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Letter

# BEAUTIFUL RIO

By Mike Shub

*To the Editors:*

Rio is still a beautiful city, even though the streets are filling up with cars and gasoline fumes. The warm sun and spectacular beaches give the illusion that life is easy. If you ask most Brazilian intellectuals they would probably tell you that there isn't much more torture here than in the rest of the world. The censored newspapers, of course, hardly ever publish a word about it. Most estimates would put the number of political prisoners at no more than about twenty-five hundred, most of whom people would guess were connected with the urban guerrillas. But even though most people would not admit it, there is a climate of fear here: one senses that no institution, family, or individual is exempt from arbitrary destruction by administrative act, the military police, or even the *esquadron do morte*. So people are consciously or unconsciously cautious and cooperative in their politics. To give just a few examples:

1. Just the other week the press reported that one of the government deputies in the Brazilian congress reminded the opposition that under the Fifth Institutional Act the government still has the right to deprive representatives of their political rights.
2. On August 28, 1971, the *Estado de Sao Paulo*, one of Brazil's leading newspapers, reported that the Order of Brazilian Lawyers had



requested information about the death of Raul Amaro Nin Ferreira, who died after being arrested by DOPS, one of the government's organizations dealing with political repression. The newspaper didn't say much more. Ferreira, however, had been a student of engineering some years ago at the Catholic University in Rio where he got his degree, and I learned the following through students there.

Ferreira had worked in the Ministry of Planning and was the son of a family of big steel industrialists, with connections in high government circles. One night in the beginning of August he drove home from a party with two friends. His friends had recently visited Sao Paulo and didn't know the streets there and they had a map of the city with them in the car. They were stopped by the police and arrested on suspicion of being terrorists when the police saw the map.

Ferreira's friends were released, but he himself died several days later in the military hospital. The police claim that he had sheltered terrorists. All that his family was able to do was to recover his body, which was covered with burns from electrical shocks.

3. I first came to Brazil with other foreign mathematicians at the beginning of summer, 1971. We then learned about Dulce Chaves Pandolfi, the wife of a Brazilian mathematician, who had been arrested almost a year before and had been physically and psychologically tortured. She had received electrical shocks all over her body and had been stripped naked, beaten, and had a live alligator thrown on top of her. She was still in jail awaiting a trial whose date has still not been set. Her imprisonment was much longer than Brazilian law permits.

Brazilian mathematicians had never intervened officially in this affair; in fact they had idly watched as, two weeks after the arrest, Sra. Pandolfi's husband's fellowship was taken away.

As foreigners, we thought that we might be freer than the Brazilian mathematicians to help her and her husband, and some of us thought about circulating a letter to the court among foreign mathematicians in Brazil. The letter was to have said something to the effect that we had heard about Sra. Pandolfi's treatment and that she had been in jail



without trial for a period exceeding the maximum allowed in Brazilian law. We intended to request that after all that had happened to her she be released at least pending trial.

We thought of the letter at first as a mild letter of a personal nature, with few political implications. After all, in citing one case of injustice or torture one points out what could be an isolated rectifiable wrong and not a government policy. But as some Brazilian mathematicians heard about this possible letter they told us that circulating and sending such a letter would probably constitute a subversive political act in the eyes of the government and would likely lead to the destruction of Brazil's leading mathematics institution.

One day a prominent Brazilian mathematician officially announced at a mathematics meeting that certain unspecified types of meetings between Brazilians and foreigners would not be tolerated. We were shocked that the prospect of sending a letter could produce such fear. I was also amazed by the commitment of this group to the progress of Brazilian mathematics in such a setting. Because of fears and threats the letter became a serious political action, and so in the end it was not sent.

In such an atmosphere it seemed to be dangerous for Sra. Pandolfi, instead of helpful. I think many Brazilian mathematicians were upset at having suppressed a simple humanitarian act, and after it was all over some of them even admitted that their hysteria was unwarranted. But that reveals the nature of the country they live in right now; and I pity them.

When I first went to Brazil for the summer I considered going back for a longer period. In view of the atmosphere this is impossible.

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