

Brazil votes not to defend the rainforest

By Ken Silverstein

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

THE FINAL BALLOTS HAVE JUST BEEN COUNTED from Brazil's October 3 congressional and gubernatorial elections, and the general consensus is that conservatives are the big winners. So far, no one seems to have noticed that among the biggest losers were the Amazon rainforest and its defenders.

Right-wing candidates ran strong nationwide in the first elections since conservative Fernando Collor de Mello edged out socialist Luis Inacio Lula da Silva in last December's presidential race. Collor, the first freely elected president in almost three decades, replaced civilian Jose Sarney, who came to power following an electoral college vote strongly influenced by the 1964-85 military dictatorship. Sarney allowed the military to retain almost complete control of Amazon policy, and little progress toward preserving the remaining rainforest was made during his tenure.

It was during the military's reign that wide-scale destruction of the Amazon began, as the generals set out to open up the region to large multinational and domestic business interests. Thousands of miles of roads were built, and billions of dollars in fiscal incentives and subsidies were doled out to private investors.

Especially favored by the dictatorship were ranching projects designed to turn the region into a huge beef exporter. That dream ended in failure—the Amazon basin still must import beef to meet local needs—while the rainforest was set ablaze to clear land for grazing. Mining and logging companies also cut huge swathes through the forest, and speculation fueled by soaring land prices led to violence against poor peasant farmers by wealthy newcomers.

Blackened greens: Rightist politics have long dominated the Amazon region, one of the poorest and most isolated in all Brazil. Their success is largely based on the support of major landowners who have long controlled the votes of the rural poor.

Traditionally, conservatives used straightforward methods to win their way into office: on election day, half of a bank note or one shoe would be delivered to voters. The other half was turned over if ballot-box results proved favorable. While payoff techniques have generally become more sophisticated, goods and services are still routinely swapped in exchange for political support.

"Almost all the region's new elected officials are totally opposed to ecological concerns and rational development," says Fernando Gabiera, president of Brazil's small Green Party, who termed the election results "a disaster" for the rainforest. Slash-and-burn techniques used by ranchers and farmers have already destroyed about 6 percent of the 2 million-square-mile wilderness. The swath of blackened land is roughly equal in size to the state of California.

Prospects for protection of the Amazon have only slightly improved since the generals stepped down. This was evident in the October vote, in which all 27 governorships, 31 chairs in the 81-seat senate and all 503 spots in the lower congress were up for grabs. Anti-ecology conservatives showed overwhelming strength in the nine states of the "Legal Amazon," where they won outright victories in three gubernatorial races and

were headed to November 25 runoffs in the other six. Only in the two small states of Acre and Amapa, where candidates from the socialist Workers Party (PT) won spots in runoffs, do pro-environmentalists have even a shot at winning office. (See accompanying story.) Rightists also swept Amazon congressional races, winning at least 12 of the 13 senate chairs up for grabs and all but a handful of house seats.

Paradise lost: Many of the region's voters view the efforts of environmentalists as an attempt to turn the rainforest into a live Disneyland, blocking economic growth and locking the region into perennial backwardness. A recent report of the major Rio daily *Jornal do Brasil* points out the great difference between the "real Amazon" and the Amazon of many First World environmentalists, who tend to see the region as a sort of Paradise Lost that must be fully preserved.

Overlooked has been the region's widespread poverty, which helps account for a male life expectancy of 42 years. "The level of perception of the Amazon's people is still tied exclusively to survival ... and will remain that way until the fish [and other resources] really begin to disappear," Roberto Viera, president of the Brazilian Institute of Law and Environmental Policy, told the newspaper. "For now, the fires in the Amazon still haven't reached people's backyards."

Gilberto Mestrinho, the new governor of Amazonas, Brazil's largest state, has perhaps the most rabidly anti-ecological views of October's electoral winners. A supporter of large-scale development projects, Mestrinho holds the original—and thoroughly outrageous—view that the Amazon is self-destructing and should be leveled forthwith, before nature itself does the job. "The center of ecology is man, and I will be the governor of men and not of the forest and animals," he repeatedly told crowds on the campaign trail.

