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Department of State
PASS DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

INFO: BRASILIA, PORTO ALEGRE, RIO DE JANEIRO

Amconsul Sao Paulo

Contrasting Trade Union Attitudes Toward Medici Government

ARA/LAB;
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INTL. TRADE
UNION ORG. ;
BLS/DFLC

1. During a recent visit to the states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, the reporting officer questioned trade union leaders on their attitudes toward the Medici government. Reactions were favorable with most revealing a propitious inclination toward the new Administration. While all agreed that it was too early to make any definitive judgments some cited recent actions of President Medici as justification for their optimism. The meeting between the President and the leaders of the eight labor confederations within hours of his inauguration was seen as evidence of the President's desire to maintain a dialogue with the trade unions. This was contrasted with the reaction of former President Costa e Silva who delayed meeting with labor leaders of the country for many months following his own inauguration. Another labor leader cited the recent action of the Medici Administration limiting the monetary correction on mortgage payments from the National Housing Bank as "proof" of the Government's desire to assist working people. Other union leaders spoke of their hopes that the Medici government would ease the strain on workers' wages and saw in the recent speeches of the President reason for optimism.

2. The following week some Sao Paulo labor leaders spoke of their reactions to the Medici government, revealing a sharp contrast to the attitudes of their colleagues in the south of Brazil. They spoke of the harassment of local union officials and the fear that persists among trade union groups. They mentioned, for example, that two local union officials from the Sao Paulo industrial suburb of Santo Andre were recently picked up by police authorities for union activities; one union official was held

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2

three weeks and then released, the other was allowed to leave after being questioned during the night. Surveillance of union activities continues through the presence at local union meetings of police agents dressed as workmen. As a result few workers speak out at union meetings; those who do frequently argue, as at a recent meeting of Santo Andre Chemical workers, that the current wage levels are sufficient (average wage NCr\$156, 00 or \$31. 31 per month) and that an increase in salaries is not necessary. The president of the union explained these comments as an example of how fear of losing their jobs had been instilled in many workers.

3. The textile workers in the same city spoke of the practice of local firms in delaying payment to their employees. The textile workers' president cited one example in which a local firm was two months behind in its salary payments. "We have instituted action in the labor court but that can take up to two years. In the meantime, 400 workers and their families are going hungry. . . . We spoke with the regional labor delegate, but he said there was nothing he could do and suggested that we turn to the labor courts. . . . Workers are afraid to quit since the employer has not filled in their work cards (carteira de trabalho) nor contributed to the social welfare system (INPS) in accordance with the laws." Other similar cases were cited, as local union officials complained that there has been no relief from these abuses that have become common in the greater São Paulo area.

4. Comment: The attitudes expressed in the southern part of Brazil reflect the general hope for better times that prevails in much of the country toward the Medici government. While the comments of the Porto Alegre union leaders reveal this optimism (as well as their own involvement in seeing the new regime succeed), the opinions expressed in Santo Andre reflect the continuing official interference disposing local labor leaders and many of their colleagues, to assume a markedly less sanguine--⁰⁰vamos ver⁰⁰--attitude toward the new government.

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