

LAND & LIBERTY



Zacapa-Izabal campaign from Oct. 1966 to March 1968.

The total number of deaths and disappearances since 1966 is likely to exceed 20,000, most of them peasants or urban poor. And the annual death list is likely to continue rising, for the simple reason that land values are rising in the northern provinces.

"One factor alleged by observers to have affected the situation in the Quiche area has been the rapid increase in value of the land - presently occupied largely by peasant smallholders organised in co-operatives - due to the planned construction of a major highway into the area linking agricultural land with national markets, as well as the discovery of petroleum deposits in the region."

The share of deaths in the north,

THE DEATH LIST

Judicial executions, 1972-April 1976

1972	1973	1974	1975 to Apr. 1976	
30	151	25	52	24
39	34	10	29	12
80	57	44	12	35
147	167	56	57	44
296	409	135	150	115

Estimated but unconfirmed 200 shot February 1976.

Position, 11%.
d by name only, 43%.
ame only are generally considered
ents.

al, Briefing Paper No. 8, 1976, p. 12.

which is the most sparsely-populated area of the country, rose from 4% in 1972 to 28% in 1976.

An example of the horror which can result from the defence of traditional rights to land is the massacre in the market place at Panzós.

Over 100 Indian peasants, including 25 women and children, were killed on May 29, 1978. The Ministry of Defence issued its version: 34 people were killed when "armed peasants" staged a surprise attack on the garrison.⁸

The Copenhagen-based International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, which has documented the tragedy, is sceptical. "It does not seem reasonable for a group of peasants to attack an army outpost with machetes. Or to take women and children with them."⁹

The cause of the deaths is an age-old one: land-grabbing. Existing plantation owners are extending their holdings with the active assistance of the country's agricultural agency, INTA.

The aim is to cash-in on the rise in land values. Expectations leapt when it was learnt that the large oil deposits in neighbouring Mexico originate from oil strata that extend into the subsoil of northern Guatemala and southern Belize.

"However, in order to get any profit out of the oil, it has to be transported to the

centre of the country. This will happen by means of a pipeline that is to pass through Alta Verapaz, including the Panzós district. The projected pipeline and wildcat drilling have meant that prices for land have begun to go up. Expecting even higher price rises, the big landowners try often with the help of the military forces to oust the Indian peasants from their land."¹⁰

By removing the Indians, the landowners simultaneously accomplish both their goals. They reap the benefits of increasing land values, and enlarge the pool of landless workers who act as a check on the wage-aspirations of plantation workers.

Gen. Romeo Lucas Garcia, who took over the Presidency last July, is one of the big landowners in the Alta Verapaz province. So is the Minister of Defence.

Guatemala is a signatory of the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), and is a party to the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948).

REFERENCES

1. Roger Plant, 'Repression drives Guatemalans to desperation', *The Guardian*, 18.2.80.
2. Andrew Graham-Yooll, 'Tide of revolution rises', *The Guardian*, 18.2.80.
3. *The Massacre at Panzós*, Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1978, p. 10.
4. *Area Handbook for Guatemala*, US Government Printing Office, 1973.
5. *Guatemala*, London: Amnesty International, 1976, p. 9.
6. Alan Riding, 'The army turns left', *Financial Times*, 12.9.75.
7. *Guatemala*, op. cit., p. 13.
8. *The Massacre at Panzós*, op. cit. pp. 16-17.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
10. IWGIA Newsletter No. 19, June 1978, pp. 3-4.