

Brazil: A Reply

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I am extremely grateful for the opportunity given to me by *New Blackfriars* to answer the charges made in the article 'Accusation from Prison' published in your last issue.

I have no comments to offer on the first part of the article entitled 'The Church in the World'.

A number of Papal Encyclicals—inspired and inspiring—are quoted and, as the representative of the largest Catholic nation of the world, I can only share the spiritual significance of messages dedicated to Christian love and to the purpose of assuring social justice to all men.

Part II of the article—'The Present Reality of Brazil'—is a completely different matter.

Seldom have I read in recent years an analysis that so adulterates facts which are easily grasped by all, but not by those who are impaired by political hate and blindness. The great regard I have for the cultural standards of the Dominican Order prevents me from believing that such an article may reflect the views of the Order in Brazil.

However, the fact that *New Blackfriars* has published the article forces me to answer it thoroughly.

The case made by the authors is simple, and follows the classical lines of demagogical preachings: from the evils of capitalism, through the exploitation of international groups, to the oppressive government which subdues the masses by violence and for the benefit of the oligarchies. A short passage, printed on Speakers' Corner lines, deserves full quotation. 'The economic system produces the result characteristic of capitalism: the social group that owns the means of production gets richer and richer, with the working majority no more than an instrument for piling up wealth for their employers.'

Incredible as it may seem, this was written not in 1869 but one hundred years later. It would be pointless to argue that the economic and social system of Brazil bears no resemblance to that anachronistic communist cliché. Free enterprise and State ownership co-exist in harmony. In a variety of fields State-owned enterprises play an indispensable rôle and what emerges is a mixed economy unsuitable for capitalistic or Marxist sloganeering. If a trend can be detected, it is towards more State control in the so-called infra-structural areas of the economy: transportation, telecommunications, housing and sanitation, power and electricity, etc.

Let us turn now to the narrow and short-sighted nationalism shown by the authors: 'Foreign capital plays an increasing rôle, building factories, seizing land, eliminating native competition,

enlarging its power to exploit the natural riches of the country. All this is allowed and even encouraged by the political powers.'

Brazil is a developing country that requires, to accelerate its 'take-off', a massive inflow of foreign investment and know-how. It is indeed the deliberate policy of the Brazilian Government to attract productive foreign capital and have it become associated to ours. Under adequate Government supervision, allowing a fair repatriation of profits, this foreign capital plays a cooperative and subsidiary role which in no way conflicts with the Brazilian 'native' enterprises.

On the usual doctrinaire lines, the authors move from international capitalism's predatory practices to 'institutionalized violence' by the régime. The article says: 'A military dictatorship was set up to preserve the *status quo*, to prevent any sort of change that might have been favourable to the workers, since this would have meant the fall of the ruling class'.

To refer to preservation and stagnation in Brazil is a rather naïve technique that can only impress someone ignorant of the new explosion of progress that is now shaking my country. Let us look at the record: in 1963 the rate of inflation was over 84 per cent; the rate of growth of the economy had been only of 1.6 per cent—a negative index if one takes into account that the growth of the population averages 3 per cent a year. *Per capita* income was US\$260. What is the situation now? The rate of growth of the economy in 1969 was 9 per cent, one of the highest in the world. Inflation was down to 24 per cent and employment was up. *Per capita* income had risen to US\$350.

New Blackfriars is not a journal of economics and I will not burden it with statistics that would further illustrate and corroborate the extraordinary vitality of the Brazilian performance. The figures are so impressive that a paragraph will do.

From 1963 to 1969 we built more than one million cars, straight to middle-class consumers; increased our energy capacity from 4 to 10 million kwh, and when the Urubupungá complex is finished (the third largest in the world) total capacity will be 16 million kwh (1973). We have built 450 thousand kilometers of roads, and are now cutting through the Amazon region the longest road in the world: over five thousand kilometers. Public receipts raised 14 times and income-tax increased from 240 million (1964) to 3,500 million cruzeiros (1969), endorsing the reality that the 'privileged classes' are now paying what they should, for the benefit of the poorer classes who before used to bear the weight through indirect and regressive taxation. Brazilian exports doubled and now border the three-billion-dollar mark.

All these miraculous records have been intentionally ignored, and the article capitalizes on infant mortality, diseases, worker and peasant poverty, shocking illiteracy rates.

Our infant mortality rates are high—in some regions still appallingly so, such as in Maceio (300/1,000), Terezina (240) and Fortaleza (160). But the figure deliberately chosen is absurd and far from the still high national average (100), especially when compared to one of the less-developed European nations (Hungary) which has a 56/1,000 rate. The very fact that the Brazilian population has grown from 40 to 90 million in the last thirty years, that 40 per cent of it is under 14 years of age, and it is steadily growing at 3 per cent per annum, shows remarkable progress in reducing mortality at the bottom of the pyramid.

We have indeed problems of disease and sanitation, in a tropical country which is bigger than Europe, but the efforts since 1964 have been continuous and successful. Some 44 million people have been vaccinated against smallpox (1970); the malaria eradication programme is spending over US\$100 million (1970–1973) to free an area of 90 per cent of the country; the yellow fever campaign has vaccinated two million people, and sprayed one million houses. The number of hospitals has increased from 2,800 (1964) to 3,600 (1969); water supply increased from 18 to 25 million people tendered to, and sewage services from six to *circa* 14 million people. Those are figures that back a herculean task of resource mobilization, doctor and nurse training, management and administration skills. They also endorse the reality that our Government is at present pursuing a distributive policy to extend social benefits to all classes and regions. We will not deny that poverty standards in the north-east are a crucial challenge: starvation and illiteracy, disease and infant mortality *exist* and are the product of centuries of ignorance and abandonment. A new age is open to that forgotten area: governmental planning has brought in, during the last five years, public and private resources that allowed the pace of economic development of the region to increase its share from 5 per cent to 15 per cent of the Brazilian GNP. Fiscal incentives have poured in US\$800 million: geared into industrialization and cattle-raising programmes. Those funds will now (1970–1973) be complemented by new public investment of some US\$2,500 million.

