

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

For thirty pieces of silver

Brazil's government is backing the U.S. line on Iraq, in exchange for empty promises of technological assistance.

In return for Brazil dynamiting the special relationship it had with Iraq for more than a decade, George Bush's administration offered it promises of oil supplies and technological assistance. U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury David Mulford arrived in Brasilia Aug. 20 with those promises in his baggage.

While Mulford was in Brasilia, U.S. Ambassador Richard Melton gave Brazilian President Fernando Collor a personal letter from Bush in which the U.S. President expressed the interest of the United States in collaborating in advanced technology projects. Bush did not insist that Brazil sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty—a matter which has been the source of great confrontation between the two governments heretofore. Instead, Bush pressured Brazil to comply with the Tlatolco treaties on non-proliferation of nuclear arms in Ibero-America, which would impose another kind of safeguard on Brazilian nuclear development.

This sudden ostensible U.S. interest in technological collaboration is so loaded with conditionalities of all kinds, that the Rio daily *O Globo* Aug. 24, in reporting on the letter, commented, "Bush offered aid to separate Brazil from Iraq. . . . It is clearly a message to Brazil not to worry about breaking its technology relations with the Iraqis, since there could be rewards. These rewards, as Brazilian diplomats understand them, are more than satisfactory and demonstrate that Brazil was right to adhere to the United Nations resolutions on Iraq without delay."

What Brazilian officials said after

Mulford met with them on the Mideast and on foreign debt negotiations, indicates that they accepted whatever Bush offered. On Aug. 20, Foreign Minister Francisco Rezek testified to the Brazilian Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "the country's petroleum supply situation is comfortable. . . . We have offers of petroleum from neighboring countries like Venezuela and from others, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran."

On Aug. 25 *O Globo* reported that Petrobras, the state oil company, contracted to raise oil imports from Venezuela from 5,000 to 30,000 barrels per day. "Petrobras refuses to reveal all the results of supply negotiations because it would be a clear demonstration that the OPEC countries are producing above their quotas."

Reliable diplomatic sources comment that Mulford arranged for the servile Venezuelan government of Carlos Andrés Pérez to increase its exports to the United States because of its confrontation with Iraq.

But the 30,000 barrels of Venezuelan oil could become the proverbial thirty pieces of silver. Bush's offer is a charade which poorly disguises the unrelenting technological boycott to which Brazil has been subjected, recently targeted against its strategic aerospace sector. For example, coinciding with Bush's diplomatic offensive, the United States is still embargoing components of the space program's satellite launch vehicle. Officials of the Air Ministry's Aerospace Technology Center recently denounced the U.S. government's embargo on Brazilian-made material for the space project sent to Los Angeles

for special thermal processing.

Diplomats in Brasilia comment that President Bush's offers have other strings attached. For example, Brazil has to give exemplary punishment to a nationalist group in the Armed Forces which, in the view of the United States, dared to try to make Brazil technologically independent. Specifically, the U.S. seems to be demanding the humiliation of a group of retired Air Force officers led by Brig. Gen. Hugo Piva. When the Gulf crisis erupted, this group was working as private contractors for Iraq on its aerospace technology project. General Piva is one of the most brilliant architects of the Brazilian aerospace program and the pioneer of the project to build the Piranha air-to-air missile, a Brazilian version of the French Exocet.

The pressure for the Brazilian officers to leave Iraq was so intense that Foreign Minister Rezek himself declared Aug. 23 that Brazilian technicians working on "sensitive projects" must leave immediately. The next day, the official spokesman for Brazil's foreign ministry, Itamaraty, threatened that these retired Air Force officers could be punished. "These officials were trained with taxpayers' money and therefore have commitments to the country, even though they are working for private companies," he stated.

The same line of threats was issued Aug. 12 in *Jornal do Brasil*, a daily frequently associated with Anglo-American causes. It published an unusually long article entitled "The black history of Brazil-Iraq relations," portraying ex-President Ernesto Geisel and several other ex-officials as criminals, "guilty" of trying, through the special relations with Iraq, to fulfill Brazil's dream of liberation from political, economic, and technological dependency.