

TALK¹ Delivered AT THE CONFERENCE ON INTERAMERICAN STUDENT PROJECTS

by Mon. Ivan Illich, (Cuernavaca²) April 20, 1968.

In the conversations which I have had today, I was impressed by two things, and I want to state them before I launch into my prepared talk.

I was impressed by your insight that the motivation of US volunteers overseas springs mostly from very alienated feelings and concepts. I was equally impressed, by what I interpret as a step forward among would be volunteers like you: openness to the idea that the only thing you can legitimately volunteer for in Latin America might be voluntary powerlessness, voluntary presence as receivers, as such, as hopefully beloved or adopted ones without any way of returning the gift.

I was equally impressed by the hypocrisy of most of you: by the hypocrisy of the atmosphere prevailing here. I say this as a brother speaking to brothers and sisters. I say it against many resistances within me; but it must be said. Your very insight, your very openness to evaluations of past programs make you hypocrites because you — or at least most of you — are decided to spend this next summer in Mexico, and therefore, you are unwilling to go far enough in your reappraisal of your program. You close your eyes because you want to go ahead and could not do so if you looked at some facts.

It is quite possible that this hypocrisy be unconscious in most of you not in all, of this I am very certain. Intellectually, you are ready to see that the motivations which could legitimate volunteer action overseas in 1963³ cannot

¹ This talk was delivered on the evening of Saturday April 20 at St. Mary's Lake of the Woods Seminary in Niles (Chicago) Illinois. Monsignor Illich was invited to make a presentation to the American Midwest Regional Meeting of CIASP (The Conference on Interamerican Student Projects). The Conference had an especially strong line-up of speakers and it was opened to all other regions of CIASP (all US regions and Canada) as well as the public.

This text version of the speech was scanned from an original mimeograph distributed to Conference participants on the following day. The document was typed version of Monsignor Illich's speech. This original document was not edited and this document is reflects the exact wording and punctuation used by Illich.

I have an audio tape of this talk and it did not stray from the remarks represented in this scanned version.

² Monsignor Illich had prepared a speech in Cuernavaca before travelling to Chicago; he added introductory remarks after an afternoon attending sessions and meeting with CIASP members. He drafted a quick introduction to the original presentation and modified the written presentation. The entire speech is usually cited as being given in Cuernavaca Mexico...but it was delivered in Chicago on April 20.

³ By all accounts, CIASP was formally established in Mexico City in 1963 with strong support from Father Placido Reitmeier and the Maryknoll Order. It emerged out of California group called Amigos Anonymous. CIASP was established as a

be invoked for the same action in 1968/69. "Mission—vacations" among poor Mexicans were "the thing" to do for well off US students earlier in this decade : sentimental concern for newly—discovered poverty south of the border combined with total blindness to much worse poverty at home justified such benevolent excursions. Intellectual insight into the difficulties of fruitful volunteer action had not sobered the spirit of Peace Corps, Papal and Self—Styled Volunteers.

Today, the existence of organizations like yours is offensive to Mexico. I wanted to make this statement in order to explain why I feel sick about it all and in order to make you aware that good intentions have not much to do with what we are discussing here. To hell with good intentions. This is a theological statement. You will not help anybody by your good intentions. There is an Irish saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions: this sums up the same theological insight.

I would prepare my statement differently, particularly in style, had I had those five hours of conversation with you. I would have made it less harsh and even more definitive. I cannot change now because my control of English is not good enough to keep my statement understandable if I change it while reading it.

Before I prepared this statement, I wanted to say something more. In the course of this day I came to believe in the survival of CIASP. On coming here I considered it my duty to continue my efforts toward getting you. out of business. I now see that too much money, too many vested interests, too many illusions back CIASP to allow this organization to disappear. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves: what to do with CIASP —since it cannot die.

I have reached the conclusion that, quite conceivably, there are a few people who could profit from the experience of the past years of CIASP and develop some kind of educational agency which makes it possible for North American students to live in Mexico. By live, I mean "Live" with a capital "L"; live in the biblical sense in Mexico for a month, fully aware of the limitations of such an experience, of the danger of narcissistic illusions in such a short encounter and yet to LIVE there.

university-student directed organization; 4 regional organizations in the United States elected directors and a national board was elected by these regions.

