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AEM-6

Funcionalismo on strike

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Dear Peter,

Schools opened in São Paulo on February 8, after 6 weeks of summer vacation. Two days later, in a rainy assembly in front of the building of the State Legislative Assembly, teachers voted to go on strike. In doing this they joined "funcionarios públicos" from 19 categories of public service in protesting the state government's project for salary readjustment and administrative restructuring, a project which the teachers claimed was destroying in one subtle blow all of the gains of 10 years of strikes. This year's strike, which lasted 34 days, managed to touch on nearly all of the most pressurized issues in the country at this time. I'm going to use this newsletter to develop some of these issues, jumping off from my immediate observations of the day to day progression of the strike.

When I arrived home at about 11:30 on the night of February 9, one of the "companheiros" with whom I am sharing an apartment was avidly watching the late news on television, which was giving a live report of an important late night vote which was taking place at that moment in the State Legislative Assembly. Or rather, the vote was trying to take place. The governor was trying to push through his project for 1988 salaries and administration of state employees, and the "deputados" of the PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores - Worker's Party) and other parties of the left were trying at all costs to block the vote. The session was at an impasse, and looked like it would continue most of the night. Toni, who is an energetic militant of the PT, suggested we go immediately over to the Assembly, he to assist and me to observe the process.

Toni's proposal is typical of the 24-hour pique of the youthful "militantes"\* of the PT and other popular movements, who become adept at forgetting how exhausted they are. In my house the "arroz e feijão" (rice and beans) of daily conversation is politics. One of my housemates is a woman who works with the "Movimento Sem Terra", a church-linked group which agitates for the rights of families without

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\* The term "militante" refers to those who commit a considerable part of their time and spirit to agitation and organization in political parties, popular movements, or other groups. It does not (necessarily) mean "gun in hand", and therefore is

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land or housing, and which at the present moment is engaged in negotiations with the state government regarding several large land invasions (involving about 8000 families) which took place in January and February. The other, Toni, who I've already described in another newsletter (AEM-4) regarding his work in the student movement, is involved in the leadership of the local "diretório" of the PT for this region of the Zona Leste of São Paulo. Although I hated to wet-blanket Toni's adventurous militancy, I reminded him that we were both actually exhausted, that it was nearly midnight, we were without a car (buses in São Paulo stop after midnight) and the Assembly was on the complete other side of town. We resolved to watch the process on television.

The subject of the conflict in the State Assembly was the project presented by Governor Orestes Quércia regarding the 1988 plan for "funcionalismo público". "Funcionalismo público" is a complicated and deep-rooted tradition in Brazil. The term refers to the huge body of administrative, technical, and professional employees of the government, ranging from secretaries and other clerical help to engineers, architects, military and civil police, communications workers, the list continues. The two biggest categories within funcionalismo público (at least on the state level) are education and health, consisting of teachers, principals, doctors, nurses, and health workers of all kinds. To give an idea of the vastness of funcionalismo, there now exist 19 different entities representing different groups of funcionarios, which together form a united front, called the "Grupo de 19", to negotiate with the government.\* \*

To understand funcionalismo you have to first understand the looming role of the "patrão" in Brazil's economic culture. Similar to the English word, "patron", the patrão is the boss, the protector and exploiter rolled into one, the one who if you please him can give you a hand up into the upper echelons (particularly if you are part of the striving middle class), or who can squeeze you dry and bring his iron fist down on your head. In the city, relations of the factory worker with the patrão become distant and impersonal. But in the agricultural regions before the arrival of modern technology, the patrão, in this case the landowner who retained his workers through a manipulative system of credit extended, was often the "padrinho" (godfather) to half of the children in the community. In the political cartoons of the unions the patrão is presented as the bloated capitalist with the cigar in his mouth, the professional exploiter dribbling dollars (and these days in many cases the patrão is a north-american.) But whether benevolent or avaricious (or both), the patrão is the symbol of the paternalism which has traditionally been a basis of Brazil's economy, in which the "trabalhador" (worker) figures as the dependent child.

In the case of funcionarios públicos, the patrão is the state, which complicates the relationship. Since a large part of funcionarios públicos are in the field of social services such as public health and education, which every political hopeful loads with promises, there is a strong logic of moral responsibility for the government support of these professions. Of course the

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closer to the English word "activist" than "militant". But here "ativista" has negative connotations, implying a person who only "acts" (agitates) without ideological reflection.

\*\* "Funcionarios Públicos" do not have the legal right to unionize or strike. The "grupo de 19" consists of "associations" of funcionarios (in effect, playing the same role of unions, but giving negotiations a sort of surreal character of official non-recognition.)

reality is that nearly everyone involved in education, for example, complains that the state administration of education is clumsy, bullheaded, and generally lacking in vision. Salaries in the fields of public services are moderate to low, and working conditions in most cases poor to miserable. On the other hand, another large part of funcionarios públicos make up the dense bureaucracy of public administration, the soft, relatively well-paying jobs which are much sought after and in fact sustain a large percentage of the middle class in Brazil.

To give an idea of the extensive role of the "estado patrão" in Brazil's economic life, I'll cite a few figures released recently in the newspapers. On a federal level, government figures from last October set the number of federal funcionarios on the government payroll at 1,577,000, a figure which is swollen a bit because 1,006,000 of those are not direct government employees but rather work for state-maintained companies and foundations, leaving 571,000 in direct government administration. In the state of São Paulo, which operates on a separate payroll, Quercia's government has released contradictory figures. Last year it claimed it had 600 thousand employees, but this year it changed its claims to 900 thousand. The associations of funcionarios have denounced this change, accusing Quercia of manipulating figures to gain acceptance for his claims that the government doesn't have money enough to give funcionarios the salary adjustment they are demanding.

The question of salaries for funcionarios públicos is highly polemic at the moment, because huge government expenditures in this area contribute to the sizable public deficit and thus to inflation, which in 1987 fell somewhere between 365% and 400%, depending on whose figures you believe. On the edge of settling a deal with its creditors for refinancing its external debt, the government is under pressure from the IMF to reduce its public spending. The proposals debated by the federal government thus far have tended to throw the bulk of deficit reduction on the backs of its workers, asserting that cuts in the areas of investments or incentives in the private sector would not be sufficient to reduce the deficit to a level acceptable to the IMF. This assertion is questioned by the parties of the left, which maintain that there is plenty of padding to be stripped before stripping the pockets of funcionarios. These claims are difficult to evaluate from the outside, given the government's silence about its fiscal figures.

The instrument used by the government to cut spending on personnel is nothing so straightforward as a salary cut or mass dismissals. The tool is born of the reality of living with triple-digit inflation. The government is using what is known as the politics of "arrocho salarial" (the closest translation is "salary tightening".) In trying to cope with the inflation of the last few years, President Sarney's four successive finance ministers introduced four or five different methods of salary readjustments, anticipations, freezes and controls, as ways of controlling inflation and helping the population recover the losses in buying power due to rapidly rising prices. The problem, of course, is that salary readjustments in tune with inflation generate more inflation - it is the government's rediscovery of this principle which has led to its many changes in strategy. The most recent has been the URP (Unidade de Referência de Preços), by which inflation is computed trimestrally and a salary readjustment applied for all workers, in both public in private sectors, for the three succeeding months (this method is less inflationary than a strict monthly readjustment in tune with inflation, although the wage-earner loses more of his buying power.)

Eager to close the deal on the debt and get the economy once more "under control", Sarney has proposed a freeze on the URP for federal funcionarios for two months, with a possible abolition of the URP for all the workers in the country. In other words, workers would no longer receive any salary increase to counter the

effects of inflation, which would mean considerable tightening of pocketbooks. This decline in buying power is the infamous "arracho salarial", which naturally leaves many people unhappy. Union leaders immediately responded by announcing their intentions to organize a nationwide general strike if the measure is carried through. Even within the government itself the issue is so politically charged that one high government official has been dismissed and three others are threatening resignation over the proposal. For the moment Sarney has backed off from the proposal, to avoid rocking the political boat before the all-important vote in the Constitutional Assembly on the length of his mandate. But sooner or later he will have to decide how to proceed on such socially painful measures.

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While this furor has been going on in Brasília, here in São Paulo Governor Quéricia has been threatening state functionaries with an arracho salarial of their own. It was this that led to the impasse that night in the Legislative Assembly and the strike that was declared the next day. But now I'd like to <sup>take the</sup> story back a bit, to give a more vivid picture of the development of the strike.

A week before the vote in the Assembly, I stopped by the house of some friends of mine, a married couple that is very active in the militancy of the PT (he serves as an advisor to one of the PT's state legislators, she is president of the local "directorate" of the PT.) Arlete, the female half of this couple, was talking with great concern over the phone when I came in. In addition to her work with the PT, Arlete is a teacher in a state secondary school, where she has developed a very interesting way of presenting a critical vision of the "official" history. She has also been a mobilizing force in the 10-year recent history of teacher organization and strikes, starting in 1978 with the "unfreezing" of the military government.

