

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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"Goodbye Columbus"

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Dear Peter,

Imagine the difficulty of an elementary school instructor in Latin America. For years, teaching history has been straightforward, especially when it came to the discovery of the New World. The Spanish equivalent of the English ditty, "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue", began a narrative of the caravels Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria. Then there were the conquistadors -- men whose courage vaulted them above their humble origins - to tame a wild continent populated by backward (if admittedly fascinating) Indian cultures. And now, just as you are gearing up your students to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the Columbus voyage, along come those very same Indians to ruin all the merry-making.

In Spain, from whence hailed the likes of Hernán Cortés and Fernando Pizarro, the Vth Centenary revolves around the theme, "A Meeting of Two Worlds". In Andean countries like Ecuador, one of two worlds is taking exception to the cause. Indigenous peoples in the Andes prefer to characterize the years since Columbus dropped anchor in the Caribbean as the beginning of "500 Years of Indian Resistance".

On 12 October, representatives of the nine Indian nations that constitute Ecuador's indigenous population of 4 million gathered in Quito's Plaza de Independencia to demand a hearing for the native side of New World history. Abundant graffiti and bright banners delivered strong words. "There never was -- nor is there -- a conquest, just invasion!" And, "We [the Indian nations] are like the desert brush: when they cut it, the brush grows back!"

The rally had been organized in the main by the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), an Indians' advocacy group formed in 1986. Lest the crowd doubt the group's position, CONAIE leader Manuel Castro affirmed publicly, "We reject the idea that 12 October be celebrated like a jubilee worthy of festival. The Conquest was a massacre ... the looting of whatever indigenous culture the Spaniards found on their way to gold."

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

Accustomed to relative silence from Andean Indians, this Columbus Day outburst has left unsettled more than one Ecuadoran proud of his Spanish ancestry. One editorialist warned that "ultraindigenismo" sought to use the Vth Centenary's occasion to implant a "struggle between races [that would] substitute in Iberoamerica the frustrated struggle between classes."

Another, writing under the title, "And If Columbus Had Never Come?", concluded that, "Noone will ever justify the lamentable facts of three centuries of colonial rule. But neither can we close our eyes to the reality that remains. [We are] a mestizo race that enjoys both the good and bad of Indians and Spaniards. Many sanguine gods were exchanged for the God of love. And we enjoy the ability to think and write in the rich and fecund idiom (Spanish) that today is spoken by a good part of humanity."

But to Luis Huamán, a young Quichua from Ecuador's southern sierra city of Cuenca, it is precisely this "noblesse oblige" attitude that is most needling. Appointed to direct CONAIE's Vth Centenary campaign, Huamán is unequivocal in his views. "We [the Incas] were unfortunate to be a nation without a written alphabet at the time of the Conquest. Ours was an oral tradition. So it was very easy for the conquistadors and chroniclers to manipulate our past and present us as pagans. Ours was a religion of the earth and sun, the 'Pachamama'. Today, the same 'civilized' persons who call us 'uncivilized' are depredating the rain forest. We want to revise history. And the Vth Centenary is one opportunity to instill reflection."

