

The denial of genocide

In late 1992, in a New York newspaper, the writer Alexander Cockburn accused Survival International of exaggerating the mistreatment of nomadic Indians in Paraguay during the 1970s.

This refers to a campaign by Survival International and others which alleged that the Indians were victims of genocide.

Allegations which were denied by Cultural Survival (CS).¹

Cockburn wrote: "As regards Paraguay, [Survival International] suggests that [CS] was a tool of the U.S. government in glossing over the conduct of Stroessner.... Neither [the U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay] nor Professors David Mayberry-Lewis (sic) and James Howe (who compiled Cultural Survival's report) had any interest in defending the Stroessner regime. They concluded that there was no evidence that the Paraguayan government was exterminating native peoples." Cockburn went on to say, "You don't need to devalue the term 'genocide', waving it like a red flag..." (*The Nation*, November 30, 1992).

The genocide allegations were rejected by the Paraguayan, US, UK and West German governments, as well as by CS which published a "special report" in 1980, *The Indian peoples of Paraguay, their plight and their prospects*, by David Maybury-Lewis (president of CS) and James Howe. This refuted the findings of many other organisations and individuals, and repeatedly stressed that the government was not guilty of genocide. It not only explicitly contradicted earlier reports by other observers but even went as far as denigrating their expertise, focussing particularly on the work of Mark Münzel and Richard Arens. Survival International had cited both authors (as well as several others) in its campaign.

Survival International's reputation is built on the accurate reporting of violations of tribal peoples' rights all over the world; these are often atrocities which occur in remote areas to relatively small numbers of people who have no access to the world's press. Our work in drawing attention to these violations over the last 24 years has

we take Cockburn's renewed accusations equally seriously today.

The genocide

The Paraguayan genocide allegations focussed principally on the Aché Indians (and to a lesser extent on the Ayoreo and some other peoples). The Aché lived in small hunter-gatherer bands, of around 40 people in each, in the hilly forests of eastern Paraguay. They were nomads; they had no agriculture and built no long-term dwellings. Colonist expansion had encroached on Aché land for many decades and the Indians were hunted down by raiding parties. When the attackers found a band of Indians they would kill most of the men, sparing only those who submitted immediately, and capture the women and children who would subsequently be sold as slaves.

One of the best known hunters and sellers of Aché in the 1950s was Manuel Jesús Pereira. In 1959 he was made an employee of the Department of Native Affairs (a part of the Paraguayan Ministry of Defence) and his farm was turned into an Aché "reservation". Hunger and a lack of any medical care were normal at this site, not because there was no food or

medicines but because they were withheld by the authorities.

Captured Aché would be transported to the reservation, often in army trucks driven by soldiers. Once there, beatings and rape were common. The young girls, under the age of 12, would be taken to live with Jesús Pereira. These, and some older girls, would also be offered to his friends. The director of the Department of Native Affairs, Colonel Tristán Infanzón, was a frequent visitor and also sold Aché slaves himself. In one incident in 1971, both he and Jesús



The Aché were hunted down and confined in camps. Many old people died from disease and starvation within months of capture. Many children were sold as slaves. This man and boys were victims of recent manhunts when the photograph was taken on 27 May 1972. The man has stuck feathers on his chest - an Aché custom for those awaiting death.

Photo: M. Hofman / IWGIA 1972

had a significant impact in pushing governments to recognise tribal peoples' rights. It is therefore very important that Survival International continues to publicise these incidents. We have a reputation for accuracy and we have not been accused of exaggerating the plight of tribal peoples in other contexts (apart from the standard denials issued by the governments of the countries in which the atrocities are taking place, and the companies invading indigenous peoples' lands) and so we took CS's accusations very seriously in 1980 and

¹ Cultural Survival Inc. (CS) is a US organisation which until recently was based in the Peabody Museum of Harvard University and in the mid-1980s was receiving most of its funds from one department of the US government (the US Agency for International Development - US AID). Its main work was as a broker for placing US government funds with field projects carried out with ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. The largest part of CS is now a trading company, CS Enterprises, promoting the so-called "rainforest harvest" and dealing mainly in Brazil nuts. It continues to receive government support.

