

## Brazil's new minister would surrender Amazon

by Valerie Rush

Brazilian President Itamar Franco's appointment of Rubens Ricupero to head the newly created Ministry of the Environment and the Amazon produced its first predictable confrontation with the country's Armed Forces, when it was learned that the new executive post gave Ricupero, a former ambassador to the United States and a favorite of the Anglo-American Establishment, security oversight for the resource-rich Amazon region. Ricupero's first announcement included plans to discuss security concerns for the region, the role of the Armed Forces in the area, border issues, and the expulsion of wildcat Brazilian goldminers from the controversial Amazon territory demarcated as a Yanomami Indian reserve.

Numerous high-ranking military officers drew the obvious conclusion that the new ministry would be interfering with the national defense mission of the Armed Forces and declared in no uncertain terms: "This is unacceptable." Within 24 hours, Provision 350, which established Ricupero's cabinet post, was modified in an attempt to calm military tempers.

However, the conflict is far from ended, since it was *precisely* to enforce the "limited sovereignty" agenda of the Anglo-American Establishment that a Ministry of the Environment and the Amazon was foisted upon the Brazilian government under international pressure. Further, it is hardly accidental that Ricupero was chosen for the powerful post, given his intimacy both with Anglo-American circles of influence represented by the Trilateral Commission and the Inter-American Dialogue, and with Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a Dialogue member "on loan" to the Brazilian government.

The appointment of Ricupero occurs at a time when tensions over the Amazon have been at their highest. In mid-August, a diplomatic clash nearly occurred between Brazil and the United States, when accusations by high-level military officials that the United States was attempting to encircle Brazil through a combined series of military maneuvers and construction of military bases along Brazil's borders hit the front pages of most of the national media. At the same time, an alleged "massacre" of Stone-Age Amazon tribesmen was played up worldwide by the international human rights lobby—despite the fact that not a single corpse was ever turned up, and that it was subsequently admitted that the incident in question occurred across the border in Venezuela, and not in

Brazil at all—and led to charges of Brazilian "inability" to protect its own human and natural resources.

### Internationalizing the Amazon

And yet, in his first press conference with foreign reporters, Ricupero declared that he saw no threat of "internationalization" of the Amazon, as the Brazilian Armed Forces have repeatedly charged. He announced that a "National Forum" would be convened to formulate policy on the Amazon. The forum would be made up of representatives "of state governments, non-government organizations, religious organizations and universities." He declared that as for environmental policy, his office would pay great attention to indigenous affairs and would support a policy of "sustainable development," the green lobby's euphemism for back to the caves.

Ricupero also announced that one of his priorities would be to lobby for the release of at least \$1 billion in international funds from several foreign lending agencies which have been earmarked for a series of 10 Amazon projects, such as developing "eco-tourism," defense of the native populations, and research into "bio-diversity." Those loans have allegedly been held up because of Brazil's inability to match the credits with funds of its own.

Brazilians should stop being so "defensive" about the Amazon, Ricupero added. Rather than seeing enemies out to steal our land, we should take advantage of the millions ready to pour in. "We should see the Amazon as an asset, not a disadvantage. . . . International interest [in the Amazon] could be very positive and could serve to channel resources and create opportunities for the country to solve its problems." Of course, he added, "International cooperation would concentrate on those aspects of interest to the industrialized countries and the major international financial agencies."

Minister Ricupero has had nothing to say about the urgent need to bring transportation, communications, and energy infrastructure into the Amazon, nor how he is going to provide the Amazon's largely impoverished 16 million inhabitants with the technology, education, and jobs that could bring them into the modern era.

The next major confrontation that is brewing with nationalist forces—both military and civilian—could center on the Yanomami reserve issue. According to the 1988 Constitution establishing 900 million hectares (an area the size of Portugal) to shelter about 10,000 Yanomami tribesmen), the demarcation of the area is to be concluded by Oct. 5, 1993. Furious opposition has been expressed to excluding such vast and mineral-rich territory along the border with Venezuela from economic exploitation as well as from the jurisdiction of the national defense forces.

According to late reports, Justice Minister Mauricio Correa has announced that the Oct. 5 deadline will not be met, since "the Itamar Franco government has neither the human nor material resources" to accomplish this.