

Report from Rio by Geraldo Lino

Collor 'supporters' wear black

Brazilians took to the streets en masse to mourn the state of the nation, not to support the scandal-ridden President.

Once more, reality is confirming the universal wisdom of classical literature. As in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, the gods—in this case the oligarchic pantheon—appear to be driving President Fernando Collor de Mello mad, as the final act before his downfall in the unfolding "Collor-gate" scandal. The latter, under investigation for the past two months, implicates him in shady dealings with his former campaign treasurer, business magnate Paulo Cesar Farias.

On Aug. 13, during an official ceremony in Brasilia, President Collor violently attacked his political opponents, who are already positioning themselves to demand impeachment proceedings against him as soon as the Congressional Commission of Inquiry investigating the case releases its final report on Aug. 26. With contorted expression and clenched fists, the President called on all Brazilians who support him, the so-called silent majority, to take to the streets the following Sunday, Aug. 16, wearing the colors of the Brazilian national flag—green, yellow, blue, and white.

Considered to be a gross error and a display of desperation by analysts and politicians, including the government's allies, Collor's call had the opposite effect of what he intended. In fact, it achieved what the political parties and trade union federations which oppose him had difficulty in doing: getting the people out on the streets. The result was a kind of civic party. On Sunday, tens of thousands

of people amassed on the streets of major cities. Instead of green and yellow, the overwhelming majority preferred to wear black or red, a sign of mourning and indignation over the catastrophic situation to which Collor has reduced the country.

In the capital of Brasilia, over 30,000 people in 8,000 cars participated in a huge demonstration that covered 20 kilometers of the city's main avenues. In contrast, no more than 300 people showed up at Dinda House, the presidential residence, to show solidarity with Collor. In the street, barely 22 cars were counted in a brief pro-Collor demonstration.

In Rio de Janeiro, 50,000 people and thousands of cars paraded along the city's shoreline all day. In the industrial center of São Paulo, demonstrations also occurred throughout the day. Authorities estimated that 5,000 cars paraded 25 kilometers along city streets. Similar demonstrations occurred in other major cities.

Confronted with reality, the President preferred to distort it. According to spokesman Etevaldo Dias, Collor insisted that the green and yellow colors predominated throughout the country on Sunday and that the day was highly positive, an evaluation that caused journalist Marcelo Pontes of *Jornal do Brasil* to conclude that the President "must be color blind."

Speaking more realistically, Senate President Mauro Benevides of the PMDB political party, told *Jornal do Brasil* that the street demonstrations

occurred spontaneously. For him, politicians cannot remain "indifferent" to popular "feelings of discontent." Several analysts think the demonstrations will influence the decision to initiate impeachment proceedings against President Collor.

Even the government's allies pragmatically recognized the predominance of anti-Collor sentiment. According to the Aug. 17 edition of *Folha de São Paulo*, Government Secretary Jorge Bornhausen and Social Action Minister Ricardo Fiuza, the chief coordinators of Collor's attempts to block impeachment proceedings in the Congress, were annoyed at the President's displays of ill temper. Another Collor ally, Bahia Gov. Antônio Carlos Magalhaes, characterized Collor's statements as "idiocy."

Folha de São Paulo also revealed that in their evaluation of the President's emotional state, the government's three military ministers fear that Collor's political judgment is severely impaired.

There are indications that important sectors of the country's elites already view Collor as a "political corpse." In its Aug. 17 editorial, after lamenting that Collor is apparently not willing to resign voluntarily, the traditional daily *O Estado de São Paulo* published a cartoon showing a map of Brazil colored entirely in black, with a solitary demonstrator in the middle holding up a sign reading "I'm With Collor."

The volatile Brazilian political situation invites a parallel with another immortal tragedy, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Blinded by power, like the usurper of Scotland's throne, President Fernando Collor de Mello may not have noticed that, judging by the Aug. 16 demonstrations, "Birnam Wood" has begun to move against him.