

Brazil News



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Editorial

The Siege

Fifty-seven years ago World War II came to a close with the surrender of Germany on May 8, 1945, and of Japan on September 2 of the same year. Even though a relatively short war, so far as wars go—less than six years—in sheer destructiveness and the loss of human lives, it is unequaled.

Americans, especially the younger generation, tend to think of the Second World War as the war the United States fought with Germany and Japan. While the United States did have an important, decisive part in this terrible war, this view, to say the very least, is myopic.

The Second World War involved many nations, hence the name, *World War*. The aggressor nations, known as the Axis Powers, were made up of Germany, Italy and Japan. The Allied Powers, composed of Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, the United States, and many other nations, including Canada.

In multi-nation wars, strange bedfellows often emerge. This certainly was the case in WWII. Let's notice:

Germany, under the chancellorship of Adolf Hitler, was the protagonist of the Second World War... No, let's say that differently: Adolf Hitler, through deceit and brutality, assumed the chancellorship of Germany, which gave him a power base to launch the war. How that one man, an erstwhile derelict who for a time survived by visiting soup kitchens, a megalomaniac who saw himself endowed with divine powers, a social misfit, could start a world war defies our imagination. Yet it needn't. As one reviews his trajectory to power and the evil genius with which he ruled, it becomes evident he was driven, or permitted to act, by a supernatural power. While Hitler possessed a Napoleonic lust to conquer the world, his primordial and obsessive ambition was to exterminate Jewry. His henchmen managed to send approximately six million Jews to their death. It is estimated that in all he was directly or indirectly responsible for the loss of some 60 million lives.

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Hitler's closest ally was Benito Mussolini, the Fascist dictator and prime minister of Italy, also a Godless man, in spite of being the head of state of a nation replete with Christian history and host to the Vatican.

Hirohito, emperor of Japan, was held as a god—in the most literal sense—by his people. Thus when he asked that his soldiers give their lives for the emperor, their obedience was absolute, to the point of preferring self-destruction to the ignobility of surrender. When a suicide mission was announced, it was considered a maximum honor to be chosen to pilot a kamikaze plane or midget submarine loaded with explosives. Indeed, they would weep when their mission was aborted because of inclement weather or technical problems.

Hitler, Mussolini, Hirohito—the perpetrators of the Second World War.

On the Allied side, the brunt of the war, was carried by three men: Winston Churchill, from Great Britain; Franklin Roosevelt, from the United States, and Iosif Stalin, from the Soviet Union. Strange, strange bedