



Indian Populations Under  
Authoritarian Regimes

# The Case of the Mapuche in Chile

Letelier Moffitt Memorial Fund for Human Rights

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Institute for Policy Studies

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The following are presentations made at a symposium sponsored by the *Latin American Studies Program* of the *Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies* in conjunction with the *Letelier-Moffitt Memorial Fund for Human Rights and Survival International (USA)*.

November 13, 1980.

#### **PARTICIPANTS:**

*Isabel Letelier*, Fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and President of the Chile Committee for Human Rights.

*Ariel Dorfman*, Chilean writer, poet, essayist, currently a Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Smithsonian Institution.

*Louis Farron*, Anthropologist, currently works at SUNY-Stonybrook, New York. Dr. Farron has studied and written extensively on the Mapuche and is familiar with their history and their society.

*Ximena Bunster*, Anthropologist, currently head of Women's Studies at Clark College, Worcester, Massachusetts. Dr. Bunster is Chilean and worked with the government of Salvador Allende on indigenous issues and policy.

*Robert Goldman*, Attorney, former Dean of the Washington School of Law, American University, member of the Board of Directors of the International Human Rights Law Group.

*Melillan Painemal*, Mapuche chief and a national officer of the Centros Culturales Mapuches. The Centros Culturales Mapuches were formed by the Mapuches in response to the military junta's 1978 decree-law abolishing their Mapuche identity and calling for the break-up of their lands. The Centros seek to give expression to the Mapuche interests, defense of their culture and their society.



Reading about Chilean history one receives the impression that the Mapuche Indians are but relics of the past having been totally "pacified" by the European conquerers and intermixed with them. In fact, today they number one million or approximately 10% of Chile's total population. They inhabit the southern regions of the country and maintain their own religion, culture and language: Mapudungun. About one half of the Mapuche population lives in urban centers and the other half on reservations or communal lands.

Mapuche means "people of the land." Mapuche customs, social organization, religion, and folklore are based on this belonging to the land. For those who inhabit the communal lands, their subsistence depends entirely on the cultivation of the land.

The Mapuche have always been relegated to the most marginal status within Chilean society. During the 1960's and early 1970's efforts were initiated to improve their situation and restore the dignity of their heritage and culture. The 1973 military coup completely reversed this process.

In March 1979, the military junta declared decree-law 2568 which calls for the "liquidation of the Indian communities," and dissolves those programs and institutions devoted to the promotion and protection of Indian interests. The stated intent of the law is to facilitate the development of the Indians through individual ownership of plots and their total integration into Chilean society as an ethnic minority. They are left to compete as equals within the Chilean economic system without appropriate tools to do so. A tax break is given to induce the divisions and a heavy retroactive tax is levied against the undivided land.

The Mapuche believe that the decree-law strikes at the very essence of their society. In response to the decree-law they formed the Centros Culturales Mapuche to organize the defense and promotion of their culture and their interests. The Centros currently number 1,540 involving approximately 500,000 Mapuches.

Laws similar to the Chilean decree have been considered in the U.S., Brazil, Canada, and Australia. The U.N. Human Rights Commission and the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have categorically criticized the decree-law manifesting concern for the survival of the Mapuche.

It is the hope of the sponsors that this symposium will contribute to the better comprehension of the basic needs and rights of indigenous peoples within the context of human rights and their advocacy.

