

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Sarney rips 'fraud' in Amazon grab

The Brazilian President looked more like a nationalist than ever, but will he confront the foreign banks?

President José Sarney blasted foreign designs on the Amazon in a speech to military leaders and Coast Guard cadets on March 17. He swore, "The Amazon is ours. Brazil's sovereign right to use and control its territory is being threatened. New forms of meddling, with overt or covert sanctions designed to force us to make decisions not in our interests, accumulate every day."

He charged that the "rich countries" are spreading "an international fraud" to blame pollution on developing lands, but "there are greater pollutions: hunger, poverty, speculation, and misery." He said, "There are bigger interests behind the ecologists. Ecology is a Trojan Horse to seduce the innocent minds of youth."

Sarney's capped a series of nationalist reactions in Brazil against the pressures coming from oligarchists posing as "environmentalists," to force Brazil to accept "limited sovereignty" in the Amazon.

● On Feb. 28, Congressman Luiz Salamão during a full session of the Lower House of Congress, while demanding that the U.S. government answer for the unjust jailing of Lyndon LaRouche, denounced "U.S. attempts at meddling into Brazilian internal affairs" and rejected "the threats coming from Mr. Bush regarding the building of the highway that connects Acre with the Pacific."

As a response to U.S. pressure, the Brazilian government, which had put little emphasis on the Acre-Peru road, is now pledged to building it as

a matter of "national honor." Between Peru and Brazil a diplomatic offensive has begun. On March 19 Peruvian President Alan García said in an interview to Brazilian TV, "I wish we did not have just one highway, but five," to integrate a zone which could be highly productive, especially by exploiting its abundant gas resources.

● The Senate set up a Parliamentary Commission to probe the devastation, violence, and attempts at internationalization of the Amazon.

● Army Minister Leonidas Pires Gonçalves is coordinating the political defense of the Amazon. "We are not interested in trading sovereignty for any form of foreign aid," he stated, regarding debt-for-conservation proposals. He has been holding meetings with senators and congressmen, with one message: "This area belongs to us *de facto* and *de jure*, and it will be defended both from the ecological standpoint as well as any other that becomes necessary, at the cost of any sacrifice."

Despite the strong statements from Sarney and his ministers, many political leaders still doubt the political will of the President to face down the international bankers, which are the main threat to Brazil's sovereignty. In a eulogy for assassinated ecologist Chico Mendez, Sen. Aluizio Bezerra of the dominant PMDB party, speaking on behalf of his colleagues, said, "The 'ecologism' of the U.S. bankers goes hand in hand with this inconsistent nationalism, committed to paying an unpayable and illegitimate foreign debt."

Bezerra attacked the international banks for "making a false ecology campaign. . . . There can be no greater hypocrisy than when entities tied to the international financial system, responsible for the adverse economic conditions imposed on the less developed countries, suddenly turn 'ecologist.' So we must denounce the macabre farce that takes place when the bankers, supporters of the economic model that killed Chico Mendez, have the gall to eulogize him."

Bezerra appealed to "uphold a program of true defense of the ecology, which includes organizing the economy to serve human beings intelligently, in harmony with nature, of which we are the highest part. . . . We cannot defend nature without defending human nature at the same time. There will never be protection for nature without the radical transformation of the present economic model which is directed toward making minorities rich and majorities poor and sick, destroying forests, rivers, soil, animals, etc. We are speaking of a program that includes land reform, nationalization of banks, effective cooperation of the armed forces in strategic areas, stopping burn-off by the big landowners, and finally, ending the payment on foreign debt, which gets bigger, the more we pay.

"Without social transformations, without real democracy, there will never be a harmonious relationship with nature, just as a country can never be considered sovereign which possesses millions of illiterates, which has one of the world's highest infant mortality rates, and an incredible number of diseased and starving people and slum dwellers. To talk of sovereignty and ecology in the abstract is to play the game of those who poison and destroy nature and subject us to the rule of international bankers."