

# Henry George Newsletter

High School Edition



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## Indigenous Peoples & Cultural Survival

Over the past two centuries, there have been many attempts by developed countries to help modernize indigenous peoples in various parts of the world. The attempts have ranged from the mission work of different western churches to the offering of charity by well intentioned non-governmental organizations.

Frequently such attempts at modernization have had a negative impact on those cultures; indigenous peoples are often culturally and even, at times, physically dislocated in the process, giving up their traditional ways of life for the dubious benefits of being brought into the modern world.

In the latter part of the 20th century, the term "development" has become an accepted way of referring to this modernization process. Whichever term is used, the motivating factor for the modernizing of indigenous peoples is usually one of acquiring those peoples' natural resources and turning the people themselves into sharecroppers on their own land. The modernization process is often colonialism in a different guise.

Within the last 10 years, however, there has been a growing awareness among first-world countries and international corporations, that development need not mean that the people who are to be "developed" must give up either their identities or their traditional ways of life. An institution like the World Bank, which provides the funding for many third-world development projects, has even come up with indigenous development plans that recognize the importance of indigenous peoples actively participating in their own development process. Indigenous peoples are also creating their own development plans and there is a growing movement among peoples around the world to participate in and guide their own entry into the modern world. One such plan for development is the *Plan de Vida* (Plan of Life) which is being initiated by the Guambiano people of Colombia. This plan seeks to both secure basic human rights and preserve the traditional lifestyle of the Guambiano people.

This article can be used with the Land & Freedom World History series, lesson # 12 *Land Ownership in Latin America* and Economic Studies lesson #3, *Economic Systems*.



*World Indigenous Peoples' Day Celebration*

## New Marketing Plan for the Airwaves

The public airwaves are as much a natural resource as the soil in which farmers grow their crops or the plot of land that landowners use to create new real estate holdings. Indeed, brand-new frequencies being relinquished for use by the F.C.C. (Federal Communications Commission) are considered by the communications industry as prime "beachfront property."

The F.C.C. is releasing the new frequencies because, with the growing use of cellphones, pagers, satellite services and other wireless devices, the airwaves are becoming ever more congested.

The idea is that frequencies, even "slices" of frequencies that are little used - for instance parts of a spectrum normally used by public safety groups - can be auctioned off by the leasees of that spectrum - to the highest bidder. Much like real estate or the commodities exchanges, this will create a speculative market. People may be trading in spectrum futures before too long. Use this article with Economics Studies # 7, *Supply and Demand* and #8, *Markets and Prices*.



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# 'Plan of Life' - Indigenous Peoples & Cultural Survival

by Bastian Hermission

Frequently, for indigenous peoples, "development" has meant the giving up of native traditions and culture in favor of some outside group's idea of "modernization." The outside group's intentions are usually the usurpation of the indigenous people's land and natural resources and "modernization" comes to mean that the native peoples become wage-workers on their own land, for the benefit of a large, often international, corporation.

Recently, within the last ten years, much of this has been changing, as governments and world bodies come to recognize that modernization and development need not mean the giving up of a centuries-old form of life. Institutions such as the World Bank even have indigenous development plans that not only acknowledge the right of native peoples to their own culture, but also stress the importance of their participation in development efforts. Ethnicity and culture are no longer seen as obstacles to development.

However, the notion still persists that development is something that comes from outside. Indigenous peoples might be consulted on what is to be achieved, they may even become part of the planning, but the development initiative is left to the world outside their communities.

This notion of development is being seriously challenged in at least one part of the world; a new indigenous development movement has begun in the South American country of Colombia, where a number of native communities are participating in something called Plan de Vida (Plan of Life).

The economic and organizational framework for Plan de Vida was provided by the new Political Constitution of Columbia of 1991,

which enacted a number of laws recognizing and protecting the rights of native peoples and granting them a considerable degree of autonomy. A section of the Constitution states that indigenous communities may conduct their own development "in accordance with their cultural and social systems." The communities receive yearly funding from the national government and are allowed to design their own independent, complex and long-term developments plans.