Pereira offered the anthropologist, Münzel, an Aché woman and an 11-year old girl.²

Conditions on the reservation were described by the French anthropologist, Pierre Clastres, who lived there in the early 1960s. Jesús Pereira was a murderer, rapist, thief and a drunk. He killed men as old as 80 and raped girls as young as 10. His domain was only ended by the international campaign of the 1970s which forced the government to take action against him.

The Aché reservation then passed into

the control of the fundamentalist missionary sect from the US, the New Tribes Mission.

This situation was well known in Paraguay and had been denounced since the 1960s by several prominent scientists; particularly León Cadogan, Miguel Chase Sardi, Bartomeu Meliá and Luigi Miraglia.

In 1965, Cadogan, an official of the Department of Native Affairs and the foremost Paraguayan Indianist of the 1950s and 60s, said, "Can we admit... the last remnants of... this race to perish because of the lack of a little bit of Christian charity." He lost his job.

Chase Sardi, the preeminent Paraguayan anthropologist of the 1970s, wrote, in 1972, "The Achés of the reservation are real prisoners in a concentration camp... [The free Aché] are hunted; they are pursued like animals. The parents are killed and the children sold... and there is no family of which a child has not been murdered." The following year he called the Aché case, "One of the most horrible crimes of genocide committed on our continent." He was imprisoned for his work in 1975.

In 1972, Meliá, an anthropologist and priest (the director of missions of the Paraguayan Episcopal Conference, and head of anthropology at the Catholic University in Asunción, the capital) said, "The reservation is an Aché graveyard." The following year he demanded a commission to investigate, "The ethnocide and genocide which the Aché-Guayakí have endured in recent years." He was deported in 1976.

Chase Sardi, Meliá and Miraglia, a Paraguayan-Italian zoologist, denounced the genocide in public statements. They had all had considerable experience of Paraguayan Indians for many years. Others supported their charge. These included the Archbishop of Asunción, Monseñor Rolón, and the most well-known Paraguayan author, Augusto Roa Bastos.

By the early 1970s it seemed inevitable that the Aché would be completely destroyed unless action was taken. Even the deputy director of the Department of Native Affairs, J.A. Borgognon, a member of President Stroessner's ruling political party, declared that the Aché were close to extinction, "Due to the repression that follows any of their efforts to resist the occupation of their lands." At the end of 1971, the Paraguayan magazine, *ABC Color*, reported, "Murdering their parents is the only way of seizing Aché children, who are then sold and brought up as servants."

By 1972 there were so many Aché slaves on the market that the price had fallen to the equivalent of US\$5 for a five-year old girl.

This situation was not publicised internationally until 1973 when Mark Münzel, a German anthropologist and Aché-speaker from the Frankfurt Ethnographic Museum, returned to Europe after his 1971-72 fieldwork. His first report, *Genocide in Paraguay*, was brought out in January 1973 by the Copenhagen-based International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). A follow-up, *Genocide continues in Paraguay*, was published in 1974.

Münzel's work in documenting the atrocities against the Aché was extremely thorough. His reports constitute a catalogue of eye-witness accounts (including, but not restricted to, his own), references and quotes. He provides the dates and places of specific violations, gives the numbers of people killed, the location of slaves etc. He shows how officials in the government knew what was happening and how some were themselves active in dealings with Aché slaves.

His accounts make the grimmest reading of one of the worst crimes against an Indian people in the Americas this century.

Münzel came under pressure to shut up from the West German government and companies with interests in Paraguay and he was threatened with legal action in Germany if he continued to speak out.

