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Imperialism and Summer Language Institute



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It is commonplace (and for some, simple rhetoric) to claim that US imperialism is the enemy of the peoples of the world. However, the myriad methods and techniques, the complex variety of procedures that the US government has used to impose its hegemony are not known with due depth.

The glorified image of the covert actions that the cinematographer and the mass media have been responsible for disseminating is only a manipulated and reduced sample of the activities of their enormous planetary apparatus of surveillance and repression.

The United States government works with unlimited resources, with a gigantic army of scientific mercenaries of the most varied professions, taking advantage of the most sophisticated technical advances. The image of the CIA agent, saving the world free of revolutionary cataclysms, hides a fundamental fact: the multifaceted intellectual team

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behind each operative agent, as well as the motley array of religious, journalistic, cultural institutions that serve or assist U.S. military and intelligence agencies. Therefore, it is important to remember the history of the Summer Language Institute (ILV), its essential characteristics, its actions in a strategic sector of our national societies: indigenous peoples.

The establishment of the Summer Linguistics is linked to William Cameron Townsend. This character became a missionary since 1917, moving to Guatemala with the aim of introducing the Bible among the Kaqchikel Indians. Here he realized that, if this text was not made known in the native language, the work of conversion was impossible, arising from this experience the idea of translating this writing in all the languages of the indigenous groups of the underdeveloped world.

In 1933 he visited Mexico and received the support of Moisés Sáenz, a Protestant anthropologist who proposed to repeat his Guatemalan experience. The missionary's stay was definitive in the steps to create a training center for young linguists willing to religious work, which is first established in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas. In 1935, Townsend and his group began working in the indigenous areas of our country.

In 1942, the ILV began its incursion into the universities, which gave it scientific sanction, first, in Oklahoma. In a few years we found high school study centers in universities in Canada, Australia, West Germany, Mexico, etc. In 1947, another stage in the expansion of the ILV began, when what was called the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (Jaars) was formed, radio and air communication services, with pilots with extensive military experience.

This complex organization was financed by donations from churches, individuals, foundations of various origins, transnational companies, such as Shell, as well as the International Development Agency, the departments of State, Health, Education and Public Assistance of the United States.

ILV methods of operation followed a similar pattern in all countries, according to political, legal and local conditions. Members of the organization were required to sign an oath of allegiance, which was renewed every six years. To train themselves, they worked in a team of two people, often married, with university studies and a well-proven capacity for religious dedication. Where they were installed, they built a house (not necessarily modest, as we observe in Chiapas) and with the necessary communication and transport infrastructure with a regional central base. Through salaried informants, usually young, the missionaries were introduced to the language and culture of the group. The informants

were trained in such a way that they became the first converts to initiate or assist a religious and ideological campaign with the materials prepared by the ILV. These publications were generally Protestant hymns or native myths, conveniently distorted, according to the ideological interests of the missionaries.

The worldwide distribution of this organization, in the seventies, was as follows: in 1977, it brought together 3,700 people working in 675 languages in 29 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania. He settled in Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil, Honduras and Panama. He worked intensively in Vietnam, Kampuchea and the Philippines, precisely at a time when these peoples were waging liberation struggles; A missionary said messianically: We have strengthened our lines with new members; we have entered new tribes and looked to God so that we could buy a new headquarters in Saigon and trusted Him to advance in Kampuchea and other new tribes. He guides us. The ideological content of the materials produced and distributed by the Summer Linguistic Institute (ILV), as well as its action in the economic, political, and social spheres, formed a coherent structure, whose ideological substratum was of a religious nature, although it responded to a defined political conception. The emphasis of its ideology was on: 1) inculcating and reinforcing recalcitrant individualism and voluntarism, banishing any idea of community organization and social solidarity; 2) encourage submission and disinterest in the political struggle. An ILV missionary in Chiapas condemned the struggle for land, arguing that it was a sin of envy.

The ILV was structured towards the end of the 1940s in three complementary sections; one in the United States, Canada and West Germany that published religious materials; another section or Summer Language Institute, which carried out the technical, linguistic, and missionary preparation work; the third, transport and communication.

The ILV was clear in its ideological messages regarding the social struggle: If any of you are killed by the caciques, the responsibility of those who survive is to bury the dead. They must not exercise revenge. God is the one who established authority of the chieftains over us. Therefore, we must pray for them. They are part of a divine plan... God is in control of things and always works for our sake. It is not possible for someone to kill us before God orders our return to his kingdom. If we are dead, we should think that it is part of the Lord's desires, since He is above all things.

The missionaries also tried to reinforce the role of the ideal worker for capital: a phrase from a material advises indigenous children: "Whenever one wants to work with pleasure

but with reluctance things happen to him ... Obey always, so that you may be good workers when you grow up."

Another task fulfilled by the ILV missionaries was to support and idealize the political, administrative, and representative apparatuses of the host states. The Mexican state was represented as democratic, sovereign, protective, merciful to the poor.

The ILV also cooperated in the introduction of products from transnational corporations to indigenous regions, encouraging superfluous consumerism. The ILV distributed a booklet dedicated to indigenous mothers that included 36 recipes, from hors d'oeuvres to desserts, with readily available ingredients, such as shrimp, mushrooms, cream and other delicacies. In his innocent work of evangelizing the natives of the world, the only mention made of a foreign country is that of the United States, represented as paradise come true on Earth, the ideal society of God's chosen people.

The influence and cultural penetration were evident in the converts of the areas we visited in Mexico, during the research of the College of Ethnologists and Social Anthropologists AC, as well as the tasks of research, information gathering, surveillance and communication, in the training camp for survival in the jungle.

Linguists investigated how to cross rivers in times of flooding, food and proper ways of life, local medicines, roads, and so on. The use of this inquiry for the anti-guerrilla struggle was evident, as was the participation of the ILV in the repression of popular movements. The best known case is that of Planas, in Colombia, a region occupied by the Guajibos, who organized a broad mass movement to defend their lands in 1970, in the face of the violent dispossession of their resources by the Colombian State and the International Development Agency. The ILV had a very prominent participation in the air and radio support to the troops in charge of clearing the area of indigenous people.

On the other hand, the ILV played a role for the transnational natural and strategic resources. Even on maps, the overlapping of regions controlled by Summer Linguistics and the extractive projects of transnational companies was notorious. In Ecuador, it occupied the same regions as Georgia Pacific and Texaco-Gulf. In Colombia, the ILV was associated with the trafficking and production of marijuana, the trafficking of diamonds and minerals, the export of flora and fauna to the United States. The missionaries, at the same time, carried out campaigns of another type, such as the sterilization of indigenous women.

Thus, we have witnessed the multifaceted use of the ILV for the strategic and tactical purposes of imperialism. This organization invaded the territories of indigenous peoples

and coordinated its activities with local governments according to a global project. It is worth remembering this story.

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