

Brazil Can't Wait. We Need the Whole Truth, Now.

Written by Alberto Dines

Monday, 01 November 2004 14:42

The case began under suspicion and a week later has grown murkier and more dubious. Despite two memos from Army command, and a third from the Chief-Minister of the Human Rights Secretary, based on investigations from the Abin (Brazilian Intelligence Agency), we are entangled in a web of doubts.

Exactly 29 years after the announcement of journalist Vladimir Herzog's suicide in the dungeon cells of the DOI-Codi (the intelligence agency during the military regime) in São Paulo, and the immediate finding that he had actually been assassinated while being interrogated, we remain engulfed in the old climate of impostures, farces, and pusillanimity.

By reacting with such rancor to the photos published by the *Correio Braziliense* of that naked and humiliated man, without contesting their being pictures of Herzog, the Army commander not only confirmed the enforcement of the 1970s regime, which committed so many atrocities, but also sanctioned the identification of the journalist; erring at least twice, driven by emotion in both instances.

Prior to signing those absurdities taken out of Cold War handbooks, a four-star general should - at a minimum - order an investigation into the article's authenticity, as well as the identity of the prisoner in the photo.

His retraction, two days later, far from bringing the issue to a close, as hoped by the Defense Minister, only reignited the confusion by lamenting Herzog's death (cited by name).

Also, without investigating, he confirmed the photos were of Herzog. He erred at least once and again moved by emotions - the fear of being exonerated.

Categorical Affirmation

The next day, the turnaround orchestrated by the intelligence agency under the Presidential office: that man was not Herzog before dying, but another prisoner, equally naked and

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humiliated, perhaps a catholic priest, Canadian, thankfully alive.

Last weekend, another twist based on statements from Clarice Herzog, the journalist's widow: some of the published photos were of her husband; the others were of another person.

This means that clumsy actions by the military were combined with a display of civil ineptness, this time in Human Rights, both coming to fruition in a haste to bury the case.

Were we in a state of war, and our forces in need of precise information about the opponent, we would literally be fried. But since we are merely facing a political crisis, such slipups and humiliations are permissible.

The hesitations, the bravados, and the hush-hush that are filtered out after a week overtaken by incompetence expose wounds still open, bleeding, and in order to heal, a shock treatment is called for: the truth. The whole truth.

The President exhibited no lack of energy in imposing upon the Army a behavior compatible with the public's desire by demanding an official response from the Military.

On the other hand, the haste and the back-and-forth of the last few days make it clear that the search for truth, besides steadfastness, requires a minimum of efficacy and a maximum of transparency.

If the Abin categorically claimed that the prisoner was not Herzog, they are now obligated to provide evidence that led to that conclusion.

If they have no evidence, they lied. If they are hiding them, they are misleading the Brazilian people. If they did not lie, nor hide, in essence they are incompetent.

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Further Interrogations

Now it's impossible to dodge the bullets. The cautiousness asked by House Speaker João Paulo Cunha just doesn't resonate; it is inappropriate before the avalanche of misguided statements of the last few days.

The climate of confusion only tends to worsen, and in persisting, it might overflow to other areas, including the government's credibility on the eve of a crucial election.

The goal is not to "sweep up" actions by the military regime's intelligence agencies, as Supreme Court Chief Justice Edison Vidigal fears.

If Herzog is or isn't the one in the photograph has become secondary. But it is essential to understand the motives that led the *Correio Braziliense* to publish - 29 years later - photos of that naked and humiliated man.

The notion of a former agent from the repression years, casually or by vengeance, delivering or selling the photos to the paper is at least naïve.

If the prints were in the hands of the former Army private since 1997, why only now, seven years later, did he decide to release them?

Who provided him the information that the man in the picture was the journalist? And had it not been Vladimir Herzog, who would be interested in churning out tremendous confusion over a name that has become emblematic in the struggle against repression? Why now and not before?

Each question not answered, or answered unsatisfactorily, generates a chain of new interrogations. What is now evident is that the whole story has not been told. And to tell the whole thing, the Herzog Case must be reopened, from ground zero.

Eight Hours Later

To begin: it is not very clear why the somewhat hoopla in announcing the diligence toward the group of journalists, among them some from the state run network TV Cultura, Friday, October 24, 1975.

An “operation” of such nature in those days used to be secretive, clandestine, or bottom line discreet. In this case, it was displayed, trumpeted.

A few weeks earlier, journalist Cláudio Marques, of the *Shopping News* of São Paulo, in his “Coluna Um” (Column One), had already alerted in a blend of irony and threats that the network’s journalists would soon be invited for a stay over at the DOI-Codi installations, on Tutuía Street.

Cláudio Marques cited names, including that of Herzog. He also attempted to implicate the then Culture Secretary of the State of São Paulo, José Mindlin.

Concerned with the threats, Herzog asked common friends and this here Observer, then in charge of the column “Jornal dos Jornais” (Newspaper of the Newspapers, *Folha de S. Paulo*, page 6, Sundays) to unmask the repression agent posing as journalist.

The accusation against Cláudio Marques was published under the title “Witch hunt”, without citing the names of the journalists in jeopardy (October 12, two weeks prior to Herzog’s actual arrest).

In the interim, Cláudio Marques kept on his attacks [see the article in its entirety below]

It captures the attention also the fact that the agents assigned to Herzog’s arrest on Friday

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night accepted the request to appear before the DOI-Codi on Saturday, at 8 am.

An operation against "dangerous subversive elements" could not have been carried out in such a mild and "civilized" manner.

Journalist Marinilda Carvalho, assistant-editor of the *Observatório da Imprensa* (Press Observatory), then arrested and tortured in Brasília, revealed that, insistently, her torturers asked about the "communist s.o.b.s" of TV Cultura that she didn't even know.

Herzog willingly showed up at the DOI-Codi, as he had promised. Eight hours later he was dead. In those days, some 90 journalists had been arrested and many were given barbaric beatings.

A good number of these journalists had foreign last names (Galvão, Konder, Markun, Weis). Of these "foreigners" only one was assassinated.

WITCH HUNT

Item published in the column "Jornal dos Jornais" ("Newspaper of the Newspapers", *Folha de S. Paulo*, 10/12/1975, page 6), thirteen weeks prior to the arrest and death of Vladimir Herzog.

To criticize the press, considering purely professional and objective aspects, is a must. It is part of the maturing journalistic process, and it ought to be practiced by all.

But to abandon concrete quality and ethical issues in order to adhere to the group of accusers

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of the ideological infiltration within the media is - at a minimum - a betrayal to professionals of a trade under a gag order, paying for a mistake they did not commit.

Such is the case of two journalists, one from São Paulo and the other from Rio, that set in motion a recent political assault.

Here [São Paulo], the name is Cláudio Marques, columnist of the *Shopping News* (Column One, page 2), who for three weeks has been unrelenting, targeting the News Department of TV Cultura, nicknamed by the columnist "TV-Vietcultura".

The campaign even attempted to defile the character of Culture Secretary [of the State of São Paulo] José Mindlin.

In Rio, the name in question is Adiron de Barros, columnist of the newspaper *Última Hora*, who not only alleges a "red infiltration" inside the Brazilian press but also cites the newspaper's own cases.

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