The Canadian wing of CIASP developed parallel to the American organization and shared resources with the American organization. The Canadian group first appeared at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. Canadian CIASP used some of the American Training Material and also provided an orientation for CIASP volunteers in Mexico City. This was organized by the Mexican Office of CIASP. In 1967, A Canadian was the director of the Mexican Office.

Canadian members of CIASP were observers at the conference on April 20, 1968. Illich later travelled to Toronto several times and had contact with CIASP members during visits to St. Michael's College. Several of his visits to Toronto was to be interviewed on CBC. These tapes are still available for purchase from CBC radio.

I have no evidence that CIASP as a whole should or could serve this purpose in the future because it might be too much marked by the sins of its origin, which are not recognized as sins by you, but rather considered as simple shortcomings. I do not think that real conversion is possible unless one says: "I was not mistaken, I was wrong. I let myself be led into the organization and to the first structure of CIASP by my deep rooted pride, belief in my superiority, my conviction that I had something to give." I do not believe that such conversion is possible for a whole organization, but I do believe that it is possible for a few individuals.

Some of you might still profit from the past experience in and through CIASP. The very frustration and humiliation which participation in CIASP programs might have meant for you, could lead you to new awareness: the awareness that even North Americans can receive the gift of hospitality without the slightest ability to pay for it; the awareness that for some gifts one cannot even say "thank you."

Now to my prepared statement.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the past six years I have become known for my increasing opposition to the presence of any and all North American "do—gooders" in Latin America. I am sure you know of my present efforts to obtain the voluntary withdrawal of all North American volunteer armies from Latin America — missionaries, Peace Corps members and groups like yours, A "division" organized for the benevolent invasion of Mexico. You were aware of these things when you invited me — of all people— to be the main speaker of you annual convention⁴. This is amazing! I can only conclude that your invitation means one of at least three things:

Some among you might have reached the conclusion that CIASP should either dissolve altogether, or take the promotion of voluntary aid to the Mexican poor out of it institutional purpose. Therefore you might have invited me here to help the others reach this same decision.

You might also have invited me because you want to learn how to deal with people who think the way I do — how to dispute with them successfully, and how to refute them. It has now become quite common to invite Black Power spokesmen to address Lions Clubs. A "dove" must always be included in a public dispute organized to increase U.S. belligerence.

And finally, you might have invited me here hoping that you would be able to agree with most of what I say, and then go ahead in good faith and work this

⁴ CIASP made contact with Monsignor Illich in Cuernavaca Mexico. Several members of CIASP leadership visited his institute (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca for informal meetings and to attend some of the sessions that were organized there in 1967. The major contact was with Mr. Larry Grimes who was the institute's registrar (...he used the pseudonym Esperanza Godot) on the institute literature.

summer in Mexican villages. This last possibility only open to those who do not listen, or who cannot understand me.

I did not come here to argue. I am here to tell you, if possible to convince you, and hopefully, to stop you, from pretentiously imposing yourselves on Mexicans.

I do have deep faith in the enormous good will of the U.S. volunteer. However, his good faith can usually be explained only by an abysmal lack of intuitive delicacy. By definition, you cannot help being ultimately vacationing salesmen for the middleclass "American way of Life," since that is really the only life you know.

A group like this could not have developed unless a mood in the United States had supported it — the belief that any true American must share God's blessings with his poorer fellow men⁵. The idea that every American has something to give, and at all times may, can and should give it, explains why it occurred to students that they could help Mexican peasants "developing" by spending a few months in their villages.

Of course, this surprising conviction was supported by members of a Missionary order, who would have no reason to exist unless they had the same conviction except a much stronger one. It is now high time to cure yourselves of this. You, like the values you carry, are the products of an American society of achievers and consumers with its two party system, its universal schooling, and its Family car affluency. You are ultimately —consciously or unconsciously salesmen for a delusive ballet in the ideals of democracy, equal opportunity and free enterprise among people who haven't the possibility of profiting from these.

Next to money and guns, the third largest North American export is the U.S. idealist, who turns up in every theatre of the world: the teacher, the volunteer, the missionary, the community organizer, the economic developer, and the vacationing do-gooder. Ideally, these people define their role as service. Actually, they frequently wind up alleviating the carnage done by money and weapons, or seducing the "underdeveloped" to the benefits of the world of affluence and achievement. Perhaps this is the moment to instead bring home to the people of the U.S. the knowledge that the way of life they have chosen simply is not alive enough to be shared.