Survival International publicised Münzel's reports as soon as they came out. Later, in 1977, we sponsored a visit to Paraguay by a leading international lawyer, Professor Richard Arens. Arens had edited a compilation of documents on the Aché genocide in the previous year and had been invited by the Paraguayan government to "come and see" for himself. He did, found the situation to be as bad as other witnesses had indicated, and wrote a report which was released by Survival International in 1978. At the same time, we published articles by other authors, examining the situation from several different points of view.

One of these was a piece by Robert J. Smith, a US anthropologist with considerable experience in Paraguay, and Bartomeu Meliá, entitled, *Genocide of the Aché-Guayakí?* This detailed the available evidence and, amongst other data, presented a series of tables enumerating the causes of Aché deaths over several generations, their total population, the dispersion of the Indian groups etc. Smith and Meliá quoted the

GENOCIDE

United Nations

Resolution

11 December 1946

The Crime of Genocide

Genocide is a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings; such denial of the right of existence shocks the conscience of mankind, results in great loss to humanity in the form of cultural and other contributions represented by these human groups, and is contrary to moral law and to the spirit and aims of the United Nations.

Convention

9 December 1948

The Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

Article I - The contracting parties affirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

Article II - In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious groups, as such:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

Article III - The following acts shall be punishable:

- Genocide;
- Conspiracy to commit genocide;
- Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;
- Attempt to commit genocide;
- Complicity in genocide.

Article IV - Persons committing genocide or any of the other acts enumerated in Article III shall be punished, whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals.

Note: Paraguay and the USA have still not ratified the Genocide Convention.

2 Some Paraguayan and foreign businessmen formed a charity, launched by an advertising company, to provide food and medicines to the Aché reservation and to promote press campaigns in its favour. This group, known as the CAIG (Guayakí Indian Aid Commission - Guayakí is a pejorative name for the Aché), was informed of the true situation but chose to continue its support for the notorious Jesús Pereira until the international outcry forced the government to remove him. The president of the group was a West German businessman (Milan Zeman, the head of Farbwerke Hoechst) and the treasurer was the head of the Bank of America (Thomas Holt). Zeman said that his intention was to be mentioned in the newspapers at least once a week as a result of his "charity" work. The other five members of this group included: another West German businessman; Colonel Tristán Infanzón, head of the Department of Native Affairs; and General Ramón César Bejarano, head of the Indigenist Association. In 1972, Bejarano said that massacres were "problems" that were, "normal in any part of the world."

1946 UN Resolution on "The Crime of Genocide" and went on to write, "Considered in the passive voice in which the resolution is phrased, indeed genocide has occurred and is occurring." They also cited the 1948 Genocide Convention, pointing out how many of its articles had been contravened in the Aché case and comparing the number of Aché deaths with the death rate of other peoples.

Smith and Meliá concluded, "*De facto* genocide has occurred. The Paraguayan government is responsible for it in terms of its failure to protect its citizens."

The writers of these reports were eminent and respected professional people, who all arrived at their conclusions separately. Many others supported them. They included:

- *The US Native American newspaper, Akwesasne Notes*, which covered the story in 1973 (Vol. 5, Nos. 5/6) saying, "The road into Aché territory has much to do with the needs of American interests";
- *Ninety five members of the Danish parliament* who, in the same year, made a formal request for humanitarian intervention in Paraguay;
- *Dr Eric Wolf*, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the City University in New York, who wrote in 1976, "Ethnocide... is not genocide. It becomes genocide when inflicted as part of a design to destroy a given group in whole or in part. This design becomes apparent in the [Aché reservation]";
- *The University of Bern*, which wrote, in June 1973, "We protest and denounce the perpetration of an Indian policy which can and must be characterized as genocide";
- *The International League for the Rights of Man*, which formally addressed the Secretary General of the UN on 1 March 1974, charging the Paraguayan government with genocide, slavery, and torture. It included a quote from Rupert Moser, "The Aché Indians... have been, are, and continue to be, subject to genocidal extermination by acts of physical killing, the deliberate creating of conditions of starvation, semi-starvation, and psychological stress, including but not limited to denial of the right of cultural expression to survivors and by slavery." A similar complaint was made to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States;
- *The Bishops Conference of the Roman Catholic church* in Paraguay, which regarded the treatment of the Aché as genocide. This was reported in the