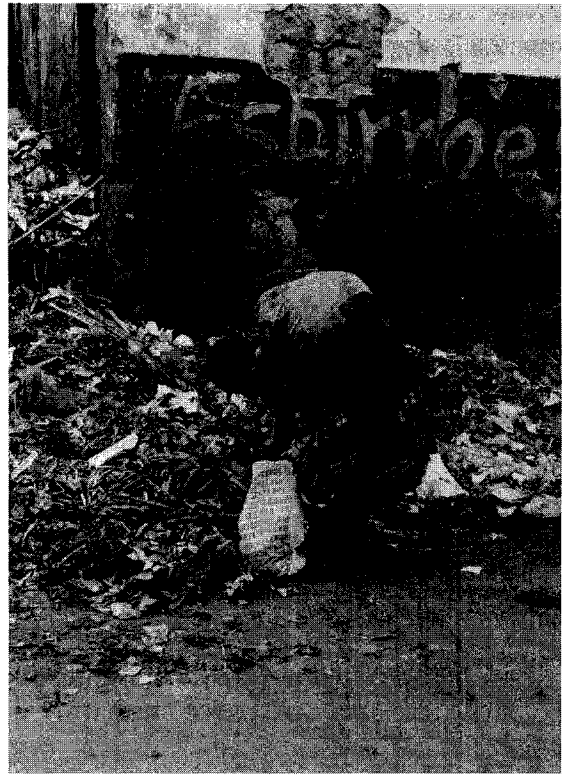
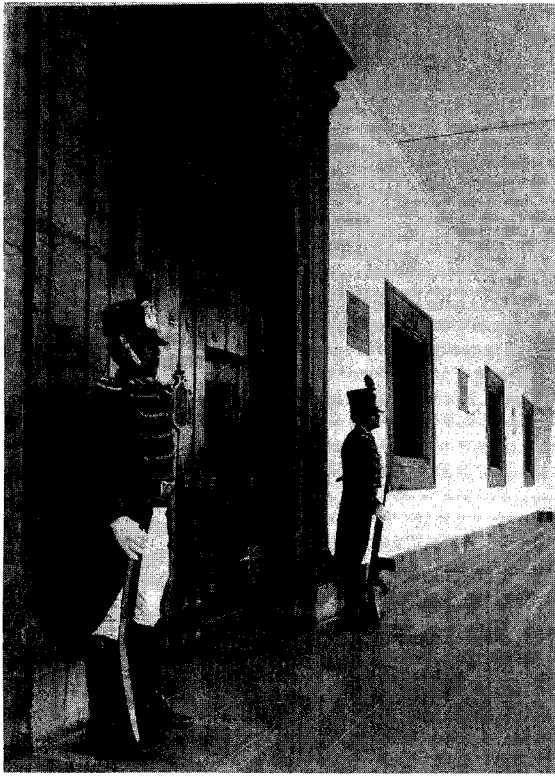
In standing up for their version of post-Columbian society in the Andes, however, CONAIE has taken on more than a few gray-haired archivists in Sevilla and Madrid. It began in the year of CONAIE's founding, when the group introduced a legislative draft of a bill entitled, "The Law for Indigenous Peoples" to the Indigenous Affairs Committee of the Ecuadoran Cámara de Diputados. [see excerpts below] Since the bill has not even been debated since 1986, CONAIE is using its present visibility to refocus attention on the law.

Though the so-called "indigenous" law reads more like an Indian Bill of Rights (which may explain why Ecuadoran legislators are reluctant to debate the bill), CONAIE has been publicizing the more concrete aspects of the proposed legislation. One of the bill's most positive sections is Article 7, which would place Quichua and Ecuador's other native idioms on equal footing with Spanish as the country's official languages. Section V goes one step further, mandating that Ecuador -- in collaboration with CONAIE -- institute a bilingual education program to promote active literacy for indigenous peoples. Both points are crucial to CONAIE's contention that Ecuador is a nation of nations.

Ampan Karakras, another of CONAIE's delegates, explains the logic behind the law, and its sections devoted to native idioms. "When we want to enroll our children in public schools using their rightful, indigenous names, we are prevented from doing so. We are told 'Spanish is the national language, not Quichua'. Our very names are relegated to the level of the exotic. We are foreigners in our own country. Racism exists, as do laws that bear little relation to our cultural identity."

Ecuadoran legislators are loath to comment publicly on why CONAIE's legislative proposal has not seen the light of day in three years. And Alfonso Calderón, Ecuadoran President Rodridgo Borja's cousin and personal

ECUADORAN POWER POLITICS ACCORDING TO CONAIE:



Now you see it ...

and now you don't.

adviser on indigenous affairs, made quite clear to this writer that the progress of the CONAIE law was not an executive responsibility. "Perhaps to social scientists, this is all very interesting. But to the President -- and to myself -- the only thing that matters is the final version that comes to the Presidential Palace for [Borja's] signature or veto. Until we see a final, debated version, we are powerless to act."

