

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Anger in the barracks

Brazil's Armed Forces don't like what IMF austerity is doing to their wages, and to military technology.

The José Sarney government's policy of wage strangulation is triggering growing discontent in the Armed Forces, whose wages are not exempt from the International Monetary Fund's austerity program. The military thus joins the rest of the population which, under the failing Summer Plan, has lost 40-50% of its buying power.

It is reported that agitation over gutted wages is making the rounds of barracks. In the powerful Club Militar, based in Rio de Janeiro, there has been a series of meetings to discuss the problem. At the last of these, a copy of a model petition for wage restoration, to be sent by military officers to Defense Minister Leonidas Pires Gonçalves, was circulated. There are also some who seek to organize a general assembly of retired Army personnel, to join active duty personnel in a united stand.

Military discontent is also centered around the impact that austerity has had on various innovative technology projects of Brazil's military industry, which have either been significantly delayed or shelved altogether. The aerospace program, for example, is not only suffering the restrictions imposed by the club of industrialized nations to prevent Brazil's acquisition of state-of-the-art technology, but by the humiliating self-imposed imposition of IMF conditionalities.

The budget for production of a supersonic airplane has been cut; the AMX airplane, developed by Italian aeronautics companies, is suffering

severe delays on the Brazilian side; the company Aviones Embraer has begun to operate at a loss; the nuclear submarine project is moving at a snail's pace. All of this, at the same time that the budgets for basic research are being squeezed, causing a major brain drain of Brazilian scientists abroad.

The situation has led the minister of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Valbert Lisieux, to present the problem directly to President José Sarney. It is not the first time that the cost of "integrating Brazil into the international financial community," as the policy which ended the 1987 debt moratorium is known, is slamming the Armed Forces, both in its personnel and in the vital high-technology projects which are the pride of Brazil.

Exactly one year ago, the previous minister of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Roberto Camarinha, was suddenly fired for demanding substantial wage hikes. He left, but the austerity cancer remained to eat away at the nation's defense capabilities.

The discontent in the Armed Forces has not yet led to a direct confrontation with the President and his economic cabinet; however, the military has indirectly let its feelings be known. Such, for example, was the meaning behind the military's rejection—using purely bureaucratic arguments—of the naming of former minister Aluizio Alves as a member of the Superior Military Court, a rejection which has led to an indefinite postponement of his appointment to the post. This unprecedented rejection

is widely seen as a protest action against President Sarney, since not only is Aluizio Alves a personal friend of the President's, but he was suggested by Sarney for the position.

In this same sense, Lt. Brigadier Fernando Martins Costa, in retiring from his post as chief of staff of the Brazilian Air Force, declared on April 5 to his comrades in arms: "Do not allow the existing climate of corruption to continue in the country. Avoid by any means its contamination of the Brazilian Air Force." The new chief who replaced Martins Costa, Brigadier Cherubin Rosa Filho, echoed his predecessor in stating: "We should think hard about the perverse process in which we are submerged, where the honest ones continue to be punished by the impunity of the dishonest."

The great irony is that the Armed Forces, which have taken the lead in rejecting the fierce assault of the international ecological-fascist lobby against Brazilian sovereignty over the Amazon River Basin, have nonetheless given their support to the Sarney government's IMF-dictated economic policies, under the illusion that this is the only way that the country can receive the resources and technological aid it needs.

In fact, in exchange for transferring abroad more than \$17 billion in debt service annually, the only "payment" Brazil has received from the banks and other foreign creditors has been the demand for reducing wages, halting domestic investments, especially in state-of-the-art technology, and the open demand for surrender of national sovereignty over its own territory.

The Brazilian Armed Forces, the compromises of its leadership notwithstanding, is not likely to remain silent forever regarding the threat that such policies pose to their own integrity, and that of the nation.