By now it should be evident to all America that the U.S. is engaged in a tremendous struggle to survive. The U.S cannot survive if the rest of the world is not convinced that here we have Heaven on Earth. The survival of the U.S. depends on the acceptance by all so called "free" men that the U.S. middle

⁵ Many of the members of CIASP were seminarians, but in many ways the organization was much more secular than it has been described by Illich. I would agree that the group could be accused of being colonialist, but the religious overtones suggested by Illich are not a fair description of either the Canadian organization nor the American CIASP.

class as "made it". The U.S. way of life has become a religion which must be accepted by all those who do not want to die by the sword — or napalm. All over the globe the U.S. is fighting to protect and develop at least a minority who consumes what the U.S. majority can afford. Such is the purpose of the Alliance for Progress of the middle classes which the U.S. signed with Latin America some years ago. But increasingly this commercial alliance must be protected by weapons which allow the minority who can "make it" to protect their acquisitions and achievements•

But weapons are not enough to permit minority rule. The marginal masses become rambunctious unless they are given a "Creed" or belief which explains the status quo. This task is given to "the U.S. volunteer — whether he be a member of CIASP or a worker in the so called Pacification Programs" in Viet Nam.

The United States is currently engaged in a three—front struggle to affirm its ideals of acquisitive and achievement oriented "Democracy". I say "three" fronts, because three great areas of the world are challenging the validity of a political and social system which makes the rich ever richer, and the poor increasingly marginal to that system.

In Asia, the U.S. is threatened by an established power — China. The U.S. opposes China with three weapons: the tiny Asian elites who could not have it any better than in an alliance with the United States; a huge war machine to stop the Chinese from "taking over"— as it is usually put in this country, and; forcible re-education of the so called "pacified peoples". All three of these efforts seem to be failing.

In Chicago, poverty funds, the police force and preachers seem to be no more successful in their efforts to check the unwillingness of the black community to wait for graceful integration into the system.

And finally, in Latin America the Alliance for Progress has been quite successful in increasing the number of people who could not be better off — meaning the tiny, middleclass elites— and has created ideal conditions for military dictatorships. The dictators were formerly at the service of the plantation owners, but now they protect the new industrial complexes. And finally, you come to help the underdog accept his destiny within the process!

All you will do in a Mexican village is create disorder. At best, you can try to convince Mexican girls that they should marry a young: man who is self made, rich, a consumer and as disrespectful of tradition as one of you. At worst, in your community development spirit you might create just enough problems to get someone shot after your vacation ends and you rush back to your middle class neighborhoods where your friends make jokes about spics and "wetbacks"...

You start on your task without any training. Even the Peace Corps spends around \$10, 000 on each corpsman to help him to adapt to his new environment and to guard him against culture shock. How odd that nobody

ever thought about spending money to educate poor Mexicans in order to prevent them from the culture—shock of meeting you!

In fact, you cannot even meet the majority which you pretend to serve in Latin America— even if you could speak their language, which most of you cannot. You can only dialogue with those like you — Latin American imitations of the North American middle class. There is no way for you to really meet with the underprivileged, since there is no common ground whatsoever for you to meet on.

Let me explain this statement, and also let me explain why most Latin Americans with whom you might be able to communicate would disagree with me.

Suppose you went to a U.S. ghetto this summer and tried to help the poor there "help themselves. Very soon you would be either spit upon or laughed at. People offended by your pretentiousness would hit or spit. People who understand that your own bad consciences rush you to this gesture would laugh condescendingly. Soon you would be made aware of your irrelevance among the poor, of your status as middle class college students on a summer assignment. You would be roundly rejected, no matter if your skin is white — as most of your faces here are — or brown or black, as a few exceptions who got in here somehow.

Your reports about your work in Mexico, which you so kindly sent me, exude self complacency. Your reports on past summers prove that you are not even capable of understanding that your do—gooding in a Mexican village is even less relevant than it would be in a U.S. ghetto. Not only is there a gulf between what you have and what others have which is much greater than the one existing between you and the poor in your own country, but there is also a gulf between what you feel and what the Mexican people feel that is in comparably greater. This gulf is so great that in a Mexican village you, as White Americans (or cultural white Americans) can, and so, imagine yourselves exactly the way a white preacher saw himself when he offered his life preaching to the black slaves on a plantation in Alabama. The fact that you live in huts and eat tortillas for a few weeks render your well intentioned group only a bit more picturesque.

