

Brazil's military resists cutbacks

by Silvia Palacios

In the first public protest of the Brazilian Armed Forces against the wages policy of the government of President Fernando Collor de Mello, Air Force Minister Brig. Socrates Monteiro warned on Dec. 20 that there was a sense of "great frustration" among the troops over the recently announced wage increase of 81%. In fact, according to estimates of the Military Club, a prestigious association of retired officers, the increase should have been 280%, just to keep up with inflation.

The unrest in the Armed Forces is not limited to matters of wages. This was made clear in a farewell address delivered the same day by Gen. Oswaldo Muniz Oliva, the head of the Army Engineering Department, on the occasion of his retirement from active duty. The speech exemplifies the state of alert that the Brazilian Armed Forces are in, as they imminently face the same treatment which is leading to the dismantling of the military institutions in neighboring countries.

Vow to develop the Amazon

Warning that powerful nations in the world are trying to internationalize the Amazon—whose mineral wealth they covet—and calling attention to the fact that, unfortunately, the "Brazilian elites" have not fully recognized the danger, General Oliva asserted that "the greatest challenge to the Army consists of being able to preserve and guarantee the entire Amazon, and at the same time participate in its development." For that, he added, the Armed Forces must preserve their integrity.

He stated that the current budget cuts are already affecting the three main aspects of the institution: operational ability, administration, and the military family. Alluding to the low salaries, which have been drastically reduced by the "anti-inflationary" plan of the Collor government, General Oliva said: "In a household where there aren't enough beans, everyone fights and nobody gets along. The military family is being severely punished."

Before assuming his last post, General Oliva was the head of the Superior War College (ESG), the premier center for the shaping of Brazilian strategic thinking over the last few decades. It was here that the dual concept of national security and economic development was conceived, and where the participation of the Armed Forces in the definition

of national economic priorities was established. Under General Oliva's direction, the ESG drafted the program *1990-2000: the Vital Decade; Toward a Modern and Democratic Brazil*, which proposes, among other things, to restart the country's economic growth with investments in great infrastructure projects, to unilaterally renegotiate the foreign debt, and a number of measures to once again place the country back on the path of "development with social justice" (see *EIR*, May 18, 1990). In the area of national security, the study proposed to take various steps to preserve national sovereignty in the face of "universalist tendencies" which are so powerful in the current government. For example, the study proposed, if necessary, to declare a "state of war" in the Amazon region in light of the threats from foreign forces.

The study, when it was completed many months ago, was delivered to then-presidential candidate Fernando Collor de Mello, who paid no attention to it. Now, the President himself has criticized the ESG's unique role as a formulator of the doctrine of national power. On Dec. 19, at the annual graduation ceremony at the ESG, Collor asserted that "The greatest challenge before pluralist society is that of articulating a national project which is not the result of a single grand theory, but, on the contrary, is the dynamic result of an interaction among multiple interests and points of view."

Plot to annihilate Armed Forces

Meanwhile, the newspaper *Ombro a Ombro*, which has the greatest number of readers among the Armed Forces, and which is run by Col. Pedro Schirmer, who was the assistant to General Oliva at the ESG, published an editorial in its December issue which explains that the unrest within the Armed Forces goes beyond the wages question.

"Looking at the national panorama, it is not absurd to say that the impression given by the economic authorities is that the end of the Cold War allows them to think of reducing the role of the Armed Forces below the level required by the country's needs. If that view arises from a mistaken personal conviction, or from ignorance of the events which move history, or from the manifest intention of discrediting the Armed Forces . . . we leave it to them to reflect on the matter. . . . This assertion is not the result of illusions or fantasies, as can be verified from the fact that the attacks which seek to annihilate the Armed Forces of neighboring countries, are part of a broader context."

The *Ombro a Ombro* editorial recalls the recent, unprecedented actions taken by the influential 100-year-old Military Club, in defense of the standard of living of the military. "The president of the Military Club, Gen. Nilton Cerqueira, in a speech delivered on the occasion of the opening of the assembly, stated: 'Those who think that the world conjuncture will lead to a reduction in the Armed Forces over the medium term, are mistaken. Sovereign nations, in our time, will not be able to abdicate the duty of maintaining them strong and well-trained for their rapid use.' "