

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Defense Ministry proposal draws fire

The proposed creation of a new, civilian Defense Ministry is part of the plot to destroy the Armed Forces.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso began his presidency by presenting to the Armed Forces his proposal to create a civilian-led Defense Ministry, which would replace the three individual service ministries as well as the minister of the Armed Forces General Staff which currently exist. There is little question that the motivations behind this plan are related to the plot of certain circles in London and Washington to demilitarize Ibero-America.

President Cardoso named Gen. Bendito Bezerra Leonel, chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, to elaborate the proposal for the new ministry, with the idea of creating it by the end of this year. But reactions against it have been so strong, there's no guaranteeing that it will be set up by the target date.

On Jan. 16, the daily *Gazeta Mercantil* reported Navy Minister Mauro César Rodrigues Pereira's comment that "we have to find our own, Brazilian solution, and can't look at what other countries have done. Our case is very different from that of the United States and England."

In its January issue, the most influential military newspaper, *Ombro a Ombro*, editorialized that "the statement that [the creation of] a Defense Ministry is a universal tendency doesn't necessarily mean that Brazil should follow that tendency. . . . Those who conceive of a Defense Ministry as a means of reducing the power of the military establishment should recall what we have previously stated here: The Armed Forces are not servants of the government or of the state, but of the Fatherland, which ex-

ists above governments and structures of the state, and is an expression of the nation which precedes the existence of the state and is an amalgam of Brazilian society."

Ombro a Ombro mentioned certain individuals who have loudly defended the proposed Defense Ministry. One of them is São Paulo Archbishop Cardinal Evaristo Arns, who in his year-end message stated, "The existence of demilitarization is desirable in order to give society the character of a civil citizenry." Arns is one of the leaders of the theology of liberation movement, a friend of Fidel Castro, and has become a chaplain of sorts to the pro-terrorist São Paulo Forum. He is also a personal friend of President Cardoso.

Thus, the President's idea came smack up against reality. He had hardly made the announcement when various sectors of the Armed Forces began to express their disagreement—some of them publicly, others limiting the debate to the barracks. In any case, the consensus is that the President's proposal is part of the effort to undermine the role which the Armed Forces have played historically in Brazil.

There is no doubt that the pressure to create the new ministry came from abroad. Last November, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry traveled to Brazil in an attempt to reestablish the "special relationship" long advocated by Henry Kissinger. Perry was especially enthusiastic about the creation of a civilian-led Defense Ministry, precisely Cardoso's proposal. "The United States seeks to hold periodic meetings with all of Latin America's defense ministers," he

told the press.

The agency which has been most vociferous in demanding the dismantling of Ibero-America's armed forces is the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD), a Washington-based think-tank which maintains close ties to Wall Street. Fernando Henrique Cardoso is one of the IAD's founding members.

To date, President Cardoso has tried to be cautious in his dealings with the Armed Forces, but tension has nonetheless arisen in two other areas—one related to wages and the other to the military's demand that new investments be channeled into its technological projects.

Funding for both of these areas depends on whether the government remains committed to following the suicidal policy outlined in the "Real Plan"—the monetarist economic plan to combat inflation devised by Cardoso when he was finance minister in the Franco government—or decides to make policy changes more in accord with national interests. During the second week in January, "unrest returned to the barracks," the daily *Correio Brasiliense* reported, provoked by the fact that wage increases were granted to the government's Executive and Legislative branches, but not to the Armed Forces.

Apparently the government is considering some action to control the military unrest over low wages. During a recent debate in the national congress, it was reported that the secretary of administration to economist Carlos Bresser Pereira had proposed a nasty scheme of divide and conquer. This consisted of raising the military high command's wages to the level of a deputy minister, without extending the raise to the lower ranks. In response, General Leonel of the General Staff quickly stated that the proposal was "an infantile idea to coopt us."