Indeed, some observers feel that the Borja government has been too ready to lend an ear to indigenous petitions. One observer remarked, "A lot of people feel as if this government has kept Indian affairs too close to the President. What they mean -- but won't say -- is that Calderón has a heart for the indigenous peoples of this country."

To Calderón's credit, the presidential adviser's fair skin and flaming red beard belie his commitment to improving the lot of Ecuador's Indians. He works out of a barebones office. Yet more impressive than the lack of executive trappings is Calderón's own secretary, a young Quichua woman from Otavalo. Dressed in her native costume, she is more than a convenient prop for Calderón. The President's man takes daily Quichua lessons to enable him to better understand the approximately 2 million Quichua-speaking Indians in the sierra. Calderón is already proficient in the native idiom, freely mixing Quichua phrases in a predominantly Spanish interview.

Calderón and his boss are no fools either. In what some viewed as an effort to take the wind out of CONAIE's sails on Columbus Day, President Borja invited leaders of the Shuar/Achuar nation to the Presidential Palace in order to award the natives free and clear title to 256,000 hectares in the tribes' Amazon basin homelands. Rather than ask CONAIE representatives to the event (CONAIE claims to represent the Shuar), Borja upstaged his indigenous rivals by inviting visiting French President Francois Mitterand to witness the ceremony. CONAIE was also left off the guest list earlier this year when Borja presided over a similar ceremony with Cofán Indians that live along the Napo River in Ecuador's northeastern rain forest.

CONAIE's desire to be perceived as the one legitimate organization representing this country's indigenous peoples may best explain its loud and incessant demand that the North American-based Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) be expelled from Ecuador. SIL has worked in the sierra and rain forests here since 1953, when President Galo Plaza invited the linguists to decipher Indian languages and create alphabets that would facilitate bilingual education programs and allow the translation of the New Testament into native tongues. But the 25-year agreement signed between SIL founder William Cameron Townsend and Galo Plaza came to an end in 1981. In that year, President Jaime Roldós Aguilera signed an executive decree telling SIL to pack its bags. As Alfonso Calderón puts it, "How could Roldós ignore the 76% majority of indigenous groups who, at that time, said, 'We want to control our own education'?" But Calderón also admits, "SIL rendered a great service to this country."

Obviously, Calderón is not alone in his ambivalence regarding SIL. Two days after signing the SIL decree, Roldós died in a plane crash. His successor, Osvaldo Hurtado, told SIL that American linguists were welcome to stay and finish their ongoing work. Though the Roldós decree was not officially rescinded, SIL personnel were granted personal visa extensions and allowed to continue translating.

Eight years later, SIL spokesman Ray Petersen takes a dim view of CONAIE's motives. "We keep a low profile. We are not missionaries and we do not build churches. Our goal is to teach indigenous peoples how to read and write in their own idioms. The New Testament is but one instrument in our work. Literacy allows these people to make their own decisions about life."

To that end, SIL built a capacitation center at Limincocha, along the Napo River, that housed training in everything from carpentry to clothesmaking. And that was in addition to SIL's regular activities of translation and transliteration. Dictionaries were published, as were legends and stories, in languages as diverse as Quichua and Secoya.

"That's what we used to be," says Petersen. "Now we're in the process of pulling out. We expect to be gone by 1991. CONAIE does not understand. We don't just ride in on the wind. Our linguists and ethnologists are committed to programs that last from 18-35 years. They go out there to live, to study -- not to get involved in politics."

Unfortunately, politics may be SIL's biggest problem. Petersen admits that SIL has given office space and encouragement to indigenous organizations other than CONAIE. In fact, it was the Federación Ecuatoriana

de Indígenas Evangelicos (FEINE), representing about 15% of Ecuador's organized indigenous peoples, that opposed Roldós' SIL expulsion decree in 1981.

