

Report from Rio by Geraldo Lino

Lutzenberger must go!

Greenie Environment Minister Lutzenberger has angered the military and Congress—who are now demanding his ouster.

Nine months before the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, the so-called "Eco-92" conference to be held next June in Rio de Janeiro, developing nations are beginning to express opposition to the proposals for international monitoring of environmental policies to be discussed at that conference.

As might be expected, the debate, which has become an open confrontation between North and South, has had intense repercussions inside Brazil, where representatives of intellectual, business, political, and military sectors have warned that any broadening of environmental control policies could impede the country's socio-economic development.

The hottest issue right now is the threat to Brazilian sovereignty over the Amazon region, around the internationalization of decisions on environmental policy. It became hotter with the statements by Gen. Thaumaturgo Sotero Vaz, chief of the General Staff of the Amazonian military command, in an interview published in the Aug. 28 issue of *Folha de São Paulo*. According to the general, the threat to the Amazon is reflected in "the interventions which might be made into the country, such as those carried out in Panama and the Persian Gulf. Here's the thing: We, as Armed Forces, will absolutely not permit the approval of any U.N. motions for restricted sovereignty or the creation of Indian nations under the aegis of the United Nations."

Asked about the possible reaction of the Armed Forces to a foreign invasion, General Sotero Vaz exploded: "If those idiots try to come in here,

we're going to hit them as if they were guerrillas."

General Sotero Vaz's remarks, aimed at any potential foreign invaders, drove Environment Secretary José Lutzenberger—a notorious defender of the Anglo-American establishment's environmental theses—into a frenzy. On Sept. 3 in Geneva, where he was attending a preparatory conference for Eco-92, Lutzenberger returned the general's invective with some of his own: "I'm not interested in what those idiots are saying," he said. "It's not worth responding to. They call us fools, well they are the fools." Enraged, according to Brazilian press reports, Lutzenberger let loose with a vitriolic attack on critics of Eco-92, calling them "the Mestrinhos of life," a reference to another of his opponents on the environmental issue, Amazon Gov. Gilberto Mestrinho.

Governor Mestrinho was unruffled. In an interview in the Sept. 4 *O Globo*, he remarked, "No one in the country will take that Lutzenberger seriously. The generals' stand is a product of their observing reality, because they live here and know the Amazon. Lutzenberger never set foot here."

Lutzenberger's attack also provoked a response from the members of the congressional commission investigating the internationalization of the Amazon. According to the Sept. 11 *Jornal do Brasil*, commission president Atila Lins will ask the government to fire Lutzenberger because of his radical stance on environmental matters and his close ties to foreign interests. "He votes against anything

having to do with the Amazon in foreign forums, whether it be hydroelectric plants, roads, or lumbering activities; [he acts] as a real agent at the service of the multinationals and foreign governments, and therefore, President [Ferdnando] Collor [de Mello] should throw the traitor out of the government," Lins said.

During a Sept. 4 meeting in Manaus, members of the Amazon Businessmen's Association showed the same lack of enthusiasm for the theses that will be defended at Eco-92. One of the association's advisers in this debate is Gen. Osvaldo Muniz Oliva (ret.), former director of the Superior War College who coordinated work on the 1990 *Vital Decade* document which foresaw as a potential conflict for Brazil's Armed Forces the likelihood of foreign interventions in the Amazon on the pretext of "saving the environment."

One of the people who rushed to Lutzenberger's defense, was Pedro Paulo Leoni Ramos, Strategic Affairs Secretary of the presidency, who lauded Lutzenberger's "vast curriculum and long experience in ecology," and added that he had "lent relevant service to the country's environmental cause." Leoni Ramos underscored that there is an absolute affinity between Lutzenberger's positions and those of the Collor government on environmental matters and that the environment secretary enjoys the President's full confidence.

Leoni Ramos's remarks imply that Lutzenberger isn't a loose cannon but that it is Collor himself who is seeking confrontation with nationalist circles. In the Sept. 11 *Jornal do Comercio*, the usually well-informed columnist Genilson Gonzaga reported that the recommendation for Lutzenberger's Geneva attack on General Sotero Vaz and other "fools" came directly from the President.