When Arlete finally hung up the phone she explained to me her state of preoccupation. Quéricia had just released in the "Diário Oficial" (the newspaper that serves as an official government organ) his 1988 project for salaries and administration of funcionarios públicos. On the state level teachers form the largest block of funcionarios. The project contained not only a considerable arracho salarial, but also a complicated mini-administrative reform having to do with changes in definitions and categories, processes of evaluation, and access to positions and promotions. In the area of education the project also involved a subtle manipulation of the salary indexes and professional categories that teachers had fought through various strikes to establish as part of their "Estatuto de Magisterio". The Magisterial Statute had not been changed in any overt way, but rather had been subtly distorted by offering a "productivity gratification" on top of salaries of 27 cruzados (about 40 cents) per classroom hour given. Because the gratification is a fixed value, it in effect destroys the salary indexes because it is not based on percentage of what the teacher is earning (thus meaning a considerable reduction of percentage increase for those in the upper categories.)

"This project destroys everything we have fought for for ten years," Arlete told me. It wasn't so much the decline in salaries in regard to inflation that was arousing her indignation, but the threats to the Magisterial Statute, which had been established in 1985 as a way of giving stability and structure to the

profession. The statute had been approved after a long process of debate between the government and the teachers, establishing such things as professional categories, processes of selection and evaluation, paid time for planning and activities, and salary hierarchies. The teachers admit that the statute is full of flaws, including the salary hierarchies, which as the publication of APEOSP, a teacher association, puts it, "contradicts our vision of the school where all have a fundamental role in education." But despite its flaws, "it's all we have," as Arlete told me. The statute is the only document ~~that~~ the teachers had participated in writing and ~~that~~ gave them some sort of guarantee against the arbitrariness of successive public administrations

(this is one of the disadvantages of having the state as "patrão".) And now, with no discussion whatsoever, Quercia was throwing a law at them which in effect undermined what little guarantees they had.

Arlete was in the phone a good deal during the week that followed, talking with organizers in the teacher movement. She told me that they were dubious about their ability to get the teachers sufficiently fired up to hit the streets the following week, when classes were due to start and the Legislative Assembly was due to vote on Quercia's project. Teachers are among the most hard-to-organize categories as far as strikes and such things go. This is perhaps because the category consists mainly of middle class women who do not consider themselves "trabalhadoras" and who are for the most part fearful of taking any political position that would put themselves or their positions at risk. Many also are "second-earners" in their households, justification for not fighting very hard for higher salaries. That's not to say they don't complain. Open the door to any teacher's lounge and you'll nearly be washed down in the wave of exclamations about everything that is wrong with the profession, from low salaries to lack of chalk to the students who "only fool around". But to get them out in the streets is a different matter.

On February 9, a week after that first phone call, the Legislative Assembly was poised to vote on Quercia's project. Anxiously awaiting the outcome of the vote, Arlete invited me to go with her the following day to a rally of teachers in front of the Assembly, in which it would be decided whether the teachers would or would not go on strike. According to all indicators, the project would pass with little problem, since the Assembly is dominated by the PMDB\*, Quercia's party. It was that evening that I arrived home to find Tini watching on television the PT's attempt to block the vote. The PT succeeded for that night, keeping the debate going until nearly 5:00 am. But the following afternoon the vote took place, establishing Quercia's project as Law Number 1 for 1988.

On the afternoon of February 10, while the Assembly was still in session over the vote, two other assemblies were taking place outside. One consisted of teachers and other categories involved in education (principals, supervisors, etc.) and the other consisted of functionaries publicos in general. It became standard procedure during the strike that first the categories of education would meet separately, and afterwards they would join the assembly of functionalists in general, including health workers, administrators, office staff, etc. All of these were effected by Quercia's project.

I went with Arlete to the assembly of education, where we joined a group of teachers from her school. Turn-out was moderate to low, "because of the rain," Arlete said, eyeing the threatening clouds. "You can see why teachers are so hard to organize. They are afraid of getting wet." It did indeed begin to rain just as the assembly got started, turning the crowd into a solid floor

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\*PMDB - Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro

of umbrellas. When the leadership called for a vote after considerable debate and denunciation, there was no way to see people's hands. It became a strike tradition - "all those in favor of going on strike starting tomorrow, raise your umbrellas!" And the floor of umbrellas erupted and climbed several feet, like an island rising from the sea. In this way the strike was declared. Later the declaration was repeated in a joint assembly with other funcionarios. Soon after the two strike votes, word came from the Legislative Assembly - Quercia's project had passed, despite all the efforts of the PT. And now the work of striking would begin.

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Before going on to discuss the progress of the strike, I'd like to pause to explain some of the technicalities needed to understand the revindications of the teachers and other funcionarios. I've already described a bit of the complications involved in the federal government's attempt to juggle with the effects of inflation in the pockets of the workers. As I was writing I realized how hard it is to explain to outsiders the reality of living in a situation in which the prices of rice, beans, and gasoline rise weekly in front of one's eyes. Thus to inform you that Quercia was offering a salary increase of 70%, and the funcionarios were not happy with that increases, may seem surprising. But that 70% does not come near to being an "increase". With inflation for 1987 falling between 360% and 400%, 70% is merely a "readjustment" which teachers claimed did not come near to covering their losses during the year. The government, on the other hand, claimed that 70%, over the salary of last July, covered official figures for inflation between July of 1987 and January of 1988.

Here one has to proceed warily, because there is considerable manipulation of the figures involved. First of all, January and not July is the traditional data-base for funcionalismo público. The government used July to calculate the readjustment because that was the time when the last "gatilho" was given. The "gatilho" was a government device implemented during the "Plano Cruzado"\* to anticipate inflation, in which every time inflation hit 20% per month a salary anticipation of 20% was automatically given to all workers in the country, in both private and public sectors. This system proved highly inflationary, and was abandoned after June with the advent of the "Plano Bresser", which substituted the less inflationary URP. (Funcionarios públicos in the state of São Paulo do not receive the URP, since it is up to each state government to decide what kind of salary readjustments it wants to give its workers. Quercia had tried to withhold the "gatilho" as well, which led to a heated teacher's strike last year obligating Quercia to fulfil federal law by paying the gatilhos for January, February, March, and April.)

Quercia justifies the use of July as a data-base for salary readjustment because four gatilhos had been received by the funcionarios up until that time, the timing of which made it appear that salaries had already been adjusted up until June. But what is illusory about the use of the gatilho to justify a lower readjustment is that the gatilho is not a readjustment, but merely a type of salary subsidy without permanence in the salary structure. The various associations representing funcionalismo (the "Grupo de 19" referred to earlier) calculated that a readjustment of 144.39% (rather than 70%) would be needed

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\* The "Plano Cruzado" was the economic package introduced in early 1986, in which the devalued "cruzeiros" was transformed into the "cruzado". Prices and

to get buying power up to the level of January of 1987. In addition to this readjustment, they were requesting a real increase of 15% (now maybe negotiation figures seem closer to home for North-Americans.)

Part of the discordance between government figures and those of the "Grupo de 19" comes from the fact that they are based on two different measures of inflation. The government uses the calculations of IBGE, a federal organ, while the funcionarios were using the figures of DIEESE, an organ for statistics and socio-economic studies run by the unions. Naturally there is going to be divergence between official figures and union figures, which are used nationwide as the basis for salary revindications. But even using the IBGE, funcionarios would need a readjustment of 124.71% to recover their losses from last January, even on top of the gatilhos already received. Choosing to base their revindications on the higher DIEESE figures, the funcionarios adopted the formula  $144.39\% + 15\%$  as the rallying cry of the movement.

I am perhaps going into more detail than is necessary about the salary proposals involved in the strike, except that they demonstrate well the hardships and confusion of living with high inflation, and the way in which the government has manipulated that confusion. To be fair to Quercia, it must be said that he is in a hard place. The federal government recently froze credit to state governments as part of its plan of spending reduction. In any case, Quercia is not on too good terms with Sarney, since he publicly supports a reduction of Sarney's mandate to 4 years (which would open space for his own candidacy for president.) As governments do in such cases, Quercia justifies the arrich salarial by saying there is simply no money in the state treasury to pay anything above 70%. Again, this is hard to evaluate from the outside, especially since the government has been less than candid in releasing figures about state receipts and expenditures. The whole question has been kept very vague, with Quercia's insistence that the matter is out of the realm of public dialogue.

It was Quercia's refusal to dialogue, accompanied by manipulation and downright deception, that has been most infuriating for teachers and other funcionarios. The very timing of the vote in the Legislative Assembly involved considerable politicking. Although the project for readjustments was slated to begin in January, Quercia only called the Assembly to debate the project on January 26, after the payrolls for January had already begun printing, with the result that paychecks for January would be without any increase. Adding to the rage of the funcionarios, paychecks did not only increase, but actually decreased, returning to the level of last October because the government removed the "bonus" offered for November and December as a way of diverting the demands for real increases. The PT accused the government of using a strategy of "empty packets" to get funcionarios to accept the scanty readjustments offered by Quercia's project. And by waiting until the last minute, Quercia forced the Assembly into accepting the project with little debate.

