

# Brazilian resistance nears boiling point

by Valerie Rush

"If he were better informed, the President would not be sleeping peacefully at night," declared former Brazilian President João Figueiredo in a May 5 radio interview about the growing social unrest in Brazil, one of very few public statements he has made since leaving office in 1985. Reflecting the dissatisfaction of large sections of the Brazilian Armed Forces with a wide range of government policies, General Figueiredo warned that "only a great miracle" could avert disaster, "a very strong break, that totally changes the structures of the country."

Four days later, Army Minister Gen. Carlos Tinoco Ribeiro greeted a Cavalry Day celebration with former President Figueiredo at his side. The gesture was widely viewed as support for Figueiredo's statements.

The former President's startling warning comes in the midst of a rapid disintegration of the political, social, and economic fabric of Brazil. Not only are the Armed Forces losing patience with a government blind to their condition of virtual collapse, but the populations of major urban centers like Rio de Janeiro are being stirred by their own hunger and desperation—and by agents provocateurs—into riots and looting.

Coming on the eve of the United Nations-sponsored "Earth Summit"—the international ecology conference to be held in Rio in June, and attended by thousands of prominent political figures from around the globe—Figueiredo's statements have thrown a spotlight on a situation which is replicating itself across the continent. Military discontent with the continent's new world order "democracies," committed as they are to a genocidal free trade economic model, a dismantled defense capability, and a negotiated accommodation with narco-terrorism, has reached or is nearing the boiling point in Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil. At the same time, these populations' disgust with the corruption of their political elites, and with endless economic disintegration in the name of securing a place in George Bush's new world order, is fast reaching its limits.

## Difficult times ahead

"The revolt has begun," said General Figueiredo. "In Rio, 23 supermarkets looted already this month. Imagine the

*favela* [slum] of Rocinha, with its 350,000 people! If 10% were to come out, that would be 35,000. No army or police force could stop them. . . . The people will suffer anything, except seeing their children starve to death. Brazil is going to face some very difficult times. There is no human force that can prevent the people from rising up against hunger."

Figueiredo proceeded to target the country's political elites for their complicity in Brazil's decline. The country is living under "a parliamentary dictatorship," he said, and "politicians think only of their personal interests, not of Brazil's."

Few Brazilians miss the irony that these words are coming from a former President who himself consistently applied the austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund to Brazil. Nonetheless, his statements have triggered a storm of responses. The oligarchy editorialized through *Jornal do Brasil*, calling Figueiredo everything from vulgar to a dumb-bell, sentiments which were shared by a good number of the politicians whom he insulted. But there were exceptions. Sen. José Paulo Bisol observed that "one needn't be a prophet to reach [Figueiredo's] conclusions. We are witnessing sporadic but dangerous convulsions which are gathering strength." And former science and technology minister Renato Archer declared, "One doesn't require a great deal of imagination to perceive that democracy across Latin America is undergoing a dramatic moment." He invoked the examples of Venezuela and Peru, and then pointed to the supermarket lootings in Rio de Janeiro as warning signs not to be ignored.

## 'Disquiet in the barracks'

But the clearest warnings are coming from the military itself, whose demands for a living wage and repeated criticisms of government economic, social, and foreign policy have been consistently ignored. The May 1 editorial of the official press organ of the Brazilian Army, *Noticiario do Exercito*, demanded that the government immediately establish wage parity between the Armed Forces and employees of the legislative and judicial branches, as established by the National Constitution. The editorial, which was dictated by Army Minister General Tinoco and entitled "Necessity, Urgency, and Justice," created an uproar among government circles, and forced President Fernando Collor de Mello to beg for time in implementing wage equity.

While Collor ponders how to keep both his creditors and the Brazilian military from biting his head off, he has received yet another warning, this time in the form of an article appearing in the May 13 *Jornal do Commercio* and written by Air Force Minister Sócrates da Costa Monteiro. The minister warns against yielding to U.S. pressures for the disarming and dismantling of Brazil's Armed Forces, especially "at a time of disquiet and nonconformity in the barracks." He denounces the anti-military trend, noting that the risk of new global conflicts has increased, not decreased, with the end of the Cold War.