

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Brazil vows to complete nuclear cycle

Despite opposition from the IMF and the "anti-nuke" lobby, the government is defending its high-technology research.

A battle is raging here over the future of Brazil's nuclear energy program, and the high-technology research that goes along with it. The best efforts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to dismantle the nuclear program through budget cuts, combined with a shrill campaign by ecologists who claim that Brazil wants to "get the bomb," have failed to defuse the commitment to national sovereignty and development on the part of key forces in the country's leadership.

"The country that does not complete its nuclear cycle by the third millennium will not be considered a power," said Army Minister Gen. Leonidas Pires Gonçalves on Sept. 3. "To complete it does not necessarily mean the production of bombs. It means dominating a technology for peaceful ends." Pires Gonçalves is a powerful spokesman for the nationalists within the armed forces who see technological development as the only solid foundation for national sovereignty and military security.

The budget cuts and scarcity of resources that have occurred as a result of IMF policy—which have already adversely affected the nuclear program—have provoked opposition from that nationalist sector. Exemplary are the statements of the army's science and technology secretary, Gen. Haroldo Erichsen da Fonseca, who defended the need for a larger budget for military technological research to President José Sarney. General Erichsen da Fonseca argued that "the na-

tional sovereignty cannot be at the mercy of a foreign nation."

Brigadier General Hugo Oliveira Piva, director of the Aerospace Technical Center of São José dos Campos, then warned that "with the 25% cut in the weapons research sector that occurred at the beginning of this year," Brazil is running the risk of seeing several major programs cancelled outright. Minister of the Army Pires too had referred to this cut as a threat to plans for re-arming the military.

The Brazilian Armed Forces are currently involved in intensive research efforts and sophisticated technological achievements. Among these are: production of a supersonic airplane and, in October, exhibition of the AMX, the first prototype of a subsonic fighter plane, the result of an Italian-Brazilian collaborative project. As part of Brazil's advanced aerospace program, the Alcantara launching base is being structured so that it may be used, under an agreement with NASA, for launching space shuttles like Columbia and Discovery. Research in the nuclear area is focusing on the production of a nuclear-propelled submarine.

In addition, there exist plans for Brazilian-Argentine collaboration in aerospace. On Aug. 10, Argentina's Defense Minister Roque Carranza stated that during his recent visit to Brazil it was clear that a joint project for the construction of civilian airplanes was feasible. The Brazilian company Embraer and the Argentina

Aeronautic Center in Cordoba could soon conclude such an agreement.

The success achieved by the Argentine nuclear program is one more motivation for Brazil to achieve a complete nuclear fuel cycle. On Aug. 23, during a meeting with a group of congressmen, General Pires Gonçalves pointed out that "Argentina, a country which is at approximately the same technological level as ourselves, has maintained in the recent period a praiseworthy continuity in this field, and has achieved significant progress." A congressman present at the meeting noted that the army minister made "a light reference to a neighboring country which had to fight a war with [military] deficiencies"—an allusion to Argentina's Malvinas War with Great Britain.

The army minister's statements about the bomb flattened those ecologist networks and "pacifists" who had attributed to him the idea that Brazil was building the bomb to defend itself from Argentine aggression, as was alleged in the daily *Correio Brasiliense* on Sept. 1.

The fuse of the "anti-bomb" hysteria was lit at the beginning of July at the state university of Campinas, where the Pugwash Conference of international ban-the-bombers held its 35th annual meeting. The meeting's final document, under the pretext of preventing an "arms race" in the southern hemisphere, advocates the destruction of the Argentine and Brazilian nuclear programs. Pugwash urges the two nations to sign a bilateral agreement that would commit them to not "building the bomb," using that old environmentalist ruse to halt scientific research. The Pugwash movement was created by the perverse Bertrand Russell, with the racist intention of denying access by Third World countries to advanced technologies, and especially nuclear energy.