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salaries were frozen for a year and then released all at once, causing inflation to skyrocket. It was followed by the "Plano Bresser", which as well as introducing the URP, initiated a complicated system of price controls which proved nearly impossible to enforce. Finance Minister Bresser has since been replaced by Malsen de Nóbrega (Sarney's fourth finance minister in three years), who is negotiating the end of the URP as an attempt to reduce the deficit and reach an accord with the IMF.

Quércia's attitude of non-negotiation led to the PT's attempt to block the vote, both on the salary proposal and on the administrative reforms involved in the project. This despite the fact that the PT (and almost everyone) agrees that the present administrative structure of functionalism needs to be reformed. According to a PT publication denouncing Quércia's project, the current system is "basically erroneous, uneducative, and demoralizing." But in ramming through the project the way he did, Quércia denied the Legislative Assembly or the functionaries the chance to investigate and debate the implications and consequences of the reforms, propose alternatives, compare them to the present system. Would they indeed be an improvement? By what criteria? And meanwhile while careers were being juggled in the air.

Likewise, the teachers' protests over the distortions in the Magisterial Statute was more than just a squabble over percentage increases in salary indices. It sprung from a deep sense of offense that this document, which teachers had fought for in order to give structure to the profession, and which everyone agreed was far from perfect, was being distorted and undermined without any sort of discussion or consultation with the teachers involved. The "estado patrão" was indeed treating them like children, mere receptors of the decisions handed them.

The teachers' revindications did not stop with salary issues, but extended to the extreme weakness of the entire state system of education. They were demanding, for example, the "immediate equipment of the schools", referring to the absurdly poor state of physical repair in so many of the public schools, the lack of materials for libraries and laboratories, even the lack of such day-to-day items as paper and chalk (I spoke to one teacher in whose school the teachers themselves pooled money to buy such items.) They demanded as well the immediate contracting of administrative personnel in the schools, to relieve teachers from the exhausting, unpaid "extra" jobs in the offices, patios, and hallways, <sup>which are</sup> demanded of them in order to have the schools run with any semblance of smoothness. And another hot demand this year is "decent food for the children", a revindication born of a pet project of Quércia to establish a special program for "ciclo básico", the first two years of school which have traditionally been the moment of greatest drop-out in Brazilian education. To counter the high rate of failure between first and second grades, especially among poor children, the governor announced (with high television publicity - this is an election year) a program of "jornada única", in which students of ciclo básico stay six hours rather than four hours in school, participate in "supplemental" activities (such as sports and art) and receive breakfast, lunch, and a snack. A beautiful plan, except for a few hitches. First, it has wrecked havoc with school schedules (and as a result, teacher salaries). Second, most schools are not physically equipped with the infrastructure needed to provide meals for the students. Third, the promised food has not arrived. The kids have been receiving crackers and macaroni soup every day. As a result, more disillusionment with Quércia's promises.

Unfortunately, most of the problems within the schools never make it to the bargaining table. As with most strikes, the issue which decides whether or not to return to work is salaries. At most questions are raised for the public about the government's commitment to education - what is not questioned is the nature of that education. This is true even among the great majority of the teachers in strike, who generally have an extremely limited view of



the job they do. One of the ironies of the strike, at least for those with a deeper understanding of education, is that even if teachers received a salary increase which eliminated the "arrêché salarial", and even if they returned to work with the Magisterial Statute intact, most would go on generating the kind of education which reproduces paternalistic and oppressive social divisions, devalues the life experience of the student, and makes school a generally rigid, alienating, and unstimulating place to be.

On the other hand, it was interesting to see this largely unpoliticized, timid, and unquestioning band of teachers hit the streets for what was for many the first time. Quéricia was refusing to meet with them to negotiate, so they resolved to bring the discussion to him. Two weeks after the vote to begin striking, the teachers decided to pay a mass visit to the governor's residence, the Palácio dos Bandeirantes in the Zona Oeste (West Zone) of São Paulo. I'll continue now with an eyewitness account of that visit.

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I knew I was in the right bus to reach the Palácio dos Bandeirantes because the bus was filled with chattering women, some carrying rolled up banners, clamoring indignantly about "classroom hours" and salaries and what they would like to do to Quéricia. As the bus approached the park which surrounds the governor's residence, their indignation was redirected toward the creeping pace of traffic, which had turned agonizingly slow, accompanied by scores of transit and military police. Later we found out that many of the buses rented by the teachers to bring groups from the schools to the demonstration had been stopped by the police eight kilometers away from the site of the assembly, forcing teachers to walk the distance. We began seeing strings of teachers walking in clustered groups toward the palace, carrying banners and dressed in every combination of jeans, sneakers, skirts and sandals from chic to hippie. I descended from the bus with a rowdy group of teachers that was impatient with the slowness of traffic and joined the progression into the park and up the hill.

Rallies of teachers are different from other rallies I have been "collecting" here. Rallies of the PT, for example, have a certain professionalism, made up almost entirely of militants who throw all of their energy into chanting slogans, singing songs, passing pamphlets to the passerbys. Teachers, on the other hand, come out once a year if necessary for their salary revindications, reluctantly at that, at least for most of them. The ideological spectrum among the teachers is diverse, containing its share of members of the PT or PCdB (Communist Party of Brazil), but consisting for the most part of that sector of the middle class that voted Quéricia and his centrist party, the PMDB, into power in 1986. Quéricia and the PMDB were swept into power at the beginning of the "Nova Republica", with the euphoria which existed at the start of Brazil's "transition to democracy". Their campaign promises were democratization of the government, access to dialogue of all sectors of society, and prioritization in the areas of health, housing and education (traditional areas of political promises.) Thus the disillusionment felt by so many teachers both by Quéricia's lack of attention to the real problems of education and by his refusal to negotiate in any way the terms of the project. Banners of this type appeared frequently - "I voted for you, Quéricia - what deception!", or the more satirical adaptation of Coke's insignia, "Don't swallow Quéricia-Cola - This is it!"

The rather casual, ambling pace of the procession changed abruptly as the teachers ascended the hill. To their consternation, they found the road to the Palace blocked by a row of cavalry and a battalion of shock troops. As each successive wave of teachers mounted the hill their ambling conversations turned into concentrated indignation. Shouts of "Forward!", "How absurd!" and "This is democracy?" were directed at the shock troops (and through them at Quercia.) Chants revived from the military years swept through the teachers crowding in front of the cavalry. "Abaixa a repressão! Abaixa a ditadura!" they shouted, followed by the more personal, "Filha de pu-ta, filha de pu-ta!" (son-of-a-bitch). Helicopters of the military police circled overhead, greeted by the hoots of the strikers, who waved their fists in the direction of the planes. Three or four strikers sat down directly in front of the horses, apparently with the intention of staying put. Others launched into heated discourses in front of the television cameras that milled eagerly around. Meanwhile the strike organizers, frustrated in their attempt to reach the Palace, began redirecting the agitated strikers down a connecting road in order to regroup in front of the football stadium of Marumbi, several kilometers away. Quercia had blocked every possible access to the Palace, determined to maintain his hard line of not receiving the strikers.

All in all, Quercia's show of force succeeded in giving the teachers an enormous sense of importance. It transformed almost instantaneously a group of mostly unpoliticized women, whose participation in demonstrations consisted as much of gossip and complaining as fired-up demands, into a group unified over their indignation at repression. Arlete told me that in all the years of Governors Maluf and Montoro, Quercia's predecessors during the military regime, access to the palace was never blocked to the teachers' protests. Of course when they got there the answer was invariably no, but at least they got there. Now under Quercia's "democratic" government they were shut out.

One wonders what game Quercia was playing here. As a strike-breaking tactic the police action was highly questionable. Because of its extreme practical absurdity (teachers are hardly a threat either to public order or property), it most likely mobilized more teachers than it scared away. The assembly that followed in the stadium of Marumbi was certainly more fired-up than it would have been if the teachers had not encountered the police along the way. And many schools who had been wobbling over the decision to strike stopped work the following day in protest.

Official declarations stated that the police action was necessary for the "security" of the palace, citing a 1983 demonstration of the unemployed that had stamped down several fences. What is more likely is that Quercia was testing out the police, both for internal reasons and to prove some points about his candidacy. The week before, in a rare move of rebelliousness, several battalions of São Paulo's military police had gone on strike to protest salaries and administrative procedures (they too are funcionários públicos). Although the strike was quickly suppressed with arrests, demotions, and dismissals, the government needed a way to demonstrate to the public, and to the ranks, the continuing discipline of the military police, especially in front of workers with whom they might sympathize. Considerable pressure was put on the police by the teachers, who invented a song for them in the spirit: "Policial, policial, você também ganha muito mal!" (you also earn very little.) But the cavalry and shock troops remained firm. Although they generally avoided incidents, they were ready to act if necessary. At one point a group of

funcionarios tried to advance on the line. The troops went into action, loosing tear gas and descending on top of the protestors, wounding several.