Amazonas' new senator, Amazonino Men-

des, is another anti-ecology extremist. He once proposed handing out chain saws to settlers to speed the felling of the forest.

In the neighboring state of Roraima, both gubernatorial finalists have openly opposed the federal government's announced plans to remove thousands of miners from the territory of the Yanomami Indians, the world's largest remaining primitive tribe. Imported diseases and armed clashes with the miners, who illegally search for gold, diamonds and other minerals on Yanomami land, have killed

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some 1,500 of the tribe's remaining 9,000 members in the past three years.

The favorite in Roraima is Romero Juca, presently on trial for illegally authorizing logging on native land between 1986 and 1988, when he headed the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI). Juca, who has been accused of flagrant corruption, also allowed miners to overrun indigenous territory during his tenure at the foundation. The miners have dumped an estimated 600 tons of mercury—used in gold prospecting—into the

Tapajos River, one of the Amazon's largest waterways.

Juca's opponent in the runoff, Otomar Pinto, is a former military man who has also demonstrated no interest in environmental or native problems. "The elections in Roraima could spell the end for the Yanomami," says

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political scientist David Fleischer of the University of Brasilia.

Equally disturbing is the situation in the huge state of Para, which has one of the region's highest rates of deforestation and has been the site of repeated clashes between miners and several major Indian tribes. Para's runoff opponents, Jader Barbalho and Sahid Xerfan, are bitter foes, responsible for perhaps the country's dirtiest first-round campaign. The antipathy is purely personal—both candidates are traditional populists. "We have no preference in Para," says Green Party leader Gabeira. "Neither possible winner will defend the Indians or the Amazon."

Bloody harvest: A final concern is that most of the newly elected officials are supported by the large landowners who are responsible for most prior destruction of the rainforest. Major farmers are also behind the violence that has plagued the region in the past decade, when over a thousand peasants were murdered in land conflicts.

The bloodiest battles have been waged in the "Parrot's Beak" area of the southeast Amazon, where the Maranhão, Tocantins and Para states meet. Ricardo Resende, a priest who works in the region with the Catholic Church-linked Pastoral Land Commission, says the region's new officeholders have "never demonstrated any interest in protecting the region's poor" and will continue to expell peasant farmers from their land. Though the Parrot's Beak has been relatively quiet in the past year, Resende fears an upturn in violence; drought in the neighboring northeast and increased unemployment in

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Brazil's left: in the anti-capitalist dark and on the defensive

While the Workers Party (PT), the main radical opposition group, appears to have doubled its congressional seats to about 35, its overall results were disappointing. After PT presidential candidate Luis Inacio da Silva—known as "Lula"—won 31 million votes last December, party leaders hoped to elect 50 members to congress. Even worse, the PT's gubernatorial candidates did badly in almost all major states. In São Paulo, where the party was born a decade ago after a series of huge labor strikes led by Lula rocked the dictatorship, the PT's Plinio Arruda Sampaio finished a poor fourth.

The Democratic Labor Party (PDT) emerged from the elections in a slightly stronger position. Led by populist Leonel Brizola, one of two governors to send out state militias to oppose the 1964 coup, the PDT upped its number of congressional seats from 38 to about 50. Brizola himself romped to a first-round win in Rio de Janeiro, and the party has a shot at at least three more governorships in November's runoffs.

Overall, the left's bank in congress grew from 72 to about 100, where it will have a solid but clearly minority position. Socialists have, in fact, been on the defensive

in Brazil. They have largely failed to present alternatives to Collor's policies, and widespread complaints about economic austerity measures have not been channeled into political opposition. The most obvious example of the left's disorganization is the near-complete inertia of the "parallel government," set up by the PT early this year to "monitor" the Collor administration and present alternative policy options to those decreed by the government. Now, almost nine months after the new president's inauguration, the parallel government has yet to release an economic program.

