

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Moscow loves Brazil

Gorbachov has personally extended a hand to Brazil's pragmatic leadership, the centerpiece of a broader plan.

The Soviets are making their biggest diplomatic play ever toward Ibero-America, with Brazil a key element in the scenario. General-Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov is building for a triumphal tour next year of Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico, among others, the first time a top Kremlin leader has ever been in what are considered major countries of the United States' "back yard."

At the United Nations on Sept. 24, the Soviet and Brazilian foreign ministers reached a geopolitical agreement to support Brazil's call for a demilitarized South Atlantic. Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze formally invited Brazilian President José Sarney to visit Moscow later this year, hard on the heels of Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín. Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid holds a similar invitation.

"In just a few months, we have progressed further" in our relations with Brazil than in many years, was the evaluation of Soviet Ambassador Vladimir Chernichov, during an audience granted by President Sarney in May.

As opposed to the rumors spread by the press organs of the Sun Myung Moon sect and by the British intelligence services, which say that Peruvian President Alan García is being wooed by the Kremlin, the reality is that a heady romance is taking place between the Brazilian Foreign Relations Ministry (Itamaraty) and its Muscovite counterpart.

In particular, the commerce department of Itamaraty, in charge of

designing Brazil's foreign-trade policies, is responsible for the new "broad political and economic understandings" that have been struck with the U.S.S.R., Cuba, and China.

The degree of understanding that now exists between Brazil and the U.S.S.R. is exactly as the now ambassador Chernichov stated it. In sharp contrast to the insulting treatment offered Sarney during his recent state visit to Washington, the Gorbachov government has leaned over backward to prevent any friction with Brazil's government.

Itamaraty is similarly protecting its "Soviet card" from behind-the-scenes efforts to spoil it, by Brazilian military factions still sympathetic to the Western Alliance. It is using the experience gained in protecting the sale of arms and industrial equipment to Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The U.S.S.R. has delineated three facets of a scenario for bilateral cooperation with the South American giant:

- 1) Sell Soviet technology to Brazilian companies;
- 2) Create associations for utilizing Soviet and/or Brazilian technology, as per the needs of either partner; and
- 3) Seek partners with tropical experience to manage projects in third countries, especially African nations allied with the Soviet Union.

The Soviets mounted their "High Tech/86" industrial exposition here in September. The Brazilians are so skeptical of Soviet technology that the Russians offered some of it for free. Gorbachov, in fact, is much more in-

terested in being able to employ modern Brazilian technology, especially in the electronics and computer industries, to salvage his depleted consumer goods industry. His plan, ironically, is aided by Washington's pressures on Brazil to produce U.S. computers, such as the state-of-the-art VAX.

Concrete deals with Brazil in the area of telecommunications and certain areas of the computer industry are already in the works. Of course, Brazil's role as a nation of abundant strategic mineral reserves has not been ignored. The Soviets have just closed a deal to obtain manganese, a requirement for the production of specialty steels.

Meanwhile, both countries are exchanging caravans of businessmen seeking trade deals. One of the more prominent ones took place in July, when the head of the Brazilian bankers' association, Theophilo Azeredo, imitated Occidental Petroleum's Moscow-loving Armand Hammer and headed a delegation of Brazilian industrialists, who enjoyed the distinction of personally meeting with Gorbachov.

In view of all this, it is not so strange that there exists a tacit agreement between Soviet imperial diplomacy and the U.S. State Department regarding policy toward Brazil. In the past few months, each of the "powers" has sought a "special relationship" with Brazil, manipulating the giant nation's pragmatism in hope of pulling it toward its own strategic objectives.

There is no real conflict between the State Department and the Soviets in this. While the former seeks a "hemispheric agreement" with Brazil, Russian diplomacy is procuring a more practical de facto alliance that will guarantee Brazilian backup for its imperialist plans in Africa, including control of the world's primary strategic minerals.