Rural welfare is a recent feature in Brazil, with the implantation of a co-operative movement; agricultural research funds; a rural electrification programme; increase of the tractor fleet from 80 to 120 thousand units (1973); supervised credit to small farmers; expansion of extension service offices from 1,000 units (1969) to 1,700 (1973)—all part of an integrated action directing public resources of a magnitude of *circa* US\$3 billion. Those may be small relative to our demands, but are the first real and rational governmental efforts for rural welfare in our history. Brazil is actually one of the few countries with an agricultural price support scheme in operation and enforcing a rural minimum wage legislation.

Let us now review the 'exploitation of the proletariat'. Since 1966

some 700 thousand low-income workers bought homes built, financed or jointly-financed by the National Housing Bank, which is today a four-year-old institution. Until that year, public resources had been used to build . . . 25 thousand homes. It is a step forward and gives hope that we may cope with our deficit of adequate housing of *circa* six million units—a hope that will be backed by US\$3,500 million, to be invested in the next three years. The employment expansion rate has increased, and 650 thousand scholarships will provide training for skilled workers. The new Programme of Social Integration (see the *Financial Times*, 18.9.1970) will create a worker participation fund using income tax industrial rebates and a turnover percentage from business involved. It will grow progressively from £60 million (1970) into a sizeable amount of £500 million (1974).

The struggle against illiteracy in Brazil shows that primary education rose in five years from 10 to 14 million students; and secondary schools from three to four million. The contention that 'of every thousand children who start primary school, only one reaches university' is more than ridiculous, it is dishonest, since the number of university enrolments rose from 130 thousand (1964) to 330 thousand (1969) and by 1974 will attain 580 thousand. The results are convincing but, by no means are we satisfied with tempo and accomplishment: the new budgetary programme for education (1970–1973) will invest US\$5,300 million in education, plus another 500 million in science and technology.

All these figures must be necessarily interpreted in their socio-economic context, which reveals a coherent policy for the attainment of goals aiming basically to serve man: his needs, aspirations and participation in progress with all its rewards. Our account may have been long, since it had to be detailed in order to answer crude generalizations and distortions on a wide basis.

Knowing that it is impossible to vitiate records which are self-evident and overwhelming, a campaign of defamation has been mounted to sell abroad a picture of 'institutionalized violence'.

The mention of 'prison for all who oppose' relates to not more than 500 people arrested in Brazil for reasons that cannot in any circumstances be labelled as 'political'. All terrorists or related suspects of terrorist activities are: kidnapers of foreign diplomats, who in other countries did not hesitate to kill; hijackers of planes; bank raiders, arsonists and bomb criminals—none of them considered 'political' prisoners in any country. Actually, two of those terrorists have been expelled by the Swiss Government; many nations have refused them entry and others abstained from accepting them, in recent cases of kidnapping and exchange. Not more than ten out of thousands of priests in my country have been arrested for direct involvement with terrorist activities.

Nevertheless, an organized defamatory campaign has striven to

create abroad a picture of religious persecution, torture and police brutality. While at home terrorism has failed to impress our population—the poorer classes or the trade-union movement, the communications media, and the vast majority of our clergy—the objective seems now to be the slandering of our image abroad.

To the mention of newspapers being silenced and political freedom suppressed, I have to reply with facts that do not need further elaboration. The Press is free and critical when necessary; foreign newspapers circulate and no foreign correspondent has ever been expelled or had his movements curtailed, and we know that they have not always been apologetical in their comments. Congress is open and an opposition party enjoys full political rights: including free TV time for campaigning and participation in international meetings, such as those of the United Nations and inter-parliamentary unions. National elections for both Houses of Congress are to be held on November 15th, and the opposition is expected, as it has traditionally in the past, to defeat Government candidates in Rio and São Paulo. So on the very eve of these nation-wide elections, the article twice bluntly states: 'there are no elections . . . but the farce of presidential selection of the Governors . . .'.

The allegations of torture and brutality are reasons for concern by the authorities: the directives issued by the President himself and the Minister of Justice are clear and firm. All the enquiries are followed by Press and Congress, and very shortly a 'White Book' will be published reviewing all the cases mentioned by foreign newspapers. Recent abuses and actual physical violence carried out against priests in a remote north-eastern locality, by self-authorised police authorities, have been punished severely. The President has himself directed that action be taken against alleged police brutalities as well as illegal methods of dealing with common criminals by the so-called 'Death Squadron'. These are, however, even if not justifiable, abuses that occur in all societies and are daily denounced in all countries.

The Church has been our very foundation. Our history is closely linked with spiritual values and the work carried out by priests and missionaries. That has been the legacy of the past and is the reality of the present.

I cannot, however, accept that a 'Christian response' should be the appeal to force and violence, terror and death. My country will continue to fight against illiteracy and misery, as it has now been fighting with positive results. We do not need advice for resorting to bombing, arson and destruction, fratricidal war and murder.

I would simply quote Saint Matthew (7 : 9): 'What man is there of you, whom if your son ask bread, will give him a stone?'