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TO : ~~RECEIVED~~ Embassy Office, Brasilia
INFO: Embassy, Rio de Janeiro
Department of State ARA/BR, INN
FROM: AmConsulate Porto Alegre
SUBJECT: Do-It-Yourself Dialogue on Student Problems

SUBJECT

1. Dialogue is the "in" word in Brazil since the recent wave of student agitation, but the more it is tossed about the less actual communication seems to take place between the authorities and the students. The Post recently had the opportunity to arrange a sort of do-it-yourself dialogue on the subject of student problems without the knowledge of either of the participants, a situation altogether appropriate to the circumstances. On July 3, 1968, the drafting officer had a lengthy luncheon with Professor Leonidas Xausa, Director of the Political Science Department of the Federal University, who was guide and mentor to the students during the recent demonstrations in Porto Alegre. That same evening the drafting officer and his wife were the only guests for dinner in the home of General Carlos Alberto Fontoura, Chief of Staff of the III Army. Conversation on both occasions centered on the student problem. When these two conversations are melded together an interesting deaf-and-dumb dialogue emerges:

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2. On the need for student demonstrations:

Prof. Xausa: "The demonstrations are a necessary step in obtaining action in a situation where the normal channels of petition and protest have dried up. The students, or the more intelligent of them anyhow, do not regard demonstrations as an end in themselves, but as a means of gaining public attention and laying hands on a forum in which their very real grievances can be explained."

Gen. Fontoura: "The recent student demonstrations are part of an international Communist conspiracy designed to rot and ultimately overthrow free governments. I don't deny that our educational system has deep problems, or that the students

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SUBJECT: Do-It-Yourself Dialogue on Student Problems - page 2

have legitimate grievances, but the Government is doing the best it can with very limited resources. The truth is that the students are not interested in solving problems, but only in carrying out political agitation. It is notable that they made no attempt to use the normal channels of appeal and protest open to them, a fact pointed out by the Rector of the University."

3. On the performance of the authorities in controlling the demonstrations:

Prof. Kausa: "The authorities naturally have an obligation to protect life and property. I would not have them do otherwise, but at least at the beginning there was no indication that life and property were threatened. Even if they were the measures put into effect to protect them were excessive. In fact the concern of the Government was not to protect life and property but to punish an infraction of its authority. A demonstration held in defiance of an order prohibiting it is a theoretical infraction of law, but it is not in itself a violation of the rights of individuals or of the society...The Government of Guanabara finally got the message (in permitting the last of the demonstrations) but I'm afraid our baboons here will never understand...However I have tried to explain to my young people that if they are to participate in activities of this kind they must fully and consciously accept the consequences of their acts. The whole point of passive resistance is not only that the participant be prepared to accept the consequences, but also that the consequences actually ensue. Otherwise the event loses much of its propaganda value, which is its only point. I tell them that they shouldn't resent getting conked on the head by a goon. That's what he's there for and that they are there for. However Brazilians are a lot softer than your American young people. They don't understand this and do resent getting conked."

Gen. Montoura: "Student turmoil has to be dealt with firmly at the very beginning. The alternative is utter anarchy. Look at France...However I think the police might have handled things better. Their main problem is lack of discipline and training

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SUBJECT: Do-it-Yourself Dialogue on Student Problems - page 3

because these things often can be dealt with firmly but without excessive violence, as they are in your country. Unfortunately the educational system isn't the only area with budgetary and personnel problems...I don't understand young people today. They seem to think they are uniquely created beings with no responsibility to anyone but themselves."

4. On Minister of Education Tarso Dutra:

Prof. Kausa: "The man is a buffoon. The problems are so great that it is quite possible a more able man could do no more than he has, but it is certain that he is incapable of solving them. Moreover his ouster and replacement would be the best possible demonstration of the Government's good faith."

Gen. Fontoura: "The man is an incompetent. I thoroughly understand the President's refusal to replace him under pressure, but enough is enough. He has got to go."

5. On the role of the Press:

Prof. Kausa: "Since the whole point of demonstrating is getting the attention of the public and getting its sympathy, the police could not have been more helpful than when they savaged reporters and cameramen."

Gen. Fontoura: "One of the main problems is not the students but the press, which is thoroughly infiltrated by Communists. No matter how demonstrations are handled we will always get a bad press. Even more importantly it is frequently the press that incites the students to violence."

6. On the financial problems of the Government:

Prof. Kausa: "It is difficult for us to accept the good faith of the Government when they reduce appropriations for education while at the same time buying expensive jet aircraft. We too are concerned about the power and prestige of Brazil, but can't they understand that we will always be a fourth rate power until we can create our own jet aircraft or anything else we want? The only route to this goal is education."

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SUBJECT: Do-It-Yourself Dialogue on Student Problems - page 4

Gen. Fontoura: "There simply isn't enough to go around. Education should come first but so should a lot of other things - roads, dams, agriculture...I don't argue that the Armed Forces should have a high priority, but we have to be kept operative. Do you know that there are full colonels in the U.S. Armed Forces who are too young ever to have seen items that are standard issue with us? Perhaps we should demonstrate too...It is difficult to believe that the students are sincerely interested in this issue when they refuse to accept money where it can be most easily gotten - from the United States. You notice they never demonstrate against assistance from Communist countries."

7. On the role of agitators:

Prof. Xausa: "We did our best to isolate the cranks and the wild birds who always crop up in things like this, and on the whole we were successful. The real problem is the secondary students. They lack the maturity and steadiness for passive resistance. On the other hand they are the future of Brazil even more than the University students. You can't just tell them to go home and play with their toys. They would lose faith in us then, and the Communists would nab them."

Gen. Fontoura: "The recent demonstrations were well planned and highly organized by professional agitators. There is absolutely no doubt of this. We have clear evidence...Using mere children - girls even - is criminal."

Comment:

8. Prof. Xausa, who describes himself as a member of the Catholic left and adds "whatever that means", did his graduate work at Columbia University. Gen. Fontoura attended the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School and is one of the few genuine intellectuals in the top levels of the III Army. Both are highly intelligent men and both admire the United States, though from very different angles. At first glance the above "dialogue" would seem to suggest that any genuine communication between the students and the Government is hopeless. However, there are enough wig-wag signals between the lines to suggest that they might have a certain amount to talk about if they ever did get together.

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