

## Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

### Freeing terrorists: Collor's final act

*The continental terrorist network which blew its cover in Managua has high-level friends in church and government.*

**T**he case is considered unheard of in the annals of Brazilian diplomatic history. On Aug. 23, the Senate approved a decree, prepared in July 1992 by the Foreign Affairs Ministry at the request of since-deposed President Fernando Collor de Mello, which formalizes a deal struck earlier with the Canadian mafia. According to the decree, Brazil and Canada will now conduct prisoner exchanges, permitting convicts to serve out their sentences in their respective countries.

The measure was drafted solely and exclusively to benefit two terrorists, Canadians David Spencer and Christine Lamont, who have been sentenced in Brazil to 28 years in jail for their part in the 1989 kidnapping of businessman Abilio Diniz, who owns Brazil's largest supermarket chain. In Canada, the maximum they will have to serve before their release is three years.

The history of the two Canadian kidnappers reveals that the continental terrorist network which many believed long dead and buried, is in fact more alive and organized than ever. Its dimensions surfaced last May 23, when a clandestine weapons cache kept by the Salvadoran FMLN blew up in Managua, Nicaragua. In the follow-up investigations, documents with Spencer and Lamont's names were discovered by the Nicaragua police, along with the names of dozens of Brazilian businessmen who were targets for kidnapping.

Concerning the role Brazil plays in the terrorist network revealed in Managua, the Brazilian federal police

delegate and vice president of Interpol for Ibero-America, Romeo Tuma, declared: "Diniz's kidnappers went through Cuba, through Nicaragua, and through El Salvador, and I haven't the slightest doubt that the connection is global and extends to Europe." He added that, in 1988 in Hamburg, there was a major meeting of world terrorist leaders at which an extensive kidnapping campaign to finance guerrilla operations was launched. Other, similar meetings took place in Chile and Argentina.

Although the Senate's approval of the Collor-era decree has triggered a huge scandal in the country, this has not prevented the terrorists from receiving public expressions of support. The most significant came from Cardinal Evaristo Arns, archbishop of São Paulo, and friend of Fidel Castro, the Sandinistas, and the Marxist Workers Party (PT). It is no accident that Arns is considered the "chaplain" of the São Paulo Forum, the organization made up of every pro-communist and pro-terrorist group on the continent, under the baton of the Cuban Communist Party.

Arns is also one of the best lobbyists whom the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) has in Brazil, through his close friendship with the influential Henry Sobel. Sobel, rabbi of the Paulist Israelite Congregation and coordinator of the National Commission for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue, which is part of the National Bishops Council of Brazil, is also president of the Brazilian Committee in the former Soviet Union.

On Aug. 21, Arns gave a televised interview in which he expressed his conviction that the participation of the two Canadian terrorists in the Diniz kidnapping was "minor," and that through his conversations with a Canadian bishop, he had been convinced that the two had always behaved well.

His defense of the Canadians was not limited to mere words. According to the Brazilian press, the cardinal had earlier sent a fax to Justice Minister Jarbas Passarinho during the reign of the Collor government, pleading the "innocence of the girl." Arns is very familiar with the case, since he acted as mediator between the Diniz family and the kidnappers. Clearly, his sympathies were on the wrong side. Another person committed to defending the new decree to free the Canadians is Sen. Eduardo Suplicy, a member of the Workers Party leadership.

Throughout the case, the "Canadian connection" is always visible. Pressure on the Brazilian authorities to free the pair came from the highest levels of the Canadian government. Canadian Ambassador to Brazil William Dymon carried out apparently effective lobbying in the Congress, and was present in the Senate on the day of the vote. According to the Sept. 1 issue of the magazine *Veja*, then-Prime Minister of Canada Brian Mulroney personally interceded with Collor during the June 1992 Eco-92 environmentalist "Earth summit" in Rio de Janeiro to urge passage of the decree.

What is publicly known of the special relationship former President Collor de Mello had with Canada includes his ties to mafioso Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress and a leading ADL financier. The first private meeting with an influential figure that Collor held after taking office in January 1990, was with Bronfman. That meeting was also attended by Rabbi Henry Sobel.