The new constitution incorporates such principles as:

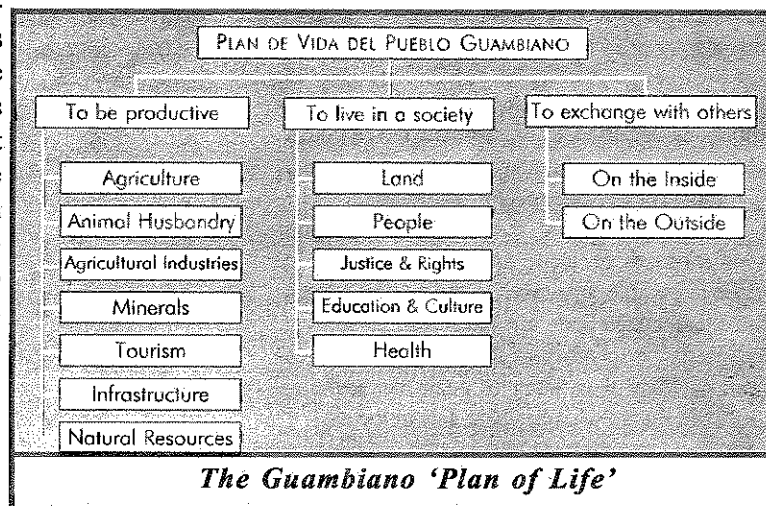
- The right to an identity as an indigenous people, which involves the right to be different, and thus free from discrimina-

interact with the broader national development of the country.

The concept of a 'plan of life' was first conceived by the Guambiano, an indigenous group living in the Cauca region of Colombia. The Guambiano had already started to work on a long-term development plan as far back as 1987, four years before the new constitution went into effect. This was due in part to their dissatisfaction with the existing structures that governed the interactions between native peoples and the Colombian society at large. For the Guambiano, Plan de Vida suggests more than just a plan for economic and social development. Its central motive is not adaptation to the Western world, but the preservation and renewal of their way of life. They realize a need to adapt to the outside, but on their own

terms. A statement they released in founding their Plan de Vida reads, in part: "As Guambianos we are aware that we are not an island...we need to have links with other groups and we need science and and other new things to help solve our problems. Autonomy for us is the right to direct and guide, to manage, to decide and freely determine our internal communal life in all aspects: economic, social, political, cultural and ecological, by means of the sovereign participation of our people."

*Adapted from Cultural Survival Quarterly*



tion in their relations with the State and society at large

- The right to sufficient territory to reproduce culturally as a people
- The right to autonomy in the various spheres of life as a people – government, justice, education, health and social and economic production
- The right to define the future development of their own culture, the quality of life and the ways in which they wish to

social, political, cultural and ecological, by means of the sovereign participation of our people."

## Questions:

1. What is meant by "indigenous" peoples?
2. Why is land so important to them?
3. Describe the Guambiano 'Plan of Life.'
4. What groups in our country's history have demanded the freedom of self determination?

# F.C.C. Promoting New Market for Airwaves

by Stephen Labaton

As the airwaves grow ever more congested with modern wireless communications, the federal government is developing plans to open up the spectrum by in effect treating its frequencies as commodities to be bought and sold as routinely as pork bellies or soybeans on the open market.

Officials at the Federal Communications Commission say they are preparing rules that would create a trading system in which telecommunications companies of all kinds, from old-fashioned radio stations and telephone companies to purveyors of wireless Internet services could bid for underused slivers of the spectrum that are already under the control of other companies.

It would be a radical overhaul of the rules governing one of the most valuable, if intangible, forms of property in the new economy: the rights to transmit electronic signals at specific radio frequencies that constitute the spectrum. It would also have profound implications, not only for the telecommunications industries but for consumers as well.

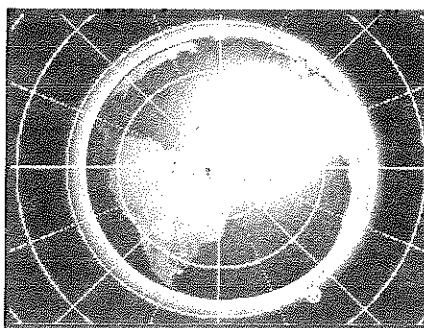
Under the current system, the federal government licenses each user and regulates what frequencies and signal power can be used. Most times these rights have been sold to the industry, although the oldest license holders got them free. But they have never been bought and sold in a secondary market like so many bushels of grain.

With the proliferation of cell phones, pagers, satellite services and other wireless devices, the communications agency's top officials have warned that demand is so outstripping supply that it may lead to what they call a spectrum drought, making the scarce spectrum even more valuable to haves and have-nots alike.