Paraguayan newspaper, *La Tribuna*, on 8 May 1974;³

- *The Anti-Slavery Society* (now Anti-Slavery International), which addressed the UN Commission on Human Rights in March 1973, and the Subcommission Against Discrimination and for the Protection of Minorities in August 1974, where it summarised all the available evidence and called for a UN investigation;
- *US Senator James Abourezk*, who, at the end of 1973, demanded an end to US aid to Paraguay. In March 1974, he denounced the Paraguayan genocide in the Senate, expressing his dismay that, "While European governments and their press have denounced Paraguay's genocidal policies, the US government has been dumping massive amounts of foreign aid into Paraguay since 1954, the year Alfredo Stroessner obtained his dictatorial power";
- *Resources on Contemporary Issues*, which now lists the Aché genocide in its seminal 1992 study by Dobkowski & Wallimann, *Genocide in our time*.

The denials

During the 1970s, only three voices outside Paraguay were raised in consistently denying the genocide: the US, UK and West German governments. Cultural Survival (CS) was to change this.

In 1978, only a few months after Survival International published the Smith & Meliá article which examined the genocide laws, CS was paid by the US government's Agency for International Development (US AID) to, "Review the status of indigenous peoples in Paraguay." Two US anthropologists, David Maybury-Lewis and James Howe, neither of them experts on Paraguay, were contracted to make two brief visits to the country in November 1978 and January 1979.

Their first report was a confidential one, written for the US government. But someone (we do not know who) managed to get hold of it under the new, anti-Watergate, Freedom of Information Act. Copies were made and circulated to the organisations, including Survival International, in the forefront of the Aché campaign. Many were appalled by what they read. The CS report explicitly rejected the genocide charge which had been an important element in the campaign for Indian rights since 1973. Survival International immediately wrote to CS to express our concern. CS then published an amended version of its report. On its release, Survival International sent a representative to Harvard University to see CS and the authors of the report, Maybury-

Lewis and Howe. During the course of two long meetings (3 & 4 November 1980), Maybury-Lewis repeatedly said that his was a "scholarly" report whereas the ones brought out by others had been "journalistic". He was therefore striving to avoid "sensationalism". When asked why he had felt it necessary to denigrate the findings of other experts and, in particular, on what basis he felt he should explicitly deny the genocide allegation, he said that he had seen no evidence of genocide. When asked how he defined the term, "genocide", he replied that he was taking it to mean, "What the man in the street understands by it." When asked why he did not apply the definition used by everyone else, the legal UN definition rather than any more popular, "man in the street", definition (particularly as his report was supposed to be "scholarly rather than journalistic") he said nothing.

The CS report goes out of its way to

The first definition

Raphael Lemkin coined the term "genocide" in his 1944 book, "Axis rule in occupied Europe", which contained one of the first detailed accounts of Nazi persecution of Jews and other groups. Lemkin derived the term from the Greek word *genos*, which means "race" or "tribe", and the Latin word *cide*, meaning "to kill" [sic]. Thus he defined genocide as "the destruction of a nation or ethnic group." In addition to direct mass killing, such "destruction" could assume other forms, including destruction of cultural heritage and prevention of procreation. Lemkin's definition served as the basis for the first formal, legal definition of genocide, which was codified in the United Nations Convention.

from *Genocide and modern war* by Eric Markusen in *Genocide in our time* by Dobkowski & Wallimann, 1992

Scholarly definitions

In comparison with the legal definition of genocide embodied in the Genocide Convention, social science and other scholarly definitions encompass a wider array of targeted groups, destructive actions, and actual cases. For example, Horowitz defines genocide as "a special form of murder: state-sanctioned liquidation against a collective group, without regard to whether an individual has committed any specific and punishable transgression"....