The only people with whom you can hope to communicate with are sons of the middle class. And here please remember that I said "some"— by which I mean a tiny elite in Latin America. You come from a country which industrialized early, and which succeeded in incorporating the great majority of its citizens into the middle classes. It is no social distinction in the U.S. to have graduated from the second year of college. Indeed, most Americans now do. Anybody in this country who did not finish high school is considered underprivileged.

In Latin America the situation is quite different. 75% of all people drop out of school before they reach the sixth grade of grammar school. Thus, people who have finished high school are members of a tiny minority. Then, a minority of

that minority goes on for university training. It is only among these people that you will find your educational equals.

At the same time, a middle class in the United States is the majority. In Mexico, it is a tiny elite. Seven years ago your country began and financed a so called "Alliance for Progress". This was an "Alliance" for the "Progress" of the middle class elites. Now, it is among the members of this middle class that you will find a few people who are willing to waste their time with you. And they are overwhelmingly those "nice kids" who would also like to soothe their troubled consciences by "doing something nice for the promotion of the poor Indians". Of course, when you and your middle class Mexican counterparts meet you will be told that you are doing something valuable, that you are "sacrificing" to help others.

And it will be the foreign priest who will especially confirm your self image for you. After all, his livelihood and sense of purpose depends on his firm belief in a year round mission which is of the same type as your summer vacation mission.

There exists the argument that some returned volunteer have gained insight into the damage they have done to others and have become maturer people. Yet, it is less frequently stated that most of them are ridiculously proud of their "summer sacrifices". Perhaps there is also something to the argument that young men should be promiscuous for awhile in order to find out that sexual love is most beautiful in a monogamous relationship. Or that the best way to leave LSD alone is to try it for awhile — or even that the best way of understanding that your help in the ghetto is neither needed nor wanted is to try, and fail. I do not agree with this argument. The damage which volunteers do willy—nilly is too high a price for the belated insight that they shouldn't have been volunteers in the first place.

Of course, for those of you who go in the full conscience that you are simply utilizing an organization to go on an expense paid vacation — and I'm sure that those are few in number — you will not understand such reasoning, since your first self admitted purpose is fraudulent,

If you have any sense of responsibility, at all, stay with your riots here at home. Work for the coming elections. McCarthy might lose. but certainly by campaigning for him you will know what you are doing, why you are doing it, and how to communicate with those to whom you speak. And you will know when you fail. If you insist on working with the poor, if this is your vocation, then at least work among the poor who can tell you to go to hell. It is incredibly unfair for you to impose yourselves on a village where you are so linguistically deaf and dumb that you don't even understand what you are doing, or what people think of you. And it is profoundly damaging to yourselves, when you define, something that you want to do as "good" a "sacrifice" and "help".

I am here to suggest that you voluntarily renounce exercising the power which being an American gives you. I am here to entreat you to freely, consciously and humbly give up the legal right you have to impose your benevolence on

Mexico. I am here to challenge you to recognize your inability, your powerlessness and your incapacity to do the “good” which you intended to do.

I am here to entreat you to use your money, your status and your education to travel in Latin America. Come to look, come to climb our mountains, to enjoy our flowers. Come to study. But do not come to help.

March 22, 1968

Dear Conference Applicant,

Welcome aboard! You're in for an exciting and profitable trip!

In the enclosed packet you will find the latest details on the upcoming CIASP Regional Conference. Included is the finalized schedule for the conference, a list of the seminar and workshop topics, a short paper by Joe Schneider giving his ideas on the purpose and development of the conference, a brief background of the speakers, registration forms, and as an extra bonus, a map to explain how to get to the conference. We ask you to look these things over carefully.

Now for the details:

SPEAKERS: Are definitely topnotch. Drs. John Kennedy and Samuel Shapiro from Notre Dame, Dr. Robert Evans of the Advisory Council on InterAmerican Affairs, and Rev. William Wipfler of the National Council of Churches are just a few. Perhaps the most controversial figures will be Monsignor Ivan Illich of the Center of Intercultural Documentation in Mexico and Father Blase Bonpane of recent Guatemalan fame.

SCHEDULE: Will be full, as you can see from the enclosed schedule.

In general the first day's talks and seminars will be aimed at an understanding of the current situation in Latin America, Sunday's workshops will be focusing on what our attitudes and response should be as committed students in the midst of crisis all around us. Each of the workshops will have student leader and one of the speakers as resource people. Saturday's seminars will be led by one of the speakers.

