

The debt won't be paid with hunger

by Sylvia Palacios

During the funeral ceremonies for Brazilian President-elect Tancredo Neves, more than six million Brazilians in the cities of Sao Paulo, Brasilia and Bello Horizonte filled the streets to bid farewell to the President who never took office. These spontaneous demonstrations, the largest and most impressive in the history of Brazil, reflect the great hopes for change that the election of Tancredo Neves—the first civilian ruler in 21 years—promised.

Tancredo Neves only succeeded in defeating the official candidate Paulo Maluf in the Brazilian electoral college by putting together a very mixed coalition of political forces, ranging from nationalists seeking to further Brazil's economic development through great projects, to anarchist leftists seeking a liberal parliamentary system, as well as to a variety of monetarist elements. The coalition took the name of Democratic Alliance, a cross between the Party for a Democratic Brazilian Movement (PMDB) and the Liberal Front Party.

With Tancredo's death, his Vice-President and successor José Sarney inherited on April 21 both a government and an enigma. Sarney knows only the plans of government that Tancredo announced in the public squares. He is largely unfamiliar, however, with the range of deals the late President-elect struck with the diverse political forces that carried him into the presidency.

As a result, the stability of the new Sarney government is threatened and risks running aground amid internecine political battles.

On April 21, the same day that the final medical bulletin announcing Tancredo's death was released, the first incident of the Democratic Alliance occurred. PMDB leader and Chamber of Deputies President Ulises Guimarães released a political statement on Tancredo's passing to the Chamber, going over the head of the new President Sarney. The institutional response was not long in coming. Senate President José Fragelli opened an extraordinary session of the Brazilian Congress with the announcement that the presidency had become vacant and ratifying José Sarney in the post—all done without the presence of Congressman Ulises Guimarães.

These conflicts were simmering throughout the hospitalization of Tancredo Neves. On March 28, the daily *Folha de São Paulo* charged that a faction of the PMDB sought "a coup maneuver" to impose a parliamentary system headed by a prime minister—presumably Ulises Guimarães—who would displace in the succession process Vice-President José Sarney.

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sustained by byzantine deals of give and take. Stability can only follow by drawing on the very real ferment of the Brazilian people for drastic economic reforms, that will put an end to the dictatorship of the International Monetary Fund. The mere possibility of patriotic actions against the IMF has already startled awake the financial creditors of Brazil. The monetarist daily *O Estado de São Paulo* warned against possible "populist actions" by Sarney in search of popular support. At the same time, the pressure is on to replace Finance Minister Francisco Dornelles with the current foreign relations minister and arch-monetarist, Olavo Setubal.

If the Sarney government uses the trade surplus of Brazil to pay the foreign debt, as occurred last year, there will be no force on earth that will sustain the government of a country where a large portion of the population is threatened with starvation and epidemic.

This was one of the slogans of Tancredo Neves' electoral campaign and is what brought millions of Brazilians out into

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the streets during the funeral marches of April 22 and 24. This fact was clearly recognized by the secretary general of the Brazilian Council of Bishops, Don Luciano Méndez de Almeida, during his requiem mass at the Planalto presidential palace:

"Here we have an example of dignity . . . because Tancredo Neves awakened in the hearts of the people the consciousness of their own dignity, and thus our inheritance—for ruler and ruled alike—is the concern to fulfill those ideals which he read in the heart of the people and of which he made himself the standardbearer. . . . This inheritance makes us think especially of those who have more need for everyone's collaboration to fully regain their dignity: workers of field and city, the jobless. Those who need dignified living, working, salary, education, habitation, and health conditions, and must find that in the men of the government, in all the collaboration of our nation. This is our program, which we see engraved in the heart of our President, and thus, we remember his great words—that development must not be at the price of greater sacrifices by our people. Debts are paid with money. Not with the sacrifices of our people. With the use of land, with the opening of new sources of employment. That is what the people expect from the New Republic."