Another reason for the exaggerated repression is more personally political. It is a lightly shielded "secret" that Quercia wants to be president of the Republic. He cannot go public with his candidacy since the Constitutional Assembly is still torn over whether to hold elections this year or extend Sarney's mandate for one or two more years. But he has been unquestionably acting like a candidate. According to a recent study by the Folha de São Paulo, the city's leading newspaper, he has spent more on publicity in the first 8 months of his governorship than his predecessor, Franco Montoro, spent in the last year of his mandate, when publicity expenses traditionally soar. Included in these expenditures are over US\$ 200,000 in publicity in other states (outside São Paulo) and over US\$12,000 in foreign newspapers. He intensified his television campaign last November, appearing in almost three hours of prime time during the first three weeks of that month, an appearance three times that of Ceca Cila, to make a comparison. And he has hit the street with "super-projects", such as the promise of 90,000 new houses of "mutirão" (self-construction with cement blocks) in the state as a whole, and the long promised extension of the city's Metrô. The Metrô is a glamor project in a city desperately in need of more transportation, but which would be better served by an amplification of its bus system, to meet the needs of the crowds of people arriving daily from the Northeast and other parts of the interior. Another obviously election oriented project was the "Jornada Única" for first and second grades that I have already mentioned, launched among high publicity but now floundering for lack of food, space, or personnel.

Given his hopes for the presidency, why is Quercia risking the political alienation of teachers, funcionarios, and other groups involved in social services in São Paulo? One reason has to do with the internal politics of the PMDB, which is a centrist umbrella party with factions to the left and right. Quercia knows that at this point he has little chance of gaining support of the left wing of the party in order to gain the candidacy. Therefore he has to secure the center-right, and a strong anti-strike position is likely to do just that.

In addition, to reach the presidency Quercia has to have the support of the military, which has recently been rumbling louder than usual against elections in 1988 and towards an extension of Sarney's mandate for five or even six years. General Leônidas, chief of the armed forces, declared he would support Sarney in a golpe-type maneuver threatened several weeks ago. At <sup>that time</sup> Sarney unleashed harsh criticisms of the Constitutional Assembly, accusing the left of undermining the "process of democracy". Should the Constituyente vote for a reduction of his mandate to four years, he threatened to go to the Judiciary, Brazil's Supreme Court, to try and secure five years. This would in effect be a golpe, pitting the Judiciary against the Legislature to discredit the Constitutional Assembly, which could give the military an excuse to step in to control "governmental disorder". This may be just a scare tactic to secure the vote in his favor, but in any case it indicates that the military is still a potent force in the process of "transition". Quercia's show of force and his hard line in negotiations may be an attempt to show the military he can be trusted with the presidency. According to this game, the support of the military, as well as his media-image in the country as a whole, is more important to gaining the presidency than the support of the Paulistas, whose vote can therefore be sacrificed.

Those Paulistas gathered in front of the stadium of Morumbi weren't appreciating being sacrificed. In the assembly that followed the confrontation with the police, the strike vote was clear and unified. Shouts of "A Greve Continua!" competed with the noise of the military helicopters circling overhead. Wandering through the crowd, I came upon Arlete and a group from her school. Mostly as a result of Arlete's work in mobilizing, about 30 teachers from the school had rented a bus to come to the rally, accompanied by eight students and what is more rare, the school principal. This high school, EESG América de Moura in the neighborhood Vila Prudente, was one of the few to remain completely paralyzed until the very end of the strike, when the more nervous and worn-out of the teachers were beginning to drift back to work. Arlete plays a role of motherly reinforcement at such rallies, keeping up steady conversation of reassurance and incitement with the teachers and students. She was visibly tired when I joined the group, seeing as she and the others had walked nearly 12 kilometers to arrive at the stadium.

The students who had come along were enthusiastic. They had gotten together in the house of one of them the night before to make a huge banner saying, "Students support the strike of the teachers!" When they arrived at the stadium they mounted an available wall and unfurled the banner, standing like proud sentinels and clearly enjoying the surprised applause of the ranks of teachers passing by. The principal had a much more cynical view of the event. I asked her how she saw the strike, since it was very few school principals who risked their positions to publicly support the paralyzation. "I don't see the strike," she answered in a tired voice. "I see that this government doesn't give the slightest importance to education. This you won't achieve with or without the strike - it's just not valued."

This point was reinforced for the teachers by Quérucia's hard line that day and in the succeeding days of the strike. The final vote of that day's assembly was a decision to attempt a return to the Palace by another route, to try once again to speak with Quérucia. As the front of the procession reached the entrance to the Palace grounds, the teachers encountered a reinforced police blockade and a statement from Quérucia saying he would not under any circumstances receive the strikers at the palace nor negotiate with representatives while the functionaries remained in strike. After much argument, he did agree to receive four legislators of the PT who had accompanied the rally. They were received in the Palace where they spoke not with Quérucia but with the Secretary of Government, who repeated Quérucia's position that there was nothing to negotiate.

Quérucia maintained this position over the next few weeks, as the mobilization of the strike rose to its peak and then began the process of decline. He did authorize legislators of the PMDB to conduct "discussions" with the strike leaders, although it was kept ambiguous whether these "discussions" were actually negotiations, with the PMDB representing the government, or whether these legislators were a sort of "intermediary" without actual negotiating force. In this way Quérucia was able to maintain the hard line of non-negotiation while beginning indirect discussions to work toward the end of the strike.

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In the weeks that immediately followed the repression at the Palace, the teachers' enthusiasm for the strike continued to rise. While the organizers calculated that 60% of state teachers participated at the beginning of the paralyzation, that figure rose to 85% during the march on the Palace and hit 90-95% during the demonstrations that followed. Government figures continued to put the number at 50-55% of schools partially paralyzed, refusing to admit that a good percentage of schools remained completely shut down during the duration of the strike. In other schools the number of strikers rose and fell in accordance with whether or not there was a demonstration that day in the center of the city.

The strike organizers kept up a steady schedule of demonstrations in order to maintain the energy of resistance that was unleashed with Quercia's repression. The focus of strikes here is not the picket line, as it is in the United States, but rather mass "concentrations" designed to pressure the center of decision-making. On Tuesday, March 1, several days after the confrontation at the Palace (Thursday, February 25), the teachers decided to gather at the "Praça da Republica", one of the prominent public plazas of São Paulo in which is located the imposing building of the State Department of Education. The goal was to "abraçar" (hug) the building, in effect circling it with a human chain much as Quercia had closed off the Palace the week before. Quercia called out the troops once again, setting up a police barrier around the building and shutting off one side with the express purpose of keeping the teachers from closing the chain. The teachers, once again with the spirit of resistance born of repression, took the chain around a side street and in this way succeeded in closing the chain despite Quercia's attempt to block them. The psychological victory was theirs in this case, although in terms of practical results all they got from Quercia was one more refusal to receive representatives in order to negotiate.

Two days later the teachers were back in front of the Department of Education, in a mass demonstration which probably marked the peak of the movement, at least in terms of numbers and enthusiasm. Newspapers put the number of teachers gathered at 50,000, with the strike organizers claiming 70,000 and the military police saying 10-12,000, their consistent number for all demonstrations during the strike. A great part of the demonstrators came in busloads from cities in the interior of the state of São Paulo, where mobilization of entire school districts was often stronger than in the capital. Banners with names of schools and cities dotted the crowd: "ANGATUBA - PRESENTE!" "SUPERVISORS, PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND STAFF OF MAUÁ - PRESENTES!"

By this time there was developing a colorful and inventive culture of the strike. On the day of the "abraço" of the Department of Education, a group from the municipality of Guarulhos (on the outskirts of São Paulo) came carrying cardboard horseheads mounted on sticks, with the words "Violência, Não! Negociação, Sim!" These reminiscences of Quercia's cavalry were greeted with cheers as they bobbed above the heads of those in the crowd.

In the tradition of carnival, several school groups came in costume, such as the group that arrived dressed as clowns, pronouncing themselves the "Círculo Básico", an ironic reference to Quercia's mismanaged program for "Círculo Básico" referred to earlier. The clowns carried signs saying "Look what we are in this government!" One elderly woman has become famous in the movement for appearing at every rally over the years dressed in an old-fashioned, full-length cap and

own, carrying a sign written in chalk, "The life of a teacher is a black board." Several teachers mounted their salary tickets on posters, labeled as "Testaments of Misery." Others came wearing colored headbands revindicating the 144% + 15% salary increases. Groups appeared with drums, tamborines, and other instruments, turning the procession at moments into a samba parade, with teachers dancing in the streets to anti-Quercia lyrics.