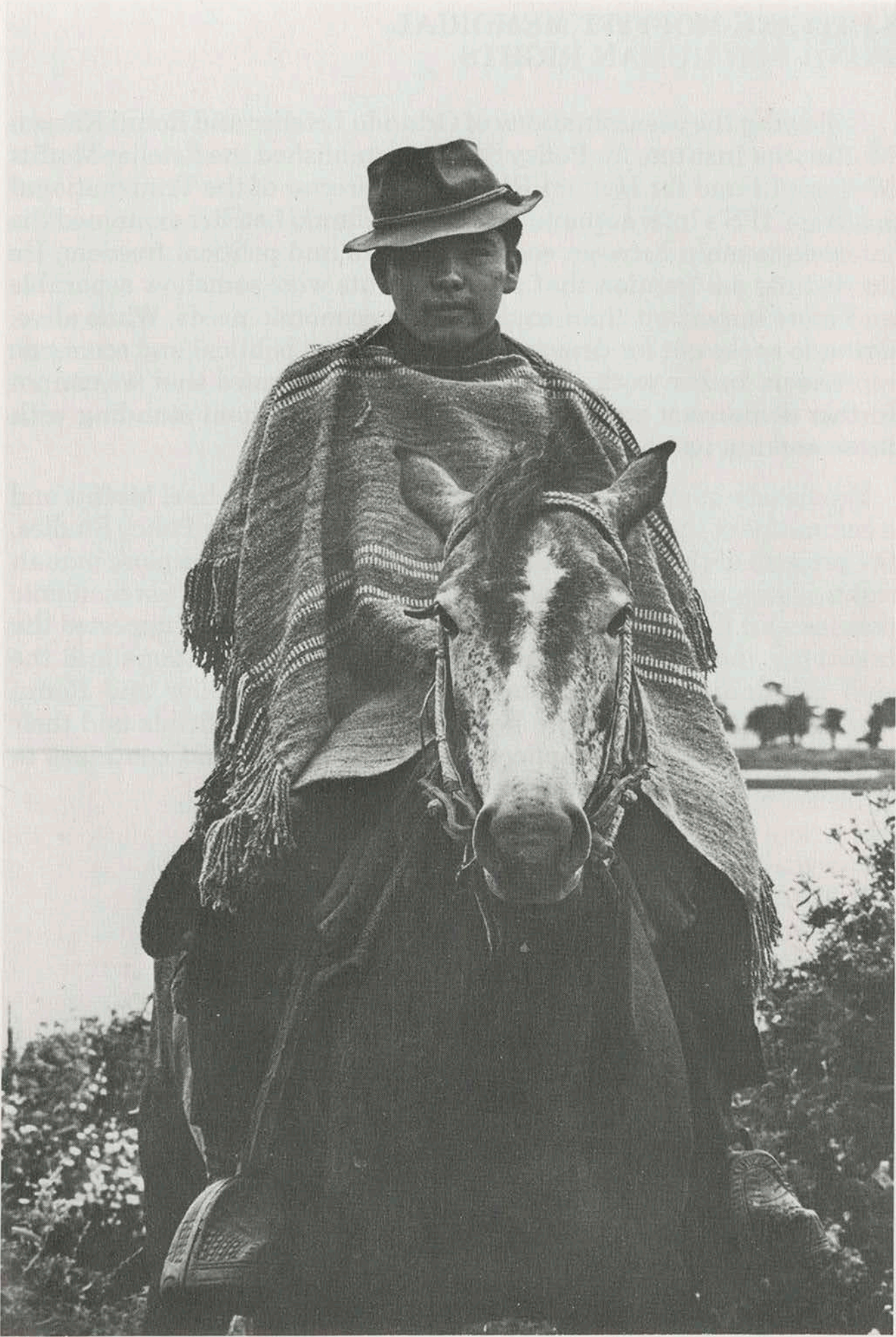


## LETELIER-MOFFITT MEMORIAL FUND FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Following the assassinations of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt, the Institute for Policy Studies established the Letelier-Moffitt Memorial Fund for Human Rights. As Director of the Transnational Institute, IPS's international program, Orlando Letelier examined the interrelationship between economic rights and political freedom. He decried the assumption that political rights were somehow separable and more important than basic human economic needs. While alive, Orlando spoke out for democracy, and against political and economic repression. In her work, Ronni Moffitt demonstrated that we cannot further democracy and equity in this country without standing with those seeking justice abroad.

Separately administered by Isabel Letelier and Michael Moffitt and a committee of the Board of Trustees of the Institute for Policy Studies, the projects of the tax-deductible Letelier-Moffitt Fund explore human rights issues, especially those involving the relation between economic policies and the denial of human rights. The fund has supported the Institute's independent investigation of the assassinations and the civil suit initiated by the families of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt, against the Republic of Chile, its officials and their anti-Castro Cuban accomplices. In addition, the Fund continues to investigate the issue of state-sponsored terrorism.







Isabel Letelier

## Human Ecology

The astonishing knowledge about our home planet Earth, that scientists have acquired up to this century, makes us feel very often that our world has suddenly shrunk and become too small and limited, not only in resources but also in horizons.

How to preserve our planet's natural balance so we, the rapacious human race, can survive, has become the task of ecologists. But how to defend the human species from its unfortunate inclination towards self-destruction, how to protect their rights so they can enjoy a rich and beautiful life in this planet is a question that still remains unanswered.

The human rights issue has been undertaken by a great variety of scholars, international agencies, politicians, churches and community activists and perhaps some day it will be considered a science and not just a trend or a naive occupation.

Learning about human rights violations is always a shocking experience: torture, killings, rapes, genocide, racism, censorship, etc. are components of its basic 'ABC's. These words make some people shudder, for some others they are part of their everyday lives.