Genocide scholar Israel Charny has proposed a "humanistic" definition that greatly expands the range of targeted groups: "the wanton murder of human beings on the basis of any identity whatsoever that they share - national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, geographical, ideological." More recently, Charny has proposed an even broader, "generic", definition of genocide: "mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings, when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential defenselessness and helplessness of the victims."

from *Genocide and modern war* by Eric Markusen in *Genocide in our time* by Dobkowski & Wallimann, 1992

3 The next day the newspaper, *ABC Color*, quoted the Minister of Defence, General Marcial Samaniego, saying that genocide in its technical legal sense was not being committed in Paraguay because of a lack of "intent" to bring about the wholesale liquidation of all Indians.

denigrate Münzel's and Arens' work. Concentrating firstly on Münzel, it accuses him of giving "entirely incorrect" information, leaving the reader with wrong "impressions", changing his story, making "dubious... claims", offering no "hard evidence for the calculation and design he alleges", leaping to conclusions without "documentation", making inferences which do "not necessarily follow" or which are "implausible". CS claims that Münzel, "nowhere offers hard evidence - as opposed to inference, surmise, and assertion - to support [his] conclusion." CS's own "sources suggest that [Münzel's] narrative of events in 1971 and 1972 is somewhat unbalanced."

CS's "sources" consist of a US Peace Corps worker who arrived five years after Münzel left, some newspaper articles, and "brief conversations with Aché [held 6-7 years after Münzel had left] translated... from Guaraní [the rural language of Paraguay] to English." In other words, CS had very little communication with Aché themselves; all of it needing translation. Moreover, the "first-hand" element of the CS report is based on only, "Two brief visits to the Aché at the Colonia Nacional and the Catholic mission," and, "A flying trip of a few hours to the Aché colony." On the latter "flying trip", "It was not easy to talk freely with [the Aché]," and the CS team only managed, "A number of... abortive conversations," before leaving.

In fact, very few violations of Indian peoples' rights in the Americas have been documented so thoroughly and so convincingly as the case of the Aché by Münzel in the 137 pages and 11 photographs which comprise his three principal articles and which incorporate much more than just his own observations. Aside from CS's criticisms, the only other negative comments we are aware of concerning Münzel's work is that it is understated. Münzel himself repeatedly notes that the evidence he presents is "the tip of the iceberg" and that there were undoubtedly many violations he was not able to document.

Having rejected Münzel's work, the CS report is no less derogatory about Arens. It says his report is impressionistic, unreliable, and that it makes false claims. It resorts to the personally insulting by saying, "Arens reported that... he saw no food in their village which he regarded as edible. On the evidence of his report one might well wonder whether Arens could find or even recognize edible food in this strange environment, which he viewed so ethnocentrically."

Professor Richard Arens was both a lawyer, and a writer and teacher of law. He had worked for the Allies during the

Aché weeping song

*I, when I was still a man,
I shot great wild boars with my arrow,
On the hunt I pierced wild boars.
I, when I was still a man -
Until the tapir was shot,
Until I died and with me all men,
Until a great trembling caught hold of me.
Then I began my roving far, far away
Through the rain, on my shoulder the tapir.
The tapir wandered with me,
He bore me away.
I and the tapir - he bore me into the forest of the dead.
The tapir bore me into the forest of the dead.*

*In the forest of the dead we shot wild boar, wild boars in the rain.
In the forest of the dead I mounted the truck, in the forest of the dead I was driven
away on the truck full of dead.
The truck of the dead bore me to Asunción
I, when I was dead, with my friends the whites,
In the city of the dead we shot
At the dead bodies of the Achés, at the many dead bodies.
Dead bodies in the rain.
I, when I was dead, I roved far away.
On the truck of the whites I rode,
In the aeroplane of the whites I flew,
Into the splendid, great shining white house of the sun,
I killed our great Mother, who lives at the sun,
I, all alone, with me only the whites.*