In this second concentration in the Praça da Republica, Quercia was satirized at every turn. He appeared as a gangster in WANTED posters, advising "Reward - Government of the state of São Paulo." He was caricatured as Pinocchio, as a witch doctor, as a vampire. One group carried puppets on a string, all saying "I voted for the man." And one of the biggest hits of the day was the trip of teachers who arrived dressed in black with veils and candles, carrying an enormous purple coffin on which was written, "Here lies functionalism public" and another black coffin inscribed, "Here lies the democracy of Quercia."

As I wandered through the crowd, running here and there into teachers whom I knew, I struggled to understand the shouts over the loudspeakers. At such events a podium is improvised by the unions with loudspeakers mounted on the tops of a truck, which can stay put in the center of the assembly or accompany the strikers in a march through the streets. At rallies such as this the discourse from the podium is about 20% strike related and about 80% political plugging by every possible group on the left. Among those mounting the truck were leaders from every political party with the word "communist", "socialist", or "trabalhador" from the moderate populist PDT (Partido Democrática Trabalhista) to the PT to the marxist-leninist PCdB. One leader of the PCdB launched into an impassioned plea for solidarity with the people of Palestine and a diatribe against U.S. imperialism. He was greeted with lukewarm applause. More enthusiastic was the applause given to representatives of the National Student Union (UNE) and the Municipal Union of Secondary Students (UMES), who offered their support for the strike and then launched into their own denunciations of capitalism and exhortations to adhere to the "luta". These discourses generally accelerate (or degenerate) into a steady stream of shouted words, which for me are nearly impossible to decipher. That's alright, since the basic message stays the same from speech to speech.

In the third rally in the Praça da Republica, which took place on March 8, a different voice was heard from the podium. March 8 was International Women's Day, and a representative of the Woman's Commission of São Paulo took the microphone to invite teachers to participate in a demonstration in the center of São Paulo later that day. It was then that I was struck by the degree to which this strike of teachers and other functionaries, the great majority of which are women, had remained unconnected from the question of women in the workplace. I was reminded of my third year at Yale in 1984 when the campus was torn by a strike of technical and clerical workers (in effect, "functionaries"). One of the central issues of the debate was the manner in which categories of work consisting predominantly of women are devalued, both in terms of respect and of salaries. Here in São Paulo, despite all the talk about "devaluation of the teaching profession" and "arrich salarial", the question of the woman worker was not raised, or at least not until this representative of the Woman's Commission spoke from the podium.

I asked Arlete and my other teacher friends about this. They said that one problem is that many of the women working as teachers do not themselves put a high value on their work. Generally the money received is a second salary,

and often in middle class households that salary goes merely for "women's trivialities" such as clothes and makeup and outings, but plays little role in the maintenance of the household. This is changing during these days of high inflation and arrcoho salarial, when every cruzado counts, but the class consciousness of the woman worker remains less than aroused. That could be seen in the deprecating smiles that accompanied the applause for the woman from the Commission. And the two processions planned for that afternoon, that of the funcionarios públicos and that of International Woman's Day, remained separate (although together they succeeded in completely paralyzing rush hour traffic in the center of São Paulo. São Paulo's Woman's Day parade was, incidently, the second biggest in the world for that day.)

By now you should have a picture of the extremely varied nature of these rallies of teachers. Part clash with police, and part carnival; part political shouting match and part picnic. Pamphleteers worked the crowd alongside hawkers selling ice cream and mineral water to the thirsty teachers. The teachers read the pamphlets and then spread them on the benches and curbs to rest their feet while the long process of denunciation, debate, and votation took place at the podium. At some moments the crowd erupted in shouts, at others the teachers sat around gossiping or waiting, tired and unconnected, shielding themselves with umbrellas alternately from the sun or rain. And the strike continued.

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If the peak of a movement is best described through its mass concentrations, its decline is easier understood close to the roots, in the local assemblies and workplaces where the real decisions are made. Those who go to a rally in the Praça da Republica already know they will vote to continue striking. Those stopping by the school daily to mark their presence in the strike face every day a new decision. Following the rally at the Palácio das Bandeirantes I began to accompany the participation of EESG América de Moura, Arlete's school, and the Regional Assembly of the Vila Prudente, my home neighborhood.

I ride home from the demonstration at the Palace in the bus rented by the teachers of América, who were exhausted but animated by the events of the day. For this moment the teachers, principal, and students who had come along were all on equal terms, joking and challenging each other and reliving the events of the day. The students listened wide-eyes as Arlete and the others told stories about past strikes, and then launched into their own political evaluations with the enthusiasm of adolescent discovery. Arlete invited the students to speak the next day at a meeting of students and parents that would be held at the school. These meetings were held weekly to keep parents and students informed and help them to feel part of the strike, since one of the difficult parts of a teacher strike is the alienation it causes with students and parents, who feel that it is they who are being hurt. Conscious of this, Quercia had mounted an intense television campaign during prime time in an attempt to discredit the revindications of the teachers. The figures that he presented in these TV spots gave a highly distorted version of the teacher demands and government response. The organizations of funcionarios immediately responded point-by-point in the newspapers, but seeing as many more people watch television than read the newspapers, the damage was done on a wide scale. What was left to the teachers was immediate appeals through these weekly meetings which became a regularly scheduled part of the strike.

Very few parents appeared the next morning for the meeting in the sports block of América, perhaps because this was a high school, and parents have by this time pretty much left students to their own responsibility. América had been completely paralyzed since the beginning of the strike on February 11, and about 200 students waited expectantly to see if the paralyzation would continue. The 30 teachers who had gone to the Palace stood restlessly on the platform while Arlete and other leaders reported on the repression and the failure of negotiations. They stressed the point that the intention of the strike was not to hurt the students, but to establish the conditions in which the quality of teaching could improve, starting with livable salaries but extending to the conditions of schools in general, largely ignored by the government. The students listened with mostly hushed faces - it was hard to judge any kind of reaction, positive or negative. Although the teachers asked for questions or commentary, no one spoke, and the meeting ended with an appeal for continued support. Afterwards a small group of students stood around chatting with the teachers, discussing ways to support the strike, but the majority drifted out of the gym, vaguely supportive of the teachers but disappointed to remain without classes.

After the assembly the teachers held a rather disorganized meeting in the teacher's lounge. People came and went, drank coffee, chatted on the side as the principal tried to raise a few issues of practical importance. As I said earlier, this principal was one of the few to support the strike, although she found herself in the ambiguous position of mediator between teachers and government. One such ambiguous issue was the question of whether teachers would or would not sign the attendance book. It had been voted as general strike policy not to sign the book, since not all principals would let teachers sign without working. But many teachers disagreed with this policy, maintaining that it would be easier to track down and punish those who didn't sign, and that after all, they weren't absent, they were on strike, and should maintain their official relationship with the state. The teachers of América had voted to sign the book, which the principal was allowing, in opposition to official instructions. The principal also raised the issue of the bulletin board the teachers were mounting with strike-related news clippings. In order to maintain appearances and avoid setting the entire school on the track for reprisals, the bulletin board could not come out in open support of the strike. For example, the principal explained, it could not proclaim "A greve continua! Vamos à luta!" (The strike continues, let's join the struggle) but it could say simply "O progresso da greve" and by remaining strictly informative pass official inspection.

As Arlete gave me a ride over to the Regional Assembly taking place at a neighboring school, she shrugged her shoulders impatiently at these negotiations of the principal. "Other categories don't have such problems. When they go on strike, they assume the risks, and go all out in fighting. It's only the teachers who try to hedge the issue."

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Before describing the Regional Assembly I need to give some background on the organization of the strike on state and local levels. I've already mentioned the "Grupo de 19", the negotiating block of the various associations of functionalism of which five are involved in education.\* The principal among these five is

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\* APEOSP (Association of Teachers of Official Education in S.P.), APASE (Association of Supervisors) AFUSE (Ass. of staff workers) UDEMO (Union of Principals) and CPP (Confederation of Teachers of Primary).



APEOSP, the association of teachers in state schools. It was APEOSP which channeled most of the organization of the strike, or at least that division of the strike composed by education, on which I have been concentrating.

For the purposes of local organization APEOSP divides the state of São Paulo into 100 regions, of which 12 are in the capital city of São Paulo itself. These regional assemblies then elect "counselors" that take part in the "Council of Representatives" (CR) that plans and debates such things as strike strategy and methods of mobilization. In addition to these regional counselors, each school elects one representative to APEOSP who serves as a point for information and organization within that school.

I attended one meeting of the CR of APEOSP around the time of the peak of the strike, accompanying two teachers who serve as counselors for the Regional Assembly of Vila Prudente. The meeting took place in the hall of the Union of Chemical and Pharmaceutical Workers, one of the prominent unions in São Paulo, affiliated with CUT, the "Central Única dos Trabalhadores". On the wall of this meeting hall were several large banners which give a flavor of the left here:

"Salute to the 70 years of the Russian Revolution"  
 "1967-1987: Commandante Che Guevara, we continue the struggle"  
 "Together we are strong - 1st Congress of Chemical Workers"  
 "There is no socialism without the liberation of women, there is no liberation of women without socialism."