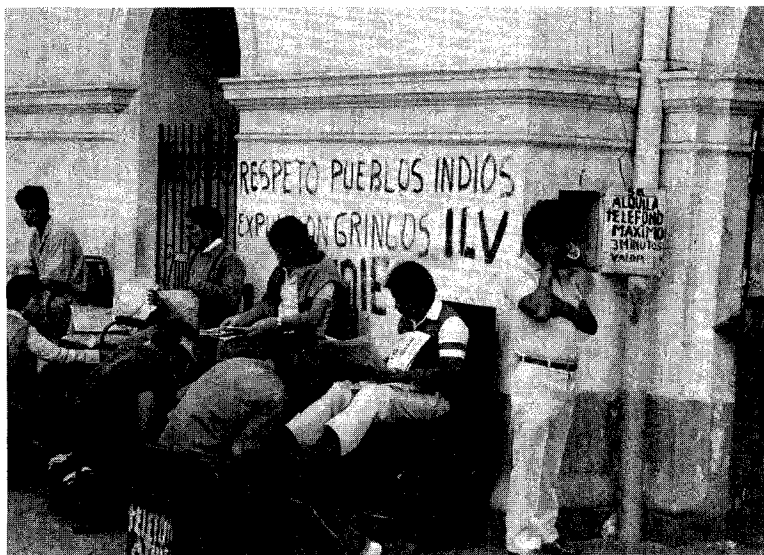
CONAIE clearly does not like the competition. At CONAIE's second biannual congress held in November 1988, CONAIE leaders referred to FEINE and other, non-CONAIE-affiliated, indigenous groups as "fantasmas", created to split the Indian movement by President Borja's conservative predecessor, León Febres Cordero.

Franklin de la Torres, a normally reserved career diplomat who staffs the Ecuador-Spain Joint Commission for the Vth Centenary, recognizes that CONAIE has a point in drawing attention to the less pleasant facets of the Conquest. Nevertheless, he concludes that CONAIE's attitude toward SIL and his Commission means only thing. "CONAIE wants power," says de la Torre, "and they want it to themselves."

At the moment, CONAIE is no cause for alarm. But it would be a mistake for Ecuadorans to ignore completely the legally expressed petitions of groups like CONAIE. To the south, Peruvians can testify to the near impossibility of putting out the flames of illegal terrorist violence that have led to the death of 2,628 victims since January. Meanwhile, back in Madrid, his Excellency Rey don Juan Carlos de España could find that the only thing more maddening than waiting out Franco's regime to resume the Bourbon throne will be snuffing the candles of opposing parties to the 500th Anniversary of the Conquest.

As ever,

W.L. Melvin



CONAIE's Proposed "Law for Indigenous Peoples"

I. Indigenous Nationalities

Article 1: The Republic of Ecuador is a multinational state in which indigenous peoples exercise their own cultures and rights -- especially with respect to autodetermination -- which this law will provide and guarantee.

Article 2: The "indigenous peoples of Ecuador" are those located within the Republic's territorial boundaries. They live and represent the historical, social, cultural, and economic continuity ... of the communities that populated America before the arrival of the European invaders.

Article 4:| The Ecuadoran state recognizes as indigenous nations the following peoples: Quichua, Siona, Secoya, Cofán, Huaorani, Shuar/Achuar, Chachi, Tsachila, and Awa.

II. Guarantees of Indigenous Nations

Article 6: The Ecuadoran state recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to maintain and promote its own, unique culture. [The state] guarantees to promote the continuance of the [indigenous peoples'] social customs, languages, and modes of thought.

Article 7: The Ecuadoran state recognizes as official languages of the Republic Quichua and other native tongues in those territories where they are spoken.