That failure results from a number of factors, the most obvious one being that faced by the left in many parts of the world: the need to construct an anti-capitalist alternative in the midst of the collapse of communism.

While the PT never backed the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe, it has suffered from the aftershocks of their fall. As one observer recently wrote in explaining the party's disappointing electoral performance, the PT has been unable to "present a coherent vision of the world or, more immediately, an alternative to the Collor Plan."

With the left in disarray and voting mandatory, casting blank ballots was the most popular form of protest in October. Such ballots totaled as high as 50 percent in some states and averaged about 35 percent, an all-time record. The figures showed a frustration with the severe economic problems that accompanied the return of civilian rule in 1985, says University of Brasilia political scientist David Fleischer. "You vote and vote and vote, and nothing changes. Prices are still high, and salaries are still low."

These trends are likely to continue, at least for the short term. Inflation shows no signs of quickly ceding, and recession is spreading throughout the economy. Most economists say Brazil is following in the footsteps of other Latin American countries that have embarked on International Monetary Fund-style "shock" plans to control high inflation; a slow battle to bring down the cost of living and an extended period of economic stagnation. For the PT and other leftist parties, criticizing Collor is not enough.

During the next few years, they must show voters they know what to do with power.

-K.S

By Paul Hockenos

SKOPJE, YUGOSLAVIA

FLASHING BLUE LIGHTS ILLUMINATE THE night roadblock on the mountain pass. The military sentry inspects license plates and peers in through lowered windows. The lights flicker off the acrylic red star on his cap, a striking anomaly in today's Eastern Europe. He steps back and waves the passing cars on to Skopje, the capital of Yugoslavia's southernmost republic of Macedonia.

For years Yugoslavia was the black sheep of the communist countries, defiant of Moscow in its liberal political and economic reforms. Today, the democratization process lags conspicuously behind that of other East bloc countries. Road blocks are common in the south, political prisoners remain in jail and the secret police operate as before. But republic by republic, election by election, a transformation of post-Cold War Yugoslavia is unfolding. Elections earlier this year in the northern republics of Slovenia and Croatia and earlier this month in Macedonia will be followed by upcoming votes in the other three republics. As the diverse populations cast off the centralized, federal mantle that has bound them for four decades, the future shape of the multinational state is as uncertain as ever.

In the rugged West Balkan republic between Albania, Bulgaria and Greece, the first round of voting on November 11 added to the complex picture of Yugoslavia's emerging political constellations. The sleepy little republic has made it plain that it will no longer serve as the submissive partner of Serbia—its powerful northern neighbor.

The demise of communism also has

Communism's black sheep pulls wool over its own eyes

opened the door for Macedonia to assert its national identity. But the nationalist awakening confronts the impoverished republic of 1.3 million people with its own unique problems. The vigorous turnout of the 400,000- to 500,000-strong ethnic Albanian minority is certain to stir passions at home as well as next door in the 90-percent Albanian region of Kosovo, Serbia's volatile southern province. Yet the Macedonian majority has bucked the nationalist trend in Yugoslavia, giving new hope to a redefined federation of the six republics.

Young, not restless: The democratic process in Macedonia is still young. On election day, giant color posters of the reformed communist party stood uncontested on the delapidated space-age cement buildings that rise from the surrounding slums. The party-published newspaper, *New Macedonia*, is virtually alone among the tiny kiosks' TV and soft-porn magazines. At a party-sponsored rally in Marshal Tito Square, only the city's top heavy-metal band brought the younger generation to its feet. A 15-foot-high yellow star with a rose emblazoned across it, the symbol of the party's new image, glowed next to the stage.

Of the 120 parliamentary seats up for grabs, only a handful were decided in the first round of elections. The vast majority of remaining seats will be contested November 25 between the front runners and likely co-

alition partners, the reform communist party and the Alliance of Reform Forces (ARF). The Macedonia vote marked the impressive debut of the ARF, brainchild of the charismatic Yugoslav federal Prime Minister Ante Markovic. Founded only a month ago, the party is the political arm of Markovic's ambitious free-market reforms, which, until this fall, had stopped galloping inflation cold. Federal proponents see the party as a last-ditch effort to prevent the country's breakup.