At this meeting of the CR were gathered the more militant of the striking teachers, generally those with an experience of participation in the left outside of the teachers' strike. The business of the day was to evaluate the progress of the strike and plan the huge concentration to take place that afternoon. The grade of paralyzation was still high, with 53% of the regions in the state reporting themselves 85-100% paralyzed and 36% reporting themselves over 50% paralyzed.

What was more interesting to me than the actual debate in the CR was the political division that these debates revealed. My companions, Libania and Eliane, described the same divisions in the leadership of APEOSP that I have seen in almost every sector of the left here in Brazil. Those who read my newsletter about "Grêmios Livres" (AEM-4) will remember the split in the student movement between the PT, the PCdB, and the Convergência Socialista. These splits reflect a tension in the left about the degree of popular participation needed for the "revolution".

As we listened to the shouted discourses from the podium, Libania explained to me that there are four distinct groups within the CR. The first comprises the directorship of APEOSP, consisting mostly of petistas (members of the PT) linked to the national leadership of the PT. Within the PT this group, called the "Corrente", is primarily concerned with maintaining the political space of the PT within the current regime, and recently has been characterized by decisions from the top and alliances with other "bourgeois" political sectors. In reaction other groups have been forming within the PT, proposing to return the PT to its founding principles of democratic decision-making that moves up from the bases. These groups of petistas are mostly linked to the popular movements such as health, housing, education, transportation, etc. They insist on an openness of approach and carry an explicit commitment to popularly based socialism, something the Corrente avoids discussing. Hence the name of one of these "tendências" within the PT, "Poder Popular e Socialismo." Within APEOSP this group calls itself "Opposition to the Directorship". Arlete, Libania, and Eliane

are part of the "Opposition", which last year challenged the directorship for leadership in the elections of APEOSP. They lost the election, since the majority of teachers in the CR chose the safer "Corrente", which is the figurehead for the PT in the country.

The remaining two groups represent the vanguardism and exclusivity that characterizes the traditional marxist-leninist approach. One is the "Convergência Socialista", which is a party-within-a-party inside of the PT. The Convergência operates as a closed group, having little commitment to the democratic principles of the PT, which it is "using" as part of its strategy of revolution. The other group is the PCdB, one of Brazil's two explicitly "communist" parties, which is forever trying to gain "quadras" (blocks) among the organizations of the left. Within APEOSP these groups maintain minority factions that manage to keep themselves highly visible in the day-to-day agitation.

These groups were evident back in the Regional Assembly of the Vila Prudente, of which the school América is part. The leadership is split between members of the "Opposition" (such as Arlete, Libania, and Eliane) and between the chair of the assembly, Claudio, who is an active member of the PCdB. Although Claudio is much further to the left than most of the teachers, his energy and political clarity helped him gain more votes than any other counselor, which put him in charge of local meetings. It was clear to see that within the democratic procedures of the assembly he managed to keep himself in the spotlight most of the time, edging out or pressuring with time checks those of the "Opposition" who got up to speak.

But despite these political tensions taking place on the sidelines, the tone of the Regional Assemblies was much less overtly political than the CR, where the concentration of "militants" was greater. The purpose of the RA was to provide the rank and file with a chance to make proposals, raise questions, clarify procedures, as well as maintain the spirit of the strike by involving teachers in at least one strike-related meeting each day. As I mentioned earlier, the focus of strikes here is not the picket line, at least not in the same way as in the United States. The picket is something that is done only occasionally, as a pressuring event, and not rain or shine.

Teachers as a category have not liked even to call these events "pickets", as it makes them sound too much like "trabalhadores". To keep their middle class distance they have preferred to call them "Comissões de Convencimentos" (persuasion commissions).

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On Wednesday, March 2, the day following the "abraço" of the Department of Education, Claudio opened the Regional Assembly with an evaluation of the strike. The RA of Vila Prudente consisted of teachers from nearly 90 different schools in the 6th and 7th school districts of the city. Three or four mornings a week they gathered in the gym of the school, EEPSPG República de Paraguay, whose principal had liberated the gym despite the fact that neither she nor most of the teachers from the school were on strike. This morning, as is traditional in Brazil, the meeting began late, with teachers drifting in to find places on the bleachers as Claudio took the microphone to begin his discourse from the floor.

That day's evaluation began with a discussion of the numbers of teachers returning to work. It appeared that there was a mixed reaction to the police repression. Some teachers and schools were mobilizing much stronger than before. Others were returning to work, frightened by the growing rumors of reprisals to come. In the region of the Vila Prudente, the role call indicated 55% paralyzation, down from 70-80% in the previous weeks. The week before 19 schools in the 6th district were completely stopped; now the number was down to eight. And of the almost 90 schools in the region, only 49 were represented in that assembly.

To avoid disanimation, Claudis tried to put these numbers in perspective. Teachers were not returning in mass, but rather two or three returning in each school were enough to significantly lower the percentage. And no progress had been made in negotiations. Quercia had authorized legislators of the PMDB to meet with the "Grupo de 19", since the legislators were beginning to feel burned by the strike, which was leaving so many of their constituents disillusioned. A continued impasse would mean the political suicide of the PMDB. But while these legislators opened the only visible path to dialogue, they did not carry any concrete counter-proposal from Quercia, who was maintaining his position of non-negotiation while the functionaries remained on strike. Hardly anyone among the strikers was insisting that they hang on "until victory" (144% + 15%) but all agreed that they needed some sort of concession.

Claudis opened the floor for others to speak. Arlete got up to urge teachers to participate in local actions, in order to educate the population, gain support of parents and teachers, and keep teachers mobilized until the next big concentration in the center of the city, scheduled for the following week. "We need to take to the streets in regional acts," she argued, "in order to keep constant pressure on the government, which is beginning to show its fragility."

Various suggestions arose. They could arrange pickets or vigils, parade with loudspeakers through the neighborhood, conduct theater presentations or "public classes" in the local plazas. Some teachers raised the question of reprisals, which was beginning to rest heavily on people's minds, especially since Quercia had dismissed 87 striking health workers from the city's biggest state hospital the week before. Rumors were flying that the Department of Education was sending around "corregedores" (literally, "correctors", a sort of truant officer for teachers) to collect names of teachers who had been signing the attendance book without working. The teachers were learning that instead of helping avoid reprisals, the signing of the book by the strikers could be processed as an illegal deception of the government, giving grounds for dismissal without being an overt "punishment of strikers". One teacher suggested that they invade the local district office to demand that the "delegada" (district director) not collaborate with reprisals nor hand over any names of those on strike. The idea was taken up by the group, which voted to conduct a procession through the streets to the district office where they would present their demands.

After this came the most official moment of the meeting - the vote to continue striking. Claudis launched into a heated defense of the strike, denouncing the "sea of mud and disgrace" in which the government was swimming. Following his discourse the strike vote was unanimous but anti-climactic. After raising their hands for the continuance of the strike, the teachers remained silent for a few moments. Claudis reminded them, "At this moment it is customary to applaud." The room broke into belated clapping. People were beginning to get tired.

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On March 7 about 50 teachers gathered at EEPSPG Republica de Paraguay to begin their march to the "delagacia" (district office). I accompanied them on the 20 minute walk through the Vila Prudente, as did about eight or nine "secondaristas" (equivalent of high school students) who wanted to show their support. It was this group of teenagers that tried to animate the group with chants and slogans. The noise-making didn't catch with most of the teachers, who proceeded at their usual ambling, gossipy pace. Along the way people appeared at doors and windows, sometimes clapping in support, accepting the pamphlets from APEOSP that the teachers handed out along the way.

The "invasion" of the delagacia was a peaceable affair. The teachers crowded into the hallway of the school building serving as administrative headquarters for the 40 schools of the region (the use of the building for this purpose being itself a point of contention, since the Zona Leste is notoriously short of schools in relation to demand.) Claudette, the "delegada" (district director), came out into the hallway to receive them, and stood to one side while Claudie stated the teachers demands that she not collaborate with reprisals nor deliver names. In an earlier meeting local strike leaders had tried to persuade Claudette to take a firm position in support of the strike. She had said that was impossible because of her commitment with the PMDB. Like most delegadas and supervisors in the school system, she had received her position as a political "position of trust".

At this moment, however, she was trying to walk the fence. As she mounted the chair in the center of the cluster of teachers, she gave an apologetic smile. She was on first-name basis with most of the teachers there, and didn't want to alienate anyone. She began by explaining that she thought the revindications of the strikers were just, and that she and the others of the local directorate of the PMDB were considering sending a letter to Quercia asking that he open negotiations. Arlete was shaking her head. "She's been saying that for weeks," Arlete whispered, "and nothing has been done yet."