The state guarantees the resources and means for the conservation of [indigenous] languages, to be used in accord with educational needs, administration of justice, social security benefits, and all other public services

Article 8: The indigenous nations of Ecuador will enjoy permanent representation in the following state organs: The National Development Council, the Court of Constitutional Guarantees, the National Council on Culture, the National Council on Education, the Consultation Committee on Foreign Relations, the National Development Bank, and in all other political organizations that formulate public policy at a national, regional or local level.

Article 10: When awarding contracts that affect the lives of indigenous peoples (e.g. petroleum exploration risk-contracts), it will be necessary to obtain the favorable, written pronouncement of the respective indigenous groups.

The state will rescind all agreements, compacts, and contracts made with religious, cultural or civil (public and private) organizations -- and will dismiss all judicial personnel -- who undertake programs or enact judgements contrary to the unity and cultural permanence of those [indigenous] nations that this law protects.

III. Indigenous Territories

Article 11: The indigenous nations of Ecuador possess territorial rights to the lands they inhabit, not only in conditions of subsistence, but as physical space to develop their respective cultures and guarantee the conservation of Ecuador's natural resources.

Article 12: Territorial rights will be exercised in accord with regional circumstances, the ownership traditions of each [nation], and with prejudice to prior common rights to land. Ancestral ownership will be respected, as will those land rights granted under previous legislation.

In the application of this law, the Ecuadoran state will establish a statute of territorial rights applicable to each of the indigenous nations.

Article 13: On lands of public dominion, the state will fix the limits and boundaries of those territories presently occupied by indigenous peoples. Such determination will guarantee exclusive usufructuary rights to the land and other natural resources contained within these territories [for indigenous peoples].

Article 15: Rural lands that pertain to indigenous communities will be indivisible, reserved from commercial dealings, and exempt from state taxes.

Article 18: In controversies over lands owned by indigenous peoples, the criteria most favorable [to indigenous peoples] will be applied.

Article 21: No public sector company will be able to execute -- either directly or indirectly -- exploration projects, the exploitation of natural resources, works of construction, or concede authorization for tourist-oriented activities on rural lands possessed by indigenous communities.

IV: Indigenous Organizations

Article 25: The Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) is recognized as the legitimate representative organ of indigenous nations in Ecuador.

Article 26: CONAIE and its affiliates will enjoy juridical and institutional autonomy

Article 27: The Government of Ecuador is expressly prohibited from allowing the legal existence of any and all groups that promote or establish division within Ecuador's indigenous peoples.

Article 28: Those persons or organizations that act to foment division or otherwise adversely affect the unity and cultural permanence of Ecuador's indigenous peoples will be sanctioned with the loss of that person or organization's legal status.

V. Education and Culture

Article 29: The Ecuadoran state recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to participate decisively in the conduct and orientation of education and promotion of culture.

Article 30: Declare obligatory bilingual and intercultural education programs in all territories inhabited by indigenous peoples

Article 31: The objectives, plans, programs, and teaching activities undertaken to implement a bilingual education system will be established in accord with CONAIE and other indigenous institutions.

Article 33: Where educational establishments are located in territories inhabited by indigenous peoples, indigenous organizations will participate in the administration and nomination of teachers, as well as administer and evaluate bilingual education plans and programs.

VI. Indigenous Medicine

Article 35: The Ecuadoran state will guarantee the [continued] exercise of traditional practices in native medicines

Article 36: Health programs developed in territories inhabited by indigenous peoples must be undertaken in written agreement with CONAIE or the respective indigenous organizations in the area, providing they respect the traditional customs and knowledge [of indigenous groups].

VII. General Dispositions

Article 37: Those indigenous organizations that have not obtained juridical status will be able to be represented by their directives, always providing [such groups] can present a document of legal support, signed by CONAIE's legal assessor, or by one of CONAIE's legally recognized affiliates.

Article 38: The Ecuadoran state, through the General National Budget, will provide annual funds in the name of CONAIE. Said funds will be used to finance the administrative activities and organizational plans of CONAIE.

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All photos taken by W.L. Melvin

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