

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

What's behind the Cuna uprising?

The Cuna Indians' attacks recall the U.S.-spawned "Tule Republic." Will the swastika fly again over Panama?

Armed with rifles and shotguns, a group of Cuna Indians kidnaped nine peasants, burnt down their houses, and blocked the main road to Alto Bayano from Panama City. While the hostages taken on April 3 were later released unharmed, the crisis remains unresolved. The Cunas are demanding that the estimated 20,000 settlers be forced out of the Bayano River valley, and that the area be made an autonomous territory for some 3,000 Indians in the region.

"If the government doesn't solve the problem . . . we are prepared to go to war again against farmers, companies, and even the government," said Atencio López, chief legal adviser for Panama's Cuna Indians, according to Reuters. The wire report added that the "conflict coincides with the 500th anniversary of the Spanish arrival on the American continent, when thousands of Indians were killed and which López bills the '500th anniversary of Indian resistance.'"

Just days before the uprising began, there was a one-week meeting in Panama of Indian representatives from Canada, the United States, and Ibero-America where plans to organize against the celebration of Columbus's voyage of 1492 were discussed. Separatist movements similar to that of the Cunas are under way virtually everywhere in Ibero-America—from Guatemala to Venezuela and Brazil—in this fifth centennial of the evangelization of the continent, supposedly to protect "native traditional ways."

In Brazil, over 9 million hectares, a territory about the size of Portugal, are being set aside for 4,000-6,000

Yanomamis, a Stone Age culture that will be kept in a state of perpetual backwardness within its designated "bantustan."

In Panama, beginning with the nationalist revolution led by Gen. Omar Torrijos in 1968, there was an accelerated push to develop the infrastructure and economy of Indian areas, and to integrate the indigenous population into the nation's decision-making process. Even while their self-governing institutions were strengthened, the Cunas, as were all indigenous groups in the country, were granted proportionate representation in Congress and other government institutions. That's not the case under the U.S. occupation, initiated with the 1989 U.S. invasion, ordered by George Bush, which overthrew Gen. Manuel Noriega, Torrijos's successor.

The ongoing Cuna rebellion in U.S.-occupied Panama demonstrates the patently racist absurdity of the separatist movement. The thousands of families whom the Cunas are attempting to dislodge from Alto Bayano are not exploitative white, rich, plantation owners. They are impoverished, land-starved peasants, fleeing the growing desertification of the Azuero Peninsula to the relatively more fertile tropical jungle of the Bayano region.

Most of these peasants are *mestizos*, that is, of mixed Indian and European ancestry. Many are Indians, as "full-blooded" as the Cunas, although culturally Hispanic.

As *EIR* has documented, these separatist movements are neither native nor indigenous to the region.

They are run out of Cultural Survival, the Interamerican Foundation, the U.N., and similar organizations mostly by American and European anthropologist—"committed anthropologists," as they prefer to be called—with funding from the U.S. government, the World Bank, and foundations, as a weapon to limit national sovereignty.

The U.S. government ran a similar separatist uprising in Panama earlier this century that also involved Cunas. On Feb. 12, 1925, the Cunas on the San Blás archipelago proclaimed their "independence" from Panama, and the establishment of the "Republic of Tule"—which adopted the swastika, that most non-native symbol that was later to gain infamy with the Nazis, as its flag. The fledgling republic immediately declared itself a protectorate of the U.S. government. The rebellion, which was personally led by the former U.S. chargé d'affaires in Panama Richard O. Marsh, was aborted when the Calvin Coolidge administration decided not to go through with the granting of protectorate status, but not before great numbers of Indians and scores of Panamanian policemen were killed fighting each other. The *Cleveland*, a U.S. Navy cruiser, was sent to rescue Marsh.

In 1942, the San Blás Cunas signed a contract to provide servants to the U.S. Armed Forces in Panama, and remained bonded to the U.S. military Southern Command until the advent of Torrijos and Noriega.

Journalists in Panama said that there were unconfirmed reports that in the latest uprising, the Ministry of Government and Justice of the U.S.-installed government supplied rifles to the Cunas. There were also reports, later denied, that Panamá Province Gov. Plutarco Arrocha instigated the uprising to clear the land in Bayano, to which he allegedly holds title.