As for reprisals, Claudette said that she had not handed over any names. She had only given the Department of Education the numbers of those striking in each school, which she thought the strikers ought to want, since it proved the strength of the strike. Names had not yet been requested, and it remained ambiguous whether she would hand over names if asked. The teachers pressed for a commitment on this point, which she succeeded in side-stepping. The teachers raise another question which was on everyone's mind. Would Claudette support payment of the days of work stoppage? This was one of the current thorns of the "non-negotiation". Claudette said she thought the teachers had to assume the consequences of the strike, and "payment of stopped days is not a strike, is it?" One teacher answered heatedly, "we are not absent, we are on strike!" (and therefore should receive payment.) This is a distinction not recognized by the government, which does not grant funcionarios publicos the right to strike.

Despite this altercation, the notable factor of this "confrontation" was the lack of heat generated. It was almost impossible to be angry with Claudette, who tried to smile for every side, and a good many teachers probably felt more sympathy than rage. Besides, she was still the authority. The tradition of respect for authority, and lack of tradition of direct confrontation, is still

strong in Brazil. Perhaps for this reason a much smaller number of teachers had turned out for this face-to-face encounter than had hit the street for the mass demonstrations, where the opponent is abstracted and confronted only in effigy.

In a different context, a friend of mine in the Educational Movement of the Zona Leste offered the following analysis of the "delegadas of Quêrcia", who were appointed in 1987 with the arrival in power of the PMDB. "These delegadas don't have any political position or any seriousness about education. In the days of Governor Montoro the delegadas had political opinions - bad ones, the opposite of the movement - but at least it gave for serious debate. Now we go to the delegacias or the Department of Education and nothing happens. 'What do you want me to do?' they ask. And this weakens the movement."

Claudette gave the teachers nothing concrete to fight against, and this was perhaps more demobilizing than all of Quêrcia's police. In the regional assembly that followed the "invasion", for the first time I heard a proposal to end the strike. "If we return to work," one teacher argued, "it won't be a defeat, since never have we been so mobilized as during this strike." Her proposal was voted down, since the government had not yet offered an adequate counter-proposal. The strike continued, but the desire was in the air to find an honorable way out.

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Three days later, the day following the third mass concentration in the Praça da Republica, the teachers of the Vila Prudente began their regional assembly with two issues in everyone's minds. The first was the number of teachers returning to work. When I entered the gym of EEPSPG Republica de Paraguay they were doing a roll count of schools present. The decline in teachers was immediately visible. Last week both sides of the bleachers had been completely filled, while today only half were occupied, with a much smaller concentration. Of the nearly 90 schools in the sixth and seventh districts, only 23 were represented. Despite the animated vote in the Praça de Republica the day before, in which it had been decided to stay in strike and pay a return visit to Quêrcia in the Palácio dos Bandeirantes, strike exhaustion and the fear of reprisals were slowly draining the movement.

The second issue of concern was the rumor that the "corregedor" was visiting schools in the region to gather names of teachers who were not working but had signed the attendance book. The night before I had spoken with Arlete, who was extremely nervous because word had gotten around that the corregedor would pass by América the following morning. Not that she herself was afraid of reprisals - as a long-time militant who had been jailed and tortured during the military period, she had long ago recognized and accepted the risks involved. But the majority of the teachers in the school were among the "newly militized", jittery when confronted with real risks and terrified of losing their jobs. (The risk was real. Last year São Paulo's mayor, Jânio Quadros, had dismissed in mass municipal teachers who had gone on strike.)

This morning, March 10, I joined the group of teachers from América, which was the only school in the region to remain completely paralyzed (and hence its vulnerability to reprisals.) Claudie was leading the

group through the schedule for the week when suddenly all eyes turned toward the roundish man in the light blue suit who had entered the gym. As he looked for a place to sit down on the bleachers the teachers eyed each other nervously. "Corregedor? Corregedor?" began the questioning whispers, raised by some to shouts as they tried to ascertain who was the new and obviously foreign arrival. Claudio took the lead in politely asking him to identify himself. "I'm from the Palace of the Government," he joked, trying to avoid the impact of the word "corregedor". "I'm a functionary public just like you. I'm here doing a job."

Despite his attempt to ingratiate himself with the teachers in this genial fashion, he immediately began alienating them with his opening questions. He asked to speak to the principal of the school about the use of the premises for a meeting of that sort, he passed a paper around asking those present to sign their names, and he asked for Claudio's party affiliation. At this point a large group of nervous teachers got up to leave. They were called back by their more militized colleagues, who insisted that no one was going to sign anything at that moment and it was better to hear him out.

That left Claudio to deal with the challenge about party affiliation. The question was complicated, because as the corregedor was probably aware, Claudio is affiliated with the PCdB, is in fact a candidate for city councilman, and the PCdB is a party which quite systematically goes after blocks of influence in the left. It seemed clear that the corregedor was trying to discredit Claudio's leadership in the regional assembly by implying that he was opportunistically using the teachers' movement for his own purposes. Claudio responded immediately that the assembly of teachers had no party affiliation, that party affiliation made no difference whatsoever in terms of the revindications of the strike, and that the factor which was mobilizing the teachers was not the work of a party but rather the "misery and exploitation" that was the reality of the profession.

Claudio was defended by the other teachers, who expressed loudly their indignation at the question and defended "pluralism of ideas". The corregedor's question was denounced as a return to the military period, when party affiliation, especially to communist-related groups, was used to discredit, repress and punish activists in social movements. Claudio launched into a discourse on the revindications of the strike, at the end of which the teachers burst into applause. The corregedor also applauded, calling the revindications "just". He apologized for his question to Claudio, locating himself once again on the side of the teachers, and asserted that he was only an administrator "doing a job" with no political opinions.

But immediately he launched into another provocation. He began to criticize the use of the school building for meetings. "Meetings should be held at APEOSP or some other place, not in state buildings, where you pit the state against the state." The teachers again responded with indignation. "This is not the building of the state, it's the building of the public! We are the state, we are education, and our place is in the school!" Caught against the wall on this question, the corregedor switched to a tactic of guilt. "I have the impression that you are prejudicing the principal of the school by holding meetings here. She could come under reprisals for this." The teachers responded that they had used the building, with the principal's authorization, since 1978. Governors Maluf and Mantare of the military regime had let them use the building. Was Quercia, the "democratic" governor, going to take away that right?

The visit of the corregedor had the aspect of a genial authority dealing with children, refusing to address them on the central revindications but scolding

them about side issues. He presented himself as a sympathizer ("I have the greatest respect for the nobility of the teaching profession"), but caught the weaknesses of the movement in such a way as to work toward demoralization. In one of his more ironic moments he criticized the act of signing the attendance book while on strike. Not only was it dishonest, but it was also bad organization. "When something is badly done, you lose force. Don't lose force!"

After the meeting broke up an animated cluster of teachers stayed around talking to him. One teacher asked how he felt "betraying" the teachers. He said, "I accept my service as a corregedor. I feel satisfied if I do my job well and honestly." That launched the teachers into a debate about what really was honest - the accuracy of the technocrat in recording data, or of the reformer who denounces what he sees as wrong in an attempt to change it. "We are the honest ones," insisted one teacher, "because we are exposing the shame of the government's negligence about education."

While the teachers and the corregedor were still in lively discussion, comparing salaries, working conditions and political positions, they were interrupted by the sudden arrival of Claudette, the delegada visited earlier. She had heard that the corregedor was in the area and had come rushing over to see what was going on. She ended up presenting her own discourse on the matter, claiming that the governor had begun to open his hand and negotiate, and that she thought it was time for the teachers to do the same.

In fact what had happened was that the Secretary of Education had agreed at the last general assembly to meet with representatives of the "Grupo de 19," for the first time in the 4 weeks of the strike. The problem was that the teachers had more recent information than Claudette. In that morning's newspaper Quercia had released a statement saying he had dis-authorized any such meetings with representatives of functionalism, and would continue to do so while they remained on strike. Stripped of her arms, Claudette could only shrug and say "we have to have negotiation at any price" implying that she thought teachers ought to return to work. The teachers shook their heads tiredly. Claudette was as much a technocrat as the corregedor, both bound by their "positions of trust".

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On the Saturday following the corregedor's visit to the Vila Prudente, Quercia finally opened his hand just enough to propel the strike to a close. He authorized the Secretary of Education to meet with representatives of the five associations of education. Only one revindication was to be discussed at these meetings - the changing of the fixed "productivity gratification" of 27 cruzados per classroom hour, which had wrecked havoc with the Magisterial Statute, to an index which would allow the same percentage of gratification for each level of salary categories. The question debated in these negotiations was what percentage would be given. The government began by offering a 14% gratification, while the teachers entered with a proposal of 24%. After two days of negotiation and counter-offers they finally arrived at the compromise figure of 18%, which was then taken for a vote to the final general assembly of teachers on March 15.