This song, by the 25-year old Nambugi was recorded by Münzel in 1971-2. Nambugi repeated his own story obsessively, over and over again. He always began with his childhood and stopped abruptly when recounting a tapir hunt which took place when he was 10 years old. Münzel said his voice was, "like a tape that had been erased in the middle." A friend of Nambugi explained what had happened. The Indians had momentarily left the boy to guard the dead game animal. The whites attacked. Nambugi was shot and badly wounded, he ran away and was lost in the forest, bleeding profusely. Nambugi could only tell his story through his song; his, "mystical search for meaning in a nightmare world."

Nürnberg Trials of Nazi war criminals in 1945/6 when he had interviewed SS officers and visited concentration camps, and he was among the earliest to champion the Genocide Convention in US legal literature. He was a Fellow of the University of Chicago's Institute of Social & Behavioral Pathology, was an expert on civil rights litigation, and was the counsel who argued the first case on juvenile rights before the US Supreme Court. He wrote books and articles on many different aspects of law and rights. During the 1970s he taught Evidence, Criminal Law, and International Human Rights at the Temple University Law School, Philadelphia.

He was chosen as counsel for both the International League for Human Rights and the Anti-Slavery Society to represent the Aché case to the UN and the Organization of American States. Of all the principal writers on Paraguayan genocide, Arens was the only one who approached the issue as a legal expert and as an advocate. He described Münzel's report in the following terms: "It cites first-hand account upon first-hand account, identifying eyewitnesses located throughout the Americas and Western Europe in a manner satisfying to the most fastidious of legal technicians."

So why does the CS report go out of its way to refute both Münzel's and Arens' work? Why does it repeatedly defend the Paraguayan government, saying: "The problems faced by the Paraguayan Indians are not caused by unusual actions by General Stroessner's dictatorship and certainly not by any government policy to exterminate them. On the contrary, they are the same problems which are faced by Indian peoples in other American countries" (p. 110); and, "There is no evidence that the government ever engaged in any campaign to exterminate the Indians of the country" (p. 111)?

The crux of the CS argument is, "The charge that the Paraguayan government has had an official policy of genocide against the Indians seems to us unlikely as well as unproven..." (p. 40).

This argument, which CS presented in 1980, is almost identical to official communiques from both the US and UK governments which were made, in some cases, several years earlier. For example, on 26 October 1973, the US State Department (the letter was signed by Jack B. Kubisch, the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs) wrote to Congressman Dante B. Fascell (Chairman of the Subcommittee on

Inter-American Affairs of the House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs) saying, "We do not believe that there has been a planned or conscious effort on the part of the Government of Paraguay to exterminate, molest, or harm the Aché Indians in any way." This statement was based on the results of an "inquiry" conducted by the US Embassy in Paraguay, and released in answer to critics in the US House of Representatives.

There is a remarkable similarity between this and a response from the British Ambassador in Paraguay which was quoted to a Survival International supporter in February 1978, over four years later, (and nearly a year before the CS visits): "There was no evidence that the systematic extermination of the Indians... formed part of the Paraguayan Government's policies."

Paradoxically, Paraguayan government statements actually admit *more* about the Aché situation than do those of the US or UK governments! On 22 April 1974, the Paraguayan Ministry of Defence said, "There exists no genocide *in the full sense of the word*, nor racial discrimination" (emphasis added). This comment, published in a Paraguayan newspaper, drew an angry retort from the Bishop of the Chaco, Monseñor Alejo Ovelar, writing on behalf of the Episcopal Conference and saying, "There really exists genocide in the full sense of the word in Paraguay." Two weeks later, on 8 May 1974, General Marcial Samaniego, the Minister of Defence, declared that there was no genocide, "As defined by the UN General Assembly." A comment which also brought a rebuff from the Episcopal Conference.

