

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Drug trade heightens threat to Amazon

The environmentalists cynically hope that the drug invasion of Rondônia will play into their plans to meddle in Brazil.

Until recently, Brazil has been viewed as a "transit country" for the international drug trade, and as a producer of the chemicals used to refine cocaine. Increasingly, however, entire zones in the country are starting to resemble those other regions of Ibero-America which have fallen into the hands of the drug trade. This presents two dangers: first, that posed by the drug trade itself; second, that this will be used as a pretext for an outside intervention in the Amazon region. It is precisely in the Amazon, with its vast natural resources so coveted by the superpowers, that the drug trade is making its greatest inroads.

A spokesman for the one-worldist Inter-Action Council in Europe described the group's scheme: "I am certain that an international military action against Brazil, over the Amazon, could occur, but only toward the end of the 1990s. It will have to be over something that could organize a supranational intervention force, something like terrorism and drugs, before we will be able to tackle the environment."

Cynical, but not surprising. After all, the Bush administration has been using the pretext of fighting drugs to test its policy of "limited sovereignty" in Ibero-America—witness last year's Panama invasion.

A report in the Nov. 10 issue of *O Estado de São Paulo* shows growing awareness of this danger inside Brazil. The influential daily reported that "possible control of the state of Rondônia by the drug trade could represent a strategic change of major proportions on the drug map, capable of

unleashing a reaction by the DEA [U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration]. . . . It was due to links with the cocaine trade that the United States invaded Panama."

Rondônia, located deep in the Amazon interior, is a state with great potential for economic development, if only the needed infrastructure were built, as reported in *EIR*, Nov. 2, 1990, p. 20.

But it is a sad fact that it has become a new paradise for international drug traffickers. The assassination of Sen. Olavo Pires, a candidate for governor of Rondônia, was perpetrated by professional killers last October in the midst of the electoral campaign, revealing how far the drug trade's power has already extended in the region.

The very terrain of the state makes ongoing police oversight difficult: Sharing over 1,500 kilometers of border with the coca-producing Bolivia, Rondônia has become the main route for Bolivian cocaine into the Brazilian consumer market, and for its illegal export to both Europe and the United States.

According to press reports, Rondônia is in second place, behind Mato Grosso do Sul, in numbers of cocaine seizures inside Brazil. From January to October, more than 300 kilograms of cocaine and over 1 ton of cocaine paste were seized. On Nov. 9, the Federal Police seized nearly 20 kilograms of pure cocaine from three passengers planning to board a flight in the airport of Porto Velho, capital of Rondônia.

The drug traffickers act with arrogant impunity. They transport the

drugs in broad daylight. And growing numbers of Brazilian citizens are being corrupted into participating in the deadly trade. According to *Jornal do Brasil* of Nov. 11, the important city of Guajara-Mirim, "founded on the border 52 years ago, is the key port of entry for Bolivian cocaine. With 40,000 residents, a cradle of traditional families, Guajara-Mirim now bears the stigma of drug capital."

O Estado de São Paulo published the statements of the region's Bishop Geraldo Vergier: "I have never seen such a catastrophic situation. There are few merchant families that are not working with cocaine."

In Rondônia, a state very rich in mineral resources, there is also an established network for drug money laundering. "The preferred activities for this are mining, hotel-keeping, air-taxi companies, and even horse breeding," reported *O Estado de São Paulo*.

Ester Kosoviski, president of Brazil's Federal Narcotics Council (COFEN), declared Nov. 13, "The borders between the two countries are very vulnerable. . . . Rondônia is a critical place." The latest COFEN report to Justice Minister Jarbas Passarinho revealed alarming data on the trafficking and consumption of cocaine in Rondônia: 60% of Porto Velho adolescents have consumed some drug, generally coca paste.

The Federal Police admit that they lack sufficient means to cope with the crisis. Police Narcotics Division delegate Ismar Cunha revealed Nov. 10 that 1,200 kilograms of cocaine seized in 1989 in all of Brazil represented something like 10% of the amount that actually entered the country that year. Those 1,200 kilograms were valued at \$500 million. "This proves," said Cunha, "that drugs, and especially cocaine, are only topped in the production of foreign exchange by the oil trade."