

## Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

### The battle for nuclear energy

*The 'green' element inside the Collor government is coming face to face with the pro-nuclear Army.*

On Sept. 30, the Brazilian daily *O Globo* published key parts of a confidential report containing the conclusions reached by the working group of the new National Nuclear Energy Program (Pronen) and presented to President Fernando Collor de Mello. If its recommendations are carried out, it would place Brazil on the level of those nations which already control nuclear fission technology, thus conquering a key aspect of its long-pursued technological sovereignty.

Brazil has historically been a developing-sector leader in the nuclear field. According to highly placed sources in Brasilia, it was a sector of the Armed Forces which decided to leak the Pronen report, as a way of giving public voice to the goals it defends, and which clash with the environmentalist orientation of President Collor and members of his cabinet. Thus, everything suggests that a serious clash between these sectors is pending.

"The scientific and technological legitimacy of Brazilian nuclear activities should be backed by social and political legitimacy. Otherwise, resistance to nuclear energy could, in the future, paradoxically restrict our society's access to better living standards for lack of an energy alternative," declares the report concerning the absolute necessity of accelerating the transition from the current "hydroelectric" model of energy generation to a "nuclear thermoelectric" model between the years 2000 and 2010.

The report also recommends that such nucleo-electric requirements be

satisfied "preferentially, by means of nationally produced reactors," and that the construction of all Brazilian nuclear reactors take place outside the bounds of international supervision. The report specifically labels the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty "discriminatory against the development of so-called Third World countries."

To achieve national energy goals, the Pronen report recommends that seven reactors—whether research or commercial—be in operation by the year 2015, including the Angra II and Angra III nuclear plants. This, says the report, would require a total investment of \$7 billion, including substantial funding of scientific research. Such an amount is small in comparison to the \$60 billion the country has paid to the creditor banks in usurious interest rates on its foreign debt over the past eight years, especially in view of the advantages Brazil would derive in terms of its own development.

The Pronen working group proposes the creation of a national coordinating body to take advantage of nuclear energy. Finally, it recommends placing emphasis on uranium enrichment through the centrifuge method, something which the Naval Ministry has been working on with good success, and through laser technology, on which the Air Force's Aerospace Technological Center (OTA) of São José dos Campos has been conducting research.

Upon taking office last April, President Collor called upon a representative and select group of strategists, scientists, and technicians—

both civilian and military—to put together the Pronen working group. Their viewpoint has now been presented for the purpose of reformulating the goals of the Brazilian nuclear program; their efforts were coordinated by a confidant of the President, his Secretary for Strategic Affairs Pedro Paulo Leoni.

However, there are ongoing maneuvers to reduce the Pronen recommendations to a mere consultative document, to be shelved at the first opportunity. In fact, the publication of key sections of the confidential report felt like a bucket of cold water upon circles at the presidential palace. In statements published Oct. 3 in *O Estado de São Paulo*, Leoni himself said that the report was "overblown." "It is not a formal proposal, but an aid to the President of the Republic. President Collor will make the final decision."

Doubtless, that decision will have the stamp of Science and Technology Secretary José Goldemberger, in whom President Collor professes the greatest confidence in this and other matters. Goldemberger is known through the Brazilian scientific community as the number-one enemy of nuclear energy, and Collor's promise to the superpowers in his Sept. 24 U.N. General Assembly address that Brazil would limit its nuclear development is viewed as directly influenced by Goldemberger.

Nonetheless, the Army has been explicit in its desire to continue the nuclear research program it is running. On Sept. 16 the Army's Science and Technology Secretary, Gen. Romero Leperquier, gave an interview to *O Globo* in which he described the advances achieved in work on a reactor which uses natural uranium for fuel. Their goal is to construct an advanced gas-graphite modular high temperature reactor.