discovered in 1868 in the Black Hills, miners and prospectors gathered in Rapid City waiting for word from the government for permission to invade the Great Sioux Indian reservation. They got it, and General George Custer was killed trying to protect miners from Indians. Now, 3000 miners are waiting in a nearby town to invade Yanomamo territory and, says Robin Hanbury-Tenison of SI, Brazil is faced with the opportunity to learn from American mistakes and not go down the same road.

In their haste for development, the Brazilians have already made many costly mistakes. According to Davis and many other critics, the goal of taming the Amazon for large-scale agriculture and cattle ranching has already proved a fiasco in many places, because deforestation causes soil erosion, and without forest cover soil nutrients are not replaced. So many ranches have already had to be abandoned. Flying in the face of ecological reality, ranch grasses continue to be imported from Texas and New Zealand.

> 3000 miners are waiting in a nearby town to invade Yanomamo territory . . .

But despite the political and economic obstacles, many believe the tide is turning in time for ecological as well as human realities to prevail. Says Davis: "The Indians of the Amazon are the only ones who know how to develop the region. Their destruction may mean the loss of the ability to develop the Amazon without destroying it." Howard Irwin concurs that "the only people able to live in Amazon conditions are the aboriginal Indians. . . . There is no known management strategy for tropical rainforest by Western people anywhere in the world that doesn't result in its decimation."—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Ex-Official Scores GM for Lack of Innovation

A new book by a former insider at the world's largest automobile company, if true, goes a long way toward explaining why American automakers have habitually trailed their foreign competition in fuel economy and product innovation. The book, titled *On a Clear Day You Can See General Motors*, is a collection of the thoughts of John Z. De Lorean, who quit GM in 1973 as a top executive with overall responsibility for its cars and trucks. De Lorean's bleak portrait of a modern corporate giant may have important consequences in the current controversy over American technological innovation and productivity.

Though the book was written mostly in 1974 and published recently by his ghost writer, J. Patrick Wright, without his authorization, De Lorean has recently told reporters of its accuracy and said that the GM of today is much the same as it was when he resigned. The picture he paints is of an overgrown, slow-moving centralized bureaucracy that would rival any agency in Washington, D.C. Top corporate managers are said to be obsessed with the minutiae of day-to-day governance, a problem that some have thought to afflict President Jimmy Carter. Loyalty, particularly at the top, was valued above creativity and business acumen. As a result, De Lorean says that GM was plagued by indecision, and caught in a spiral of constant reactions to events initiated elsewhere. "It seems incredible but sound, long-range and comprehensive business planning were almost non-existent at GM when I was there."

The problem existed throughout the company, as incredible logjams of work piled up, much of it relating to model changeovers and parts problems. "As each manager tried feverishly to just meet the obligations of a day's work schedule, he didn't have time to innovate or sit back to think how he could better run his organization." As a result, the corporation frequently missed consumer trends, says De Lorean, including the move to smaller, more fuel-efficient cars, and the increasing share of the U.S. market occupied by foreign manufacturers. "The decision [ultimately] to go

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