"Something had to be done," says Grado Sumkovski of the birth of the ARF. "The nationalist fragmentation has jeopardized the economic program that is the key to the country's renewal." The intrarepublic trade war has rendered Markovic incapable of pushing through his radical austerity plan—inflation jumped to 8 percent in September. "The federal government has the power de-

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jure, but not de facto," Markovic says. "Only an all-Yugoslav consensus can get the economy back on its feet."

After the nationalist victories in Slovenia and Croatia, the Macedonia vote was the first sign that a new federal alternative might be popular in Yugoslavia. The ARF's *raison d'être* appeals to many who are uneasy with the political and economic implications of the nationalist fervor. The Markovic party calls for an all-Yugoslav defense concept and common economic and foreign policies. "We're convinced that most people in Slovenia also know that we must live together," explains Sumkovski. "It can only be so. No single republic can make its way to Europe alone." The ARF insists that new all-Yugoslav elections be held next year.

The reformed communist party will also play a major role in the next government. The new face of the Macedonian League of Communists, now the Party of Democratic

window displays the campaign posters of the Albanian party, the Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP). A noisy stream of men wearing white lace Albanian hats shuffles between the unheated one-room PDP office and the coffeehouse next door.

The ethnic Albanians see their vote as a chance finally to gain full cultural and human rights for the 30 to 35 percent Albanian population in Macedonia, as well as for the republic's Turkish, Bulgarian and Moslem minorities. Ethnic tension between Albanians and Macedonians has escalated over the last three years. The region's grinding poverty and Skopje's heavy-handed ethnic policies have only aggravated the situation, fueling extremists on both sides. Last year, for example, the definition of Macedonia as "a state of Macedonian people and the Albanian and Turkish minorities" was changed to "a nation-state of Macedonian people." The rationale: to "strengthen the national integrity of the Macedonian people."

Only a handful of Albanian schools exist in predominantly Albanian western Macedonia. Albanian dwellings have been bulldozed, women sterilized against their wills, children imprisoned. "Not a single Albanian newspaper is available in all of Yugoslavia," says PDP President Nevzat Halili. Until this year, street protests were met with crack-downs and heightened repression.

"This is finally our chance," said Halili before the election. "We want to solve this problem peacefully and democratically. But if the situation worsens," he warns, "we will find other ways. Ones we never wanted."

The Albanian rank and file are more explicit. So many bridges have been burned that many hold no hope of political life in a democratic Yugoslavia. "The Berlin Wall fell; now ours must fall," says one man. "Of course we want a Greater Albania." In Kosovo, too, many see the only way out as an Albanian state joining western Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania.

Volatile votes: The Albanians' electoral success has enraged Macedonian nationalists, who placed well behind the PDP. All of the non-Albanian parties charged that massive fraud occurred in the Albanian districts and that votes in at least six districts would have to be recast, while international observers claim the election went off more or less fairly. In protest, five nationalist groups say they will boycott the second round.

But despite their lackluster finishes, the nationalist parties' open anti-Albanian rhetoric provides them with fertile ground to build upon. The Movement for All-Macedonian Action calls for the expulsion of all ethnic minorities from Macedonian territory. The nationalists also play heavily on the persecution of the 300,000 Macedonian in Bulgaria and 200,000 in Greece who aren't even recognized as ethnic minorities.

Nothing less than Greater Macedonia is the goal of the Inner Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), which captured at least one spot in the second-round runoff. Its members imprisoned under the communists, the historical militant group has surfaced again with its pre-war program intact. IMRO has found a sympathetic ear in rural districts, especially among the youth. The walls of their headquarters outside Skopje are decorated with once-banned maps of Greater Macedonia that incorporate large chunks of Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro and Turkey.

First founded in 1883, the organization insists that Macedonians must right the

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