LOCATION: Is at St. Mary's of the Lake Seminary in Niles, Illinois (just outside of Chicago), The students have offered us dormitory space for about 170 people

WHO'S INVITED? All CIASPers, past and present. School leaders are again asked to notify alumni in their areas and to invite them. Naturally group advisors are included and other interested faculty members. And, because we want the conference to be as much of a DIALOG and TOTALIMMERSION EXPERIENCE as possible, we would ask you to invite Latin American students from your campuses to join us. This will not only give the new students some

firsthand contact with the Latin mind, but also greatly enrich our discussions with more of an ambiente latino

COST: Will be \$10 per applicant, This will include room, board, and all other incidental materials (believe us, this is the lowest price we could manage). Latin American foreign students will come (free) as guests of the conference (this is to show how important we feel they are), but, of course, any donation toward room and board will be graciously accepted!

Observers (faculty members and other interested students) are welcome at the conference for an admission price of \$3 This entitles them to hear all the major talks (excludes seminars and workshops). Meals will be \$1 each.

ACCOMODATIONS: There will be room for advisors to stay in the dormitories with the students if they wish (nuns may stay at the convent). Reservations may be made at a nearby motel for \$8 per night if preferred.

PUBLICITY You are encouraged to advertize the conference on your respective campuses, We want the conference to be an educational service to people in the area and hope to attract as many as possible. We will be sending publicity materials to each school, but remember that the most effective advertizing is you.

Talk up the conference, pass around the schedule, and invite your friends.

REGISTRATION: All registration for the conference participants must be done in advance of the conference. Registration includes indication of the seminar and workshop you would like to attend and payment of the \$10 fee, The absolute deadline for registration is Wednesday April 3 (if necessary, send special delivery). This is so paper relevant to your particular seminar can be sent to you before you go home for the Easter break. Since the seminars demand in indepth study of the problem, this advance preparation is essential., The early registration will also give us a chance to make the final preparations as exactly as possible,

A registration blank is included on the last page of this packet, Foreign students are asked to register as participants, indicating preferred seminars, etc, but, of course, no money is

necessary. Please register individually and as soon as possible, (We are providing an envelope for this purpose.)

Observers may register in advance (\$3) but may also register at the door. Because we want to keep the groups small, seminars and workshops will be open only to conference participants.

PREPARATION: Read as much as you can on Latin America, especially articles by the conference speakers, Talk over some of the current happenings in Latin America and see if you can't find parallels in the United States, Remember that, the more you bring to the conference, the more you can share. Good luck in your reading!

Hoping to see all of you at the conference; we guarantee it will be more than worth it.

Coordinating Committee,

Joe Schneider, Terry Smith, Gen Czepiel, Bill Larme

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

(A more complete list of the credentials of the speakers and seminar leaders will be published at a later date)

Bonpane, Rev. Blase, M.M. Catholic missionary to Guatemala, Holds Masters Degree in Latin American Affairs from Georgetown University, Worked with Latin American university students for one year in Guatemala City.

Evans, Dr., Robert Advisory Council on InterAmerican Affairs National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

Illich, Msgr. Ivan Director, Center for Intercultural Development (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, Vicar-General, Diocese of Cuernavaca

Kennedy, Dr. John Director, Program of Latin American Studies, University of Notre Dame, Indiana

Lucriccio, Toni Theology student, Sacred Heart Seminary, Plymouth, Michigan. Lawyer before entering the seminary, now active in civil rights and black power movements in Detroit.,

Mamalakis, Mareos Professor of Economics, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Monasterio, Dr, Xavier O. Instructor, Department of Philosophy, University of Dayton, Ohio

Saxe-Fernandez, John Instructor, Department of Sociology, Hofstra University, Hempsted, New York.

Shapiro, Dr. Samuel Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Notre Dame, Indiana, Acting third year as editor of CICOP Conference Report Author of Invisible Latin America.

Templin, Ralph T. Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio. Editor of the Journal of Human Relations Director of School of the Living, Suffern, New York, and School of Community Living, Yellow Springs, Ohio, Author of Democracy and Nonviolence.

Wipfler, Rev., William L, Assistant Director of the Latin American Department of the National Council of Churches Division of Overseas Ministry Episcopalian priest, eight years' experience in the Dominican Republic; two years in Costa Rica. Author of The Churches of the Dominican Republic.