

# Brazilian Congress impeaches Collor

by Peter Rush

The political career of Brazil President Fernando Collor de Mello ended abruptly Tuesday night, Sept. 29, when the lower house of the Brazilian Congress voted overwhelmingly to impeach him on charges of corruption. According to the Brazilian Constitution, Collor must now relinquish the presidency for the next six months to the vice president, while the upper house, the Senate, investigates the charges more fully and decides whether Collor should be permanently removed from office or exonerated and reinstated. It is almost assured that he will be convicted by the Senate—unless he decides to resign first—given the enormous weight of evidence already unearthed of Collor's receipt of illegally raised monies from his campaign chairman P.C. Farias, who himself is under criminal indictment for his activities.

Despite earlier indications that a significant minority of the House's members would vote for Collor, the final result was, in the words of PMDB party leader Ulysses Guimarães, "a massacre." Some 441 congressmen voted for impeachment, 38 voted against, 23 were absent, and there was one abstention. The result was greeted by celebrations in the street and demonstrations in support of the decision in Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and other cities. A poll showed over 80% of all Brazilians backed the congressional decision.

Although Collor's impeachment was expected, it had an instant impact across Ibero-America, in the many countries governed by administrations almost identical to Collor's: liberal, corrupt regimes which have imposed harsh austerity policies dictated by the banks and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Collor's ouster will give new life to the growing opposition political forces in countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, and Argentina, in particular, where the people want their corrupt supposed "democracies" out.

## 'Brazil 1, Colombia 0'

This mood was captured best by the Colombian newspaper *La Prensa*, in a headline that read "Brazil 1, Colombia 0." Colombia's anti-government paper *El Espectador* wrote that "in our country, as in many other places in Latin America, the same situation [of corruption] is occurring in other governments, but it is clear that so far we lack the

courage to confront these situations that are constantly confronting us in a big way."

Inside Brazil, all eyes are on the incoming acting President, Vice President Itamar Franco. It is expected that he will create a government and cabinet that will unite all the major political forces in the country in a broad coalition. For this and other reasons, no dramatic changes of policy are considered likely immediately, but there may well be major changes down the line, especially regarding the economy and its current subjugation to IMF austerity measures.

Responding to Franco's accession, the *New York Times* betrayed the nervousness that has seized the international financial community in an editorial Sept. 30 that complained that Collor "wasn't all bad. . . . He was largely responsible for dismantling of Brazil's nuclear bomb program, reducing Amazon deforestation, doubling reservation land for Indians, starting a program to privatize state companies, and opening Brazil's highly protected economy to free trade." Mexico's major daily *Excelsior* made the point even more clearly, saying that "the Brazilian political crisis is a hard blow against continental liberalism," adding that it also "creates a huge uncertainty about the path that democracy will take in this country, since the fall of Collor is overthrowing the neo-liberal economic program that is compatible with the interests of the majority of Latin American nations and the United States."

Of concern to these circles is Franco's previous statements critical of the rule of IMF policies in Brazil. The Sept. 30 *Washington Post* characterized Franco as "a passionate adversary of the influence of the IMF on economic policy," who is "reluctant to see Brazil pay its foreign debt. This record dismays international bankers."

## Franco must act

The reality is that Franco will be unable to hold together a broad coalition that spans both sides of the IMF-liberal economic policy debate for very long, and will be compelled either to fit actions to his previous anti-IMF words, or else submit to the IMF as have the rulers of all other major Ibero-American countries.

One indication that he intends to undo at least part of Collor's unhappy legacy is his decision to reconstitute the National Intelligence System (SNI). The SNI was for decades at the heart of military participation in Brazil's national direction, and its reconstitution after Collor had abolished it reflects a deal with the institutional military. At the least, the deal would likely involve an end to the dismantling of the nation's Armed Forces by budget cuts and other measures designed to destroy it, as urged by the U.S. government, in particular. This point was not lost on the *New York Times*, which editorialized Oct. 1 that Franco would be well-advised to retain many of Collor's "undeniable achievements," above all, because Collor "reinforced civilian rule by curbing the entrenched political power of the Army."