Now, for instance, the agency reports that the volume of traffic on the Internet is doubling every 100 days, a stunning increase considering that telephone traffic has tradi-

tionally risen about 5 percent a year. As consumers increasingly reach the Internet through wireless connections, like cell phones and handheld computers, experts fear the heavy use of the airwaves will begin to create bottlenecks and interference that could greatly frustrate the further development of the technology.

"What a tragedy it would be if, right as we're on the verge of the Internet migrating to inexpensive handheld devices and offering real hopes of truly democratizing the technology, the movement would be stymied by overloading the spectrum," William E. Kennard, the chairman of the Federal



Communications Commission, said in an interview.

Mr. Kennard, who has been pushing the agency to consider what rules need to be changed to help deregulate the spectrum to foster a new market, said the F.C.C. was just beginning to enable the licensees who own the rights to a given slice of the spectrum to make money from any surplus they have, like parts of the airwaves they may not be using 24 hours each day.

In a little-noticed announcement last month, the F.C.C. released rules for an auction this spring of a slice of the spectrum used by public safety organizations, including police departments and hospitals, as well as railroads.

Described by Mr. Kennard as "putting our toe in the water," the rules will reserve some of the frequencies to be auctioned to "guard band managers." They would be able to lease and trade the frequencies they win at the auction to commercial companies or private wireless users, setting up a system

that opens the door to brokers who could help match buyers with sellers.

*These frequencies are considered beachfront property by the industry and can be used for a variety of technologies.*

Another auction this year for even more valuable frequencies, those being vacated by broadcasters as they convert to digital television, is also being prepared in a way intended to encourage new spot markets. These frequencies, considered beachfront property by the industry, can be used for a variety of technologies beyond television, including cell phone and Internet communications.

If the idea works, the trading of spectrum futures could benefit the telecommunications companies that own licenses and other companies that cannot function without obtaining access to the airwaves. And consumers, in theory, would benefit from more capable communications devices and cheaper bills.

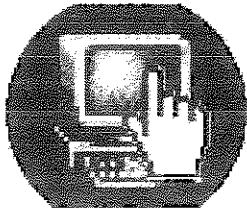
Just as the trade in physical commodities allows farmers to hedge against abrupt swings in price and enables consumers to count on steady supplies, economists and communications experts say a new approach that treated scarce frequencies as a commodity would allow new and older technologies to continue to flourish. "There is a severe spectrum shortage," said Mr. Kennard, "and consumers want better services."

-reprinted from the NY Times

## Questions:

1. How are the airwaves like other natural resources?
2. Why are some spectrums compared to beachfront property?
3. Why is there more congestion on the airwaves?
4. In a market, if demand is greater than supply - what usually happens?

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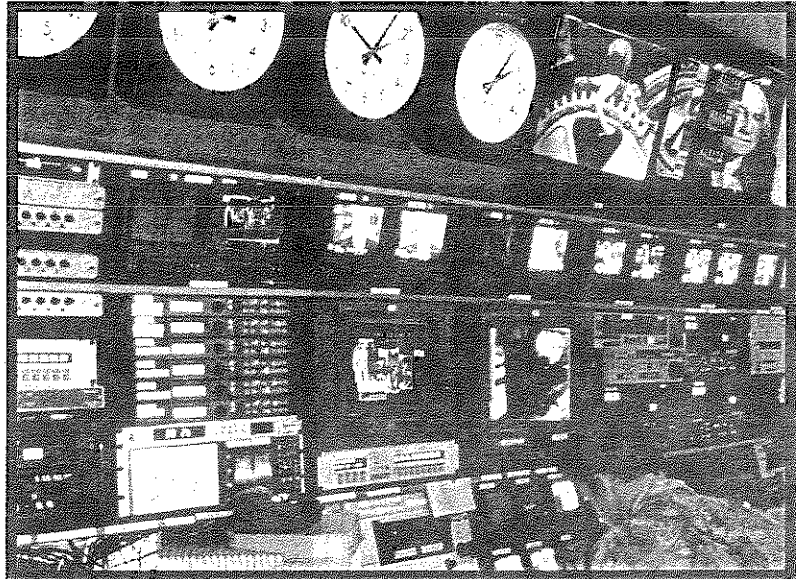
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