Repressive governments which proliferate in our continent are the most obvious violators of human rights. However, they are not the only ones, and any student of human rights will realize that all human rights have been violated since this continent was so-called "discovered." The most ancient victims of these violations are the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the native peoples of this continent, the first Americans.

Since the conquerors came, whether they spoke English or Spanish or Portuguese, the native voices have been denouncing the pillage of their continent. On reading Columbus' description of the first Indian he encountered, we get a feeling for the mood of the relationship:

"As soon as I arrived in the Indies on the first island which I found, I took some of the natives by force in order that they might learn and might give me information of whatever there is in these parts. At



present, those I bring with me are still of the opinion that I come from heaven.”

Sitting Bull did not share his opinion, and he said at the Powder River Council:

“Hear me people, we have now to deal with another race—small and feeble when our fathers met them, but now great and overbearing. Strangely enough they have a mind to till the soil and the love of possession is a disease with them. These people have made many rules that the rich may break but the poor may not. They take tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich and those who rule. They claim this mother of ours, the Earth, for their own, and fence their neighbors away; they deface her with their buildings and their refuse.”

Nor further to the south in Paraguay did the Pai Tavytera agree. They didn't understand the greediness of the white man, nor his rapacity. They could not understand the destruction of forests because as they said: “In the same way the body has hair, the land has trees. If the land becomes sick, a balance must be maintained.”

The organizers of this conference want to bring to you the voices of a people about which little is known in Washington. It's extremely difficult for them to be heard, as it is for any other native group. A week ago, a group of Native Americans took a long walk from San Francisco to Washington, trying to draw attention to their struggle for survival. They received very little response from the media and policy makers. It is important that this seminar take place in Washington. Academics, students, policy makers and international agencies that finance development projects should be given the opportunity to listen to these people that have dwelt for centuries in lands where development projects are being undertaken.

I would like to end by quoting Chief Joseph from the Nez Pierce Tribe:

“I have heard talk and talk but nothing is done. Good words do not last long unless they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people, they do not pay for my country, now overrun by white men. They do not protect my father's grave, they do not pay for my horses and cattle. I'm tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sink when I remember all the good words and all the broken promises. There has been too much talking by men who had no right to talk.”

The Mapuche say, put us on the map, consider our existence in your development projects, put us on your human rights agenda.



**Ariel Dorfman**

## Cultural Survival

I would like you to take a typical map of the world. The one that you happen to have in your minds at this moment. Let its image flash on for a second. We tend to think that this is the way our planet really is, although it is in fact a fabrication, a way in which we look at and project our land and sea. The North is above and the South is below. Which means, that if you turn the globe on its head, which is what happens constantly in rotation and physical terms, you would not be able to read the names on the map. They would be upside down. We have come to think of the world in that way, as something natural and fixed forever. Seen from the North, from above.

Today's topic needs, I believe, a similar mental operation to be understood. We must ask ourselves what visions, predetermined views, we hold of the indigenous populations, of the vast minorities which live in Chile, in Latin America, and other continents; how do we look at them in everyday terms. Take that view of those who have been called Indians, and turn that look upside down, inside out, tear the inner lining from that view, and try to see the world from below, from the eyes of the oppressed, from the skin of those who have been defined, in practice, and very often in official and unofficial speeches, as outside humanity, not meriting the same attention and rights as other people who have been born on this planet.

Let me confess that I have been one of those who felt that way; not wanting to be so, not even knowing it. Twenty years ago, I was taught, and before that, yes, I had been taught forever, and repeated my lesson to others, that there were hardly any Indians left in Chile. Perhaps two hundred thousand or so, I would say carelessly, not knowing until much later that the figure is closer to a million, one tenth of the population. The years since then have changed things, but not very much. Not enough. We are ignorant about this question, even among people who have burning social interests and spend their life struggling for a just society. Because racism is deep in the system and in the air, and we



breathe, make a living, and do not realize the nearby suffering. We have only a vague idea about how the people who were once the owners of our land ever lived and how they now survive.

We are now more interested and care more. Besides the fact that there is worldwide attention being given to these issues, and that liberation struggles have opened many eyes and many hearts to help reinterpret history, in Chile at least, very important reasons have pinpointed this new understanding. One is the Allende government, which not only tried to solve some of the deepset difficulties with an agrarian reform and serious legislation for the indigenous population, but which created a national awareness, through raising the consciousness of all those who worked, that the Mapuches must be treated as people. And the other experience is, conversely, that of the Pinochet government, which, bizarre as it may seem, began treating most Chileans as if they were Indians, doing what a conquering army does to the native inhabitants. Indeed, what the Mapuches have been suffering for centuries is what the majority of the country is suffering today. We are all, let me say, Indians.

