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Exclusive Tribune Foreign Report

Germ Warfare Against Indians Is Charged in Brazil



In the field: Dr. Patrick Braun takes a blood pressure reading on the amused Oyampi Indian child during an epidemiological study he conducted in the Amazon river basin.



Civilizations in conflict: Primitive flute contrasts with the tailor-made cigarette.

134 Face Trial for the Use Of Pathogens in Jungle

Medical Tribune Report

PARIS—Brazilian landowners and Government officials are scheduled to stand trial next spring, charged with complicity in deliberately introducing biologic pathogens into Indian tribes in order to clear them from valuable rubber lands.

Out of 700 members of the now disbanded Government Service for the Protection of Indians (SPI), 134 are to be tried. Some 200 others have been dis-

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missed in a shake-up of the Government's Indian agencies, Gen. Costa Calvacanti, Brazil's Minister of Interior, told Dr. Patrick Braun, Medical Attaché to the French Department of Overseas Territories. Dr. Braun recently returned from a trip to South America, where he has been studying the effects on the aborigines of contacts with white civilization.

The Brazilian defendants will have to answer charges of inducing devastating epidemics by "gifts" of clothing impregnated with disease organisms and of sending disease carriers into a population almost

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totally lacking in immunologic defenses.

In describing the forthcoming trial, General Cavalcanti told Dr. Braun:

"One cannot speak of genocide but rather of vicious crimes, committed by unscrupulous adventurers employed, it is true, by local economic and political powers (rubber planters, landowners, officials) seeking to appropriate Indian lands in a manner recalling the massacres which in the last century nearly exterminated the Indians of North America."

Dr. Braun, who returned here recently from Rio de Janeiro, revealed to MEDICAL TRIBUNE the substance of voluminous records hitherto undisclosed outside Brazil. Reports examined by Dr. Braun in the files of the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior as well as the 5,115-page dossier of a special governmental commission of inquiry bolster the charges of innumerable attacks against the Indians, including the use of biologic as well as conventional weapons.

Smallpox, influenza, tuberculosis, and measles organisms were deliberately introduced among the tribes of the Mato Grosso area between 1957 and 1963, according to a 1968 report by Gen. Albuquerque Lima, who was then Minister of the Interior. In one of his reports General Lima wrote:

"The refinements of this criminal penetration brought bacteriologic warfare to the backwoods by means of 'gifts' to the forest inhabitants of clothing impregnated with the microbes of smallpox; their food was poisoned, their children kidnapped; the forest tribesmen were shamelessly murdered."

Mr. Ivan Rubens, scientific adviser of the Indian Museum in Rio de Janeiro and a member of the governmental investigating commission, showed Dr. Braun the reports written by SPI officials concerning the attempts to exterminate the Xavantes Indians of Mato Grosso by giving them smallpox virus-impregnated garments. In 1963, Mr. Rubens said, one Francisco de Brito, manager of the Arruda Rubber Company, sent to the Cintas Largas Indians of Mato Grosso blouses and fabrics contaminated with the smallpox virus. Lorenzo Hamilton, vice-president of the newly established National Foundation for the Indian (FUNAI), successor to the scandal-ridden SPI, told Dr. Braun that "a landowner of the Mato Grosso area killed the Indians living on his land by importing various microorganisms (smallpox, tuberculosis, measles, or chickenpox)."

A Farmer's Revenge

Another Mato Grosso farmer, whose son had been killed by the Indians, avenged himself by putting arsenic in sugar destined for the Indians, he said.

Some of the major epidemics that ravaged the Amazon basin Indian tribes in the past decade are said to have been caused by their white neighbors. The investigation files at the Ministry of the Interior include documents strongly suggesting that the highly destructive 1964 and 1965 tuberculosis epidemics among the Indians of the northeastern Amazon basin were deliberately induced, Dr. Braun said. He told of evidence that infectious organisms "were deliberately brought into the Indian territories by landowners and speculators utilizing a mestizo previously infected." For the people who had not yet built up an immunity against tuberculosis, the pathogen was so virulent that countless victims died quickly.

Some land grabs were accomplished by older methods, as in the case of the Cintas Largas Indians who happened to be occupying a rubber-producing territory.

A Department of Agriculture report based on details supplied by a Jesuit mission, described the attacks on them.

"These Indians lived traditionally in the area of tributaries of the Rio Madeira in the north of the Mato Grosso. Victims of various attacks by rubber planters and other plantation owners in the area, the Cintas Largas had to flee from contact

with the invaders of their territory and establish a new settlement on the banks of the Rio Aripuana, where they were attacked by a group of men in the pay of the landowner Antonio Junqueira."

Among the defendants at the impending trial are: Comdr. Luis Venhas Neves, former director of SPI, charged with 44 crimes, including complicity in murder and embezzlement of \$300,000 from the SPI funds; Francisco de Brito, manager of the Arruda Rubber Company, charged with extermination of the Cintas Largas; and Antonio Junqueira, rubber planter, charged with leading the expedition against the Cintas Largas.

Total Extinction Feared

The impending trial has spotlighted the danger of total extinction for the South American Indians, even without the deliberate onslaughts against them, Dr. Braun noted. In addition to endemic diseases the Indians are prey to those that were inadvertently transmitted to them by European adventurers. Lacking immunologic defenses against tuberculosis and other diseases alien to them, the

Indians are dying off rapidly, Dr. Braun stressed. The Urubu tribe of northeastern Brazil, for instance, was introduced to the white man and the measles in the early 1950s. Ever since, both have paid repeated visits. One measles epidemic alone destroyed 160 members of the tribe, which numbered only 750. Pulmonary and intestinal complications, according to Dr. Braun, killed them in a matter of several hours.

Epidemics of acute pneumonopathy have already decimated several tribes of the Oayanas. In 1960 in the Oyapock region, Dr. Braun said, an outbreak of the common cold resulted in seven deaths in a single village.

"Only one solution can save the Indians," Dr. Braun declared, "and that is to leave them undisturbed in their own lands, which should be accessible only to outsiders with medical and scientific missions. France is one of the first nations to adopt this policy, he pointed out. Since July 25, 1964, no unauthorized persons can enter Indian territories in French Guiana."

Although Brazil has not made plans to isolate the Indians, Dr. Braun said, she is

taking steps to help them. Aside from the complete revamping of its Indian service and the prosecution of alleged accomplices in the warfare against the Indians, Brazil is setting up hospitals in the interior designed to care for Indians. One at Ilha do Bananal now has 50 beds for tuberculosis patients and 40 general beds.

Whether these efforts can in the end save the Indians from the biologic hazards of contact with whites is still problematic, Dr. Braun said.