

# Brazil Signals Turnabout In Handling of Detainees

By Bruce Handler

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan. 31—Brazil's authoritarian military government made an abrupt change today from its usual secrecy in cases involving leftist subversion and publicly gave out details about a police raid on a clandestine Communist cell.

The unexpected action led to speculation that the days of secret arrests and torture here might be coming to an end.

Justice Minister Armando Falcao said yesterday on television that "numerous arrests" have been made in connection with the recent discovery of a hidden printing plant near Rio which he said was turning out propaganda for the outlawed Brazilian Communist Party. Falcao did not say who or how many were in custody but he went out of his way to pledge that they would get fair trials.

Then today, in an even more radical departure, the federal police held a press conference and invited newsmen to examine the evidence on the cell for themselves. Until now, federal police policy for dealing with reporters was to ignore them.

The announcement of the arrests was the first significant indication in well over a year that leftist movements still were active here, more than a decade after the military threw out a left-leaning civilian administration and assumed dictatorial powers.

The promise to hold fair trials apparently was to counter repeated complaints that armed forces police still are picking up suspected leftists without warrants and in some cases torturing them to death during interrogation.

The latest public criticism came on Wednesday from Supreme Court Justice Aliomar Baleeiro, who said: "There are illegal arrests, tortures and

disappearances. John Doe disappears, and no one ever finds a trace of him again. Not even a body or ashes." Most newspapers carried the statement, which in the past they would have felt compelled to pass up.

After the military takeover in 1964, Brazilian security agents violently repressed suspected leftist terrorists and propagandists. By 1973 they had captured, killed or suppressed most of them.

Yet illegal arrests and tortures continue.

Brazilian civil rights lawyers are trying to find 22 persons who have disappeared in recent months with no record of ever having been officially arrested. Their families think they were illegally kidnaped by the police.

"The Communist Party, communism and subversion are through in this country," Falcao said, explaining the latest anti-Communist raid. But he added: "The guilty will be punished duly and legally."

President Ernesto Geisel, a retired army general, has said he is willing to let Brazil return "slowly, gradually and surely," to democratic civilian rule but that for the time being "the necessary minimum level of internal security measures" will be maintained. Geisel is known to oppose illegal arrests and tortures, but some local military commanders apparently have enough behind-the-scenes backing to torture political prisoners and get away with it.

The justice minister said the Communist-run printing plant turned out propaganda preceding last November's congressional elections, in which the one token opposition political party allowed here sorely embarrassed the official government party.

A leading political columnist, Carlos Castello Branco of

the Rio paper Journal do Brasil, wrote today that the government revelations about the raid on the cell "may have inaugurated a new phase... in which public opinion will be informed of actions taken by the police, to insure public order."

At the federal police briefing this morning, they showed newsmen slides and drawings of the recently discovered printing plant. There was even a toy mock-up, complete with plastic grass and bushes and model buildings with roofs that could be lifted off to show an underground room containing a printing press and mimeographs.

Col. Emilio da Silveria, head of the Rio office of the federal police, showed slides picturing how the plant, in a nearby rural area, was camouflaged by "an apparently normal animal pen—with chickens and turkeys." He labeled the setup "highly sophisticated."

Reporters were then invited to visit the place. The printing room had pictures of Angela Davis and Che Guevara on the walls. A collection of Voz Operaria—Portuguese for "workers' voice"—the Brazilian Communist Party's clandestine newspaper, was on a shelf. There were hidden switches, passage ways, and escape hatches.

The November issue of Voz Operaria, which had been mailed anonymously to correspondents in Rio, carried stories on missing persons alleged to have been illegally arrested, complaints about low salaries for workers, and a piece on the anniversary of the Soviet revolution. A letter from Luiz Carlos Prestes—the head of the Brazilian party, thought to be living in Moscow—asked money to support Brazilian political prisoners' families and to combat "the fascist military dictatorship."

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