The conclusion

The term "genocide" is only used by Survival International after careful consideration.

The definition used was that of the United Nations, the correct legal description of the crime. The Paraguayan government knew what was happening. It funded the camps to which the Aché were brought. It paid the personnel who ran them. Its own officials were involved in murder and rape. It paid the soldiers who drove the trucks used in the manhunts. Moreover, it took no action whatsoever when alerted of these facts (until the European campaign began to have an effect).

The Aché were certainly victims of genocide.

It is impossible to estimate with any accuracy the number of Aché who died as a result of the manhunts and subsequent mistreatment they received. Probably about 50% survived (this is about the same proportion of European Jews who survived the Holocaust). Today, there are no more

nomadic Aché living in the forest and so there are no more manhunts. In common with most Amerindian peoples who have survived the first decades of contact, the remnant Aché population is now increasing.

The politics

So why did the US and UK governments deny that genocide had occurred?

Stroessner's military dictatorship - which had ruled longer than any other in South America - depended entirely on US assistance. It was considered one of the staunchest anti-communist regimes on the continent and was also used to launder money and arms going to countries which the US was not dealing with legally. Links between the two governments were strong; so strong that General Stroessner used to say that he regarded the US Ambassador in Asunción as a member of his cabinet. But by the 1970s, Paraguay was beginning to be an embarrassment to Washington as the evidence was increasingly proven that the most extreme forms of government-sponsored brutality were rife. The imprisonment, torture, and the murder or disappearance of anyone opposed to the government, and often their families as well, was an everyday occurrence. Paraguay's only friends, apart from the US, were the world's most oppressive and violent regimes; South Africa was a favourite. Stories of Paraguay providing a safe haven for the most notorious Nazi war criminals, and even giving them official positions in the state's "security" apparatus seemed increasingly less like journalistic exaggeration (and have now been shown to be true).

In February 1978, a State Department report included Paraguay in a list of countries where human rights were harshly violated. At the same time, 30 law professors, including the Dean, at Temple University, Philadelphia, approached the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and argued that it was a violation of US law to send any kind of aid to Paraguay in the light of the continued flagrant and sustained human rights violations. Coming in the middle of President Carter's term (1976-1980), and set in the context of his avowed human rights policy, this was a powerful signal to the US establishment. If massive US aid was to continue, it was important to show that human rights violations were not taking place, or at least that the reports of them were exaggerated. Whatever the CS authors may, or may not, have intended, that is exactly what the CS report actually said.

The Nation

As a footnote to this account, it is worth returning to Cockburn's allegations, in the *Nation*, that Survival's work in pursuing the

campaign in the 1970s was a "devaluation" of the term genocide. Readers of *The Nation* with very long memories will be confused by this, because in 1973 the newspaper printed an article by Richard Arens, *Paraguayan Indian hunt*, which laid the charge of genocide squarely at the door of the Paraguayan government (24 September issue). Why is the same newspaper publishing, 19 years later, one of its regular columnists denying the charge? Has the editor actually studied the history and decided that the earlier account was unfounded? If so, perhaps the *Nation* owes an apology to the Stroessner regime for its own, earlier, "exaggerated" report.

Denying the denials

It has long been recognised by genocide scholars that denials that genocide is happening, or has occurred in the past, are an important element in the perpetration of the crime itself. The way governments deny all genocide, except when it is practised by their enemies, has also been studied. If genocide is to be successfully opposed, it is vital that all denials are exposed. Otherwise it paves the way for the greatest of all crimes to happen yet again.

The treatment of the Aché constituted one of the worst crimes committed against an Indian people in the Americas this century. It was certainly genocidal. The situation only improved because of the vigorous outcry - both international and from within Paraguay. The reason there are any Aché living today is largely a result of this, as there is no doubt that the worst atrocities were toned down following this campaign.

