
Interview: Benedita da Silva

Brazil's Congress investigates mass sterilization of poor women

The following interview with Rio de Janeiro Congresswoman Benedita da Silva was granted to correspondents Silvia Palacios and Lorenzo Carrasco on May 27.

EIR: You have just asked the House of Deputies to create a Congressional Commission of Inquiry to look into the sterilizations which have occurred in Brazil. What caused you to do that?

Da Silva: In Brazil, there is a process of mass sterilization. The majority of those sterilized are in the 15- to 54-year-old age group, and most of them don't even know that they've been sterilized. In 1988, when we held the first seminar in São Paulo on female sterilization, we were horrified because a demographer presented data from the IBGE [Brazilian Statistical and Geographical Institute] on sterilization which indicated that, of women between the ages of 15 and 54 who were married, or had sex partners, and who used some kind of contraceptive, 33% were sterilized.

Since the country is going through a period of severe austerity, there are some people who want to resolve the poverty issue by sterilizing women. Business executives are also worried that the individual woman might hurt their company's growth, if she's out on maternity leave. Some Brazilian companies are demanding, as a guarantee, that a woman have her tubes tied—that is, that she be sterilized. The Women's Forum, government agencies, and others have demanded that this practice be stopped.

There is also enormous foreign intervention in the matter of sterilization here. The government went around signing agreements with foreign agencies which, in the name of the family's social welfare, were really massively sterilizing Brazilian women.

Just last week, I read in the papers that a United Nations agency was saying that demographic growth is a threat to development, and I became very worried.

It's well known that the United States has interfered in the question of birth control policy. I read in the *Jornal de Brasilia* about denunciations to the effect that the United States considers control of demographic growth to be of great strategic importance in developing nations—that is, in Brazil, Latin America, Africa.

The truth is, that people know that conditions don't per-

mit a family to have 5, 10, or 15 children as used to be the case. There is a willingness to plan the size of the family; but it is one thing to plan, and another thing to control—to the point of irrationally controlling the country's growth.

EIR: In an interview with *EIR* published March 8, Health Minister Dr. Alcení Guerra charged that a dozen foreign entities have financed sterilizations in Brazil. How is the Commission of Inquiry going to investigate these charges?

Da Silva: The commission will not only look into these denunciations, although these will be dealt with in the dossiers to be presented; we will also hear from the institution or the individual responsible for each policy; we will hear from the health minister because, at the same time, we want him to be conscious of the fact that there is foreign capital promoting sterilization in Brazil. Moreover, it is the government that signs the agreements—this isn't done surreptitiously; and I would like the government to show the commission those agreements, and contracts signed with several government and non-governmental agencies which have done research in the area of health in Brazil.

EIR: Are you going to call on ministers to testify?

Da Silva: We are going to call ministers, as well as directors of clinics, and of Bemfam [Brazilian Family Welfare Society]. . . . We'll also call on the Women's Forum; in short, everyone who is working in this area.

EIR: How will the commission use the results of the inquiry?

Da Silva: In a commission of this nature, [the results] are handed directly to the justice and the health ministers, and they will put them to use.

EIR: Since there is also an issue of foreign intervention, will you also subpoena the foreign minister?

Da Silva: Yes, of course.

EIR: Recently in the United States, a National Security Council memorandum—coded NSSM-200—was declassified; in it, then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger named 13 target countries, among them Brazil, for which drastic

population reduction was planned for reasons of U.S. "national security." Are you aware of these documents?

Da Silva: No, I didn't have them in hand, but now that I do, I'm going to have them entered into the congressional record. I'm also going to organize a debate on several levels: in the areas of education, health, the trade union movement, to give the largest possible dissemination to these documents and take whatever steps are necessary. I am also going to question the foreign minister regarding this document and ask which international agreements the government has signed.

EIR: You said that the International Monetary Fund made birth control programs one of its conditionalities.

Da Silva: Yes, I've said that the IMF has made a number of demands, and have learned that one of the IMF's clauses stipulates birth control [as a condition], and we're also looking for those documents. Should we obtain them, we would want to question the IMF also, because their attempts to interfere with our population know no limits. Brazil is at great risk, because things are done secretly; that is, it's almost impossible to gain access to the agreements which the Executive signs, because even Itamaraty [the Foreign Ministry] doesn't release the information.

EIR: In motivating the creation of the Commission of Inquiry, you said that there was racism behind the massive sterilizations. Can you explain that?

Da Silva: Not accidentally, the majority of women sterilized are poor and black, and most haven't gone beyond the first grade. This is an extremely interesting chain of events because, beyond the fact of black women being sterilized, there is also the issue of the extermination of infants and adolescents, which happens to occur, in large part, in the black community. What we're really talking about here is the extinction of a race—to the degree that you sterilize black women, you prevent black babies from being born.

EIR: What is the percentage of black women sterilized?

Da Silva: Within the universe of sterilized women, more than 60% of black women have been sterilized.

EIR: In the context of George Bush's new world order, we found in the U.S. Congress's *Congressional Record* that he was an enthusiast of the ideas of the racist William Shockley.

Da Silva: Yes, like all of his policies, what we're seeing on the race question is horrible. Consider what we just witnessed in the Mideast, the battle with Saddam Hussein. Bush went to great lengths to build up in the media the myth of an Iraqi war machine, and there was a total massacre. From his actions, you see that Bush is totally committed to that type of policy, one in which he thinks he's the ruler of the world. I think Bush's plan is to take over Latin America, and thereby control those countries with non-white populations.

EIR: When the U.S. invaded Panama, the greatest massacre of civilians occurred in poor, black neighborhoods.

Da Silva: This is ethnocide, right? A black population—a non-white population!

EIR: In several of the state legislatures, there are initiatives to set up commissions of inquiry on sterilization. Does the national Commission of Inquiry have any ability to coordinate with those local efforts?

Da Silva: The two go together. In the House, I will be receiving information from all of the state assemblies.

EIR: When will the Commission of Inquiry start functioning and how long will it last?

Da Silva: It can only be established after the leadership comes to an agreement; right now, we're approaching the leadership so that the commission can be installed immediately. Once the fact of its establishment is published, we have 90 working days. We are also in the process of setting up another commission, for the same time period, to investigate the extermination of infants and adolescents.

EIR: Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft and President Bush were the individuals in charge of implementing the malthusian policies outlined in NSSM-200. How do you view Brazil's relationship with the United States, considering that Bush himself was part of that team?

Da Silva: I see that Brazil has a very good foreign relations stance, in the sense that it maintains relations with many different countries; but particularly with regard to its relationship with the United States, Brazil has had a relationship of dependency, and I'm not very much in agreement with its closeness to Bush's policies.

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