But of course, those who have always been indigenous, who belong to the Mapuche ethos, are treated, in this situation, infinitely worse than all the rest of their brothers and sisters.

In that sense, the manner in which a government treats its minorities, and specifically its indigenous population, is a good way of finding out, of sounding out, what it dreams—or should we say nightmares—what it dreams of doing, what it would like to do to other oppressed groups in society, the oppressed majority. It is also a good way of examining the relationship of those who rule to the past. Because those in power generally will want to disguise and sweep away from the horizon of memory those remnants of the original inhabitants who have not previously been eliminated by force.

The last law in Chile, number 2568, which will be analyzed extensively by the other speakers, is part of a conscious, calculated plan to liquidate the Mapuche problem, once and for all. This use of the word “problem” is, in itself, interesting. They are a problem because the national security doctrine deems a country to be militarily secure if it has a homogeneous population and culture. They are a problem because in the center of their capacity for survival is a different set of values from that of the consumer society and multinational business. They are a problem because there is no place for them in a country which is integrating into the world market with TV serials and advertisements; no place for people who find the land and the trees sacred and the mountains a living ritual and who practice solidarity

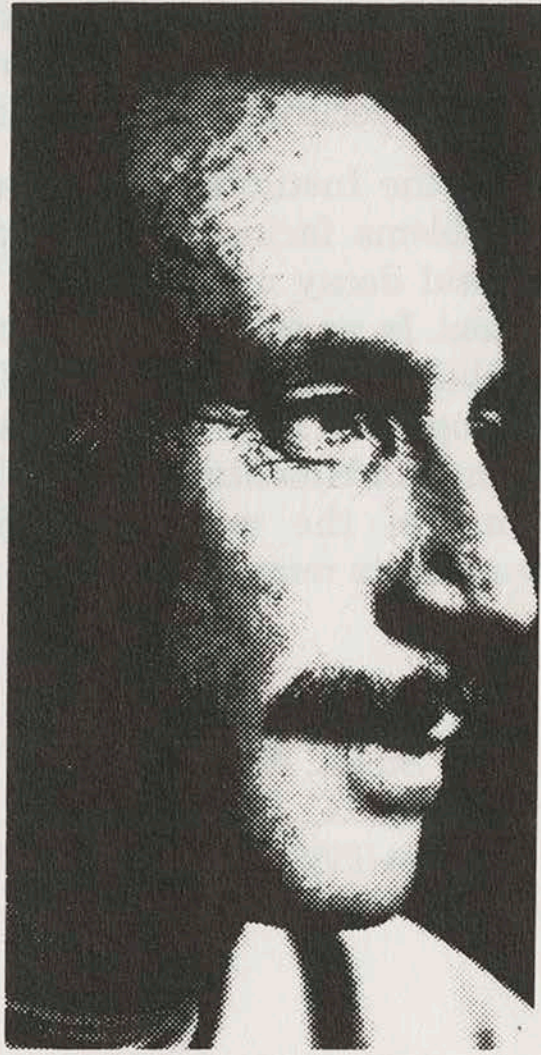


# ASSASSINATION ON EMBASSY ROW

BY JOHN DINGES & SAUL LANDAU

On September 21, 1976, a booby-trapped car exploded on Washington's Embassy Row, killing two of its three occupants, Orlando Letelier, former Chilean ambassador, and 25-year-old Ronni Moffitt. The FBI crowned a slow-moving investigation with the uncovering of Michael Townley, expatriate American born in Waterloo, Iowa, professional assassin for Chile's secret police. Townley turned star witness for the prosecution. Two Cuban exiles were convicted for the murders. The head and two officials of Chile's secret police were indicted but not extradited to stand trial. The author-investigators present a stunningly authentic and spell-binding reconstruction of the sinister chain of events that allowed a "friendly" foreign government to stage an unparalleled act of

(continued on front flap)



## **Assassination on Embassy Row** **By John Dinges and Saul Landau**

A devastating political document that probes all aspects of the Letelier-Moffitt assassinations, interweaving the investigations of the murder by the FBI and the Institute. The story surpasses the most sophisticated fiction in depth of characterization at the same time that it raises serious and tantalizing questions about the response of American intelligence and foreign policy to international terrorism. \$14.95.