There are still several little-contacted tribal peoples in the world - many of them are nomads, not dissimilar to the Aché. It is partly for their sakes that we should not allow Aché history to be rewritten for political and economic expediency, nor for any other reason for that matter.

Principal references

- *Genocide in Paraguay*, by Mark Münzel, IWGIA, Copenhagen, 1973.
- *Genocide continues in Paraguay*, by Mark Münzel, IWGIA, Copenhagen, 1974.
- *Genocide in Paraguay*, by Richard Arens (ed.), Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1976.
- *The forest Indians in Stroessner's Paraguay: survival or extinction?* by Richard Arens, Survival International, 1978.
- *Genocide of the Aché-Guayaki?* by Robert J. Smith & Bartomeu Meliá, in Survival International Supplement, June 1978.
- *The Indian peoples of Paraguay: their plight and their prospects*, by David Maybury-Lewis & James Howe, Cultural Survival, 1980.

Two hunters penetrated into the forests of the Paraná. They killed an Aché "male" and wounded a "female", his wife, taking possession of her children, a little boy of 10 years of age and a baby girl. The boy was sold to a woodcutter of the Paraná, the girl to a village family. This data we obtained from Kandégui, the Ache "male", now an adult, 15 years after he was captured: data confirmed by his "master".... His sister, after having served as a slave for many years,... was put in the street when advanced pregnancy made it impossible for her to perform her tasks. As a reward for her years of slavery, she bore on her shoulders a shirt... almost too short to cover her nakedness... When, after giving birth, she offered her services to another family, the latter insisted that she get rid of her daughter - a condition which she accepted in order that they should not both die of hunger. She gave her daughter to a family without children.

Patria, pro-government newspaper, Asunción, 31 July 1957

Key dates

1960s

- A number of social scientists denounce the Aché genocide to the authorities in Paraguay.

1973

- The German, Mark Münzel, publicises the genocide internationally.
- An international campaign is launched, principally by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs and Survival International.
- *The Nation* publishes an account of the genocide.
- A US Senator demands an end to US aid to Paraguay.
- The US Embassy conducts an "inquiry" and the US government says,

"We do not believe that there has been a planned or conscious effort on the part of the Government of Paraguay to exterminate, molest, or harm the Aché Indians in any way."

1976

- Richard Arens edits a compilation of accounts of the genocide.

1978

- February: Thirty law professors inform the US Senate that the provision of aid to Paraguay violates US law.
- February: The British government says,

"There was no evidence that the systematic extermination of the Indians... formed part of the Paraguayan Government's policies."

- June: Survival International publishes Richard Arens' account, an article by Smith & Mellá and other material on the genocide.
- November: Cultural Survival pays its first visit to Paraguay funded by the US government.

1980

- Cultural Survival publishes its report saying,

"The charge that the Paraguayan government has had an official policy of genocide against the Indians seems to us unlikely as well as unproven..."

1992

- *The Nation* publishes a denial of the genocide.

In August 1971, on the... estancia owned by Mr Parini, who is reputed to be an Aché slave dealer, two cows were found killed... Mr Parini appealed to the 5th Military Division of Curuguaty... The 5th Division appealed to the... Ministry of Defense. The Director of the Department, Col. Infanzón, visited Mr Parini between 20 and 22 August... Almost immediately after [this meeting] a killing raid... was undertaken... [The killing] was carried out with "machete" knives, as proudly described by the killers themselves. There were between 12 and 20 [Aché] killed, some of them most probably the mothers of kidnapped children. At least 5 small children were captured alive. One, a girl of some 6 years of age, was later purchased by José Dolores Pereira of Laurel... A boy of about 4 years of age was bought or received as a gift by Siverio Pereira of Laurel, but he died a few weeks after his capture. A boy perhaps 8 years old was kept by his kidnapper, Salvador Garcete, in Laurel, where he died of smallpox in November 1971...

Münzel, 1973