

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Protesting the 'new order'

Spreading military protests are being triggered by the issue over wages, but are more deeply rooted.

The recent emergency cabinet overhaul conducted by President Fernando Collor de Mello, in coordination with the centers of Anglo-American power, was inadequate to the task of suppressing the spread of the "Venezuela-Peru" virus within the Brazilian Armed Forces. The loud protests now exploding in the barracks and among officers over the starvation wages granted the military, are only one signal of a larger crisis that is just now emerging into public view.

According to a report presented by the three military ministers to newly appointed Justice Minister Celio Borja, Collor's monetarist economic program has cost the military, since the beginning of his administration, an 850% loss in wages. Economics Ministry technocrats are currently attempting to calm military passions with a 60% increase in monthly wages.

This was the central issue dominating the inaugural meeting of Collor de Mello's new cabinet, at which Navy Minister Adm. Mario César Flores bluntly informed Collor: "The time I will take to speak will be proportional to the space [my ministry] has in the budget: minimal." His comments, needless to say, were unusually brief.

Military Club president Gen. Nilton Cerqueira warned: "President Fernando Collor's policy with regard to military wages is sadistic. Don't come and blame us afterwards." Weeks earlier, the director of the influential military newspaper *Ombro a Ombro*, Col. Pedro Schirmer, had commented upon the implications for Brazil of

President Fujimori's "self-coup" in Peru: "I don't rule out the possibility that soldiers as individuals might participate in a social convulsion. The military is but the people in uniform, and the [economic] situation for the people and for the military is very bad."

The volatility of Brazil's institutional crisis is already prompting commentaries from the Anglo-American establishment's think-tanks. For example, Johns Hopkins University's Michael Coppedge warned that "now a lot of attention is being paid to Peru, and no one is worrying about Brazil. I think that that country is a potential candidate for a dictatorship."

Newly appointed Foreign Minister Celso Lafer has gone out of his way to present a picture of tranquility, issuing an April 15 statement denying there could be a Peruvian-style coup in Brazil, since the cabinet reform "was the Brazilian response to the crisis, a response within the democratic system." But reality is otherwise. As the daily *Correio Brasiliense* noted in its April 16 editorial, it is worth remembering that "the proclamation of the Republic [at the end of the last century] had as its fuse the low wages of the military."

And, although the international press mouthpieces of Wall Street have given undue propaganda to retired Capt. Jair Bolsonaro as the "legitimate" spokesman of these military protests, his actions are but provocations outside of the real line of patriotic resistance.

Military dissatisfaction goes deep-

er than wages, however, for it is rooted in opposition to the Collor government's policy of submission to George Bush's "new world order" which, among other things, embraces the so-called McNamara Doctrine (after the former U.S. defense secretary) to dismantle the armed forces of Ibero-America. That doctrine is also promoted by the establishment's Inter-American Dialogue, to which Lafer belongs.

Exemplary of this deep-rooted discontent is the first public appearance of an organized group of retired military men from all three branches. The "Guararapes Group" unveiled itself through an April 14 article published in the daily *Tribuna de Imprensa*, in which it explained that it takes its name from the memory of the battles against Dutch colonialism waged in the 17th century in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco.

Issued in the form of a proclamation, the Guararapes statement attacks the temptation to dismantle the Armed Forces, and the imposition of a one-world "new order." Reminding readers of the powers conferred upon the Armed Forces by the Constitution, the Guararapes Group demands to know how the military will fulfill its role of protecting national sovereignty if it is shrunk beyond recognition: "To minimize this Cyclopean task [of national defense] in the name of a world peace . . . to be assured by some International Force, is to deny history. . . . The federal Constitution speaks of sovereignty, not of a protectorate.

"Brazil without its Armed Forces, or with a reduced Armed Forces lacking a civic spirit . . . will easily fall prey to domination at the precise moment in which the world begins to see its powers fall to critical levels. Perhaps, even ironically, through the use of the very international peace police force about to be created."