For their final mass assembly the teachers chose to return to the stadium of Marumbi, close to the Palácio dos Bandeirantes where Quércia had stationed his shock troops three weeks before. The troops were much less in evidence that day. There was no need for them, since resignation and an anticipation of a return to work had largely replaced the spit-fire of the previous visit. The teachers had been 34 days in strike, had pulled off the biggest mobilization of education in recent history, but now it was time to grab at concessions. No one, however, was very happy about it. Instead of the 144.39% + 15% originally revindicated, they would receive only 70% + the 18% "gratification". The arrêché salarial would continue. And many other questions were left unresolved. Would the remaining distortions in the Magisterial Statute be fixed? Would teachers be paid for the days of paralyzation? What kind of trimestral readjustment would be given to them in April? Not to mention the questions about school conditions, equipment, food and personnel which had never reached the bargaining table. And there remained other doubts. Teachers were realizing that the "productivity gratification" had its faults. Since it was not actually counted as salary, it did not count toward calculating retirement benefits, nor would it be applied to the extra hours demanded of teachers in secretarial or ministerial work.

With all of these questions in the air, the mood of the rally was both resigned and divided. The teachers stood or sat tiredly with their banners, listening to the reports from the podium. The carnival of the earlier rallies was over, although someone had brought along a huge crepe-paper birthday cake for Quércia, who was celebrating the first anniversary of his governorship that day. "Congratulations Quércia - one year of lies!" said the sign attached to the cake.

When João Felício, the president of APEOSP, took to the podium to eulogize the strike movement, he was cheered. "Never have we had the level of mobilization as during this strike, and never have we achieved the degree of unity between teachers and workers of other categories." But when he went on to urge the end of the strike, he was booed by a good part of the crowd, which was still divided and vacillating. Felício presented the facts. Over 50% of teachers had returned to work already that Monday. The movement was fast losing force, and to maintain the strike without sufficient numbers would split and weaken the campaign for trimestral readjustments in April. "We need to go back in order to come back strong, if need be, in April."

When the matter finally came to a vote, the crowd remained divided. According to APEOSP's estimate of hands raised, 65% of the 40,000 strikers present voted to end the strike, while 35% wanted to keep going "until victory." And so it was decided. Teachers would return to work the following day, and negotiations would continue on the outstanding issues of payment of stopped days, correction of distortions, and April's readjustment.

There were no cheers following this vote. The teachers of América, with whom I was standing at the time, looked at each other. "Well, that's it." And began tiredly to fold up their banners to head home. Arlete, two other teachers, and I hitched a ride out to the main avenue with a bank worker who was passing by. "Well, what did you get?" he asked. "Fourteen percent? Sixteen percent?" "Eighteen percent," said the teachers, smiling wryly at the appearance of victory. "At least you got that much," the bank worker told them. "Looks like we are going to have to go on strike as well. This arrêché never ends." "Good luck with your strike," the teachers told him with tired smiles as he dropped us at the bus stop.



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A month later, as I am finally finishing this newsletter, none of the questions left at the end of the strike have been resolved. Negotiations are continuing, with April's readjustment in tense debate. Teachers are demanding 65% to cover inflation between January and April, while the government is offering only 40%, with a possible increase to 43%. The 18% gratification so fought over has not yet been paid. The government is insisting that teachers make up missed classes before receiving payment for the days of paralyzation, while teachers are demanding to be paid first. And the remaining distortions in the Magisterial Statute have not yet been touched in negotiation.

The surprise blow came when the teachers received their salary checks for the month of March. Not only had they not yet received the productivity gratification, but the government had inexplicably discounted 45% of their earnings for that month. About a third of that discount was the normal withholding for taxes, health coverage, and other charges. But the rest of the discount no one understands. Arlete showed me her salary ticket. In the column marked "payment", 13,360.96 cruzados was indicated as readjustment, the 70% conceded by the government. In the column marked "discount", 13,360.96 was subtracted. The government had in effect completely discounted the readjustment for that month. The teachers were receiving no increase at all. Arlete told me that when teachers saw their salary tickets, some tore them up in the spot. Others screamed or cried. What had the strike meant at all? Arlete asked me how I was going to explain this in my newsletter. "No one will believe that in this country the government gives a readjustment and then takes it away."

Quercia has not yet given an explanation as to what was going on with these salary checks. He said he would examine the matter "to verify if the money has to be returned." In the meantime the teachers have declared that they will not make up any classes until the discounted amount is restored. They have the support of the students in this point. When Arlete showed her salary ticket to her classes, it was the kids themselves who told her she ought not to make up the missed classes until paid.

While this furor may just result from a mistake on the part of the government, it has been a further blow to the morale of the teachers. More than ever they see little reason to believe that Quercia's government will ever address the problems of education. The PMDB has certainly lost votes. Arlete thinks it probable that a large block of these votes will go to the PT in the coming elections, since the PT was so visible throughout the process in its political support of functionalism, and through APEOSP, in its practical role in organizing the strike. The PT has gained considerable credibility in the past year or two, and it will be interesting to see how it does in the coming elections.

Despite the fury and disillusionment of the teachers, there is little chance that they will hit the streets for a renewed strike. Teachers have used up their pique for the year. And on top of strike exhaustion, they are feeling their commitment to the students. Having insisted that the purpose of the strike was not to hurt the students, they feel obliged to make up classes, and if they stop for more days, they will be obliged to eliminate June vacations (which neither students nor teachers want.) One of the remaining struggles with the secretary of education is to let each school council decide on its own schedule for making up classes, rather than being forced to follow a centralized schedule issued by the Department of Education. This may be one of the few fights they

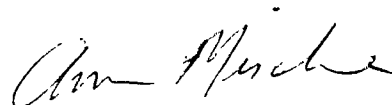
win in the current round of negotiations, which otherwise looks pretty bleak. Next week they have scheduled a one-day paralyzation in the Praça da República to pressure the government on these issues.

I asked Arlete if teachers thought the strike was worth it. She said that the feeling among the teachers was that in terms of practical conquests, it wasn't worth it. But in terms of the unity among teachers which the strike created, it was worth it. "We went into it united and we came out of it united. That hasn't happened in any other strike."

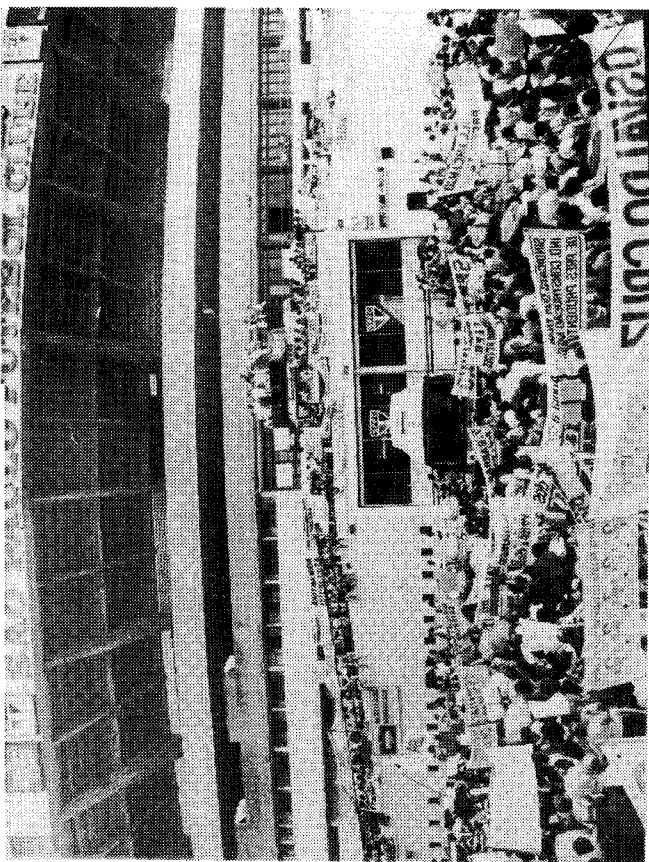
She went on to explain, "a strike always has an educative quality. Once you have lived through a strike you see politics in a different way. This is as true for the students as it is for the teachers. Here at América the strike has raised the level of political discussion to a much higher level. It has made people much more critical."

The question for the future is whether this newly developed "criticism" will degenerate into the cynical inertia common here, or whether it will stimulate those involved to participate in different types of militancy. Probably it will do both things. Brazil seems to move in cycles of disanimation and mobilization. One test of the political mood in the country will come in this year's elections, if indeed they do take place. With the PMDB filled with internal divisions, the PT, as the party of the provocative opposition, may have a chance of winning significant spaces in municipal elections. And if the new Constitution goes into effect as scheduled in the next few months, it will introduce a whole new structure of social and labor legislation, which will have a significant impact on politics and the economy. But this discussion will have to wait for future newsletters. For now the strike rests, and schools are trying to get back on track. The tracks themselves remain in desperate need of repair, and their direction remains unquestioned.

Take care,



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Barred from the Governor's Palace, teachers gather in front of the football stadium of Marumbi.



"Municipal council of Tabão da Serra supports Funcionarios Públicos"



"STRIKE! The only way we'll be heard!"



"EEPG Mandel da Silva - UNITED IN THE STRIKE"

"Congratulations Quercia, one year of lies!"



Arlete (center) and the teachers from EESG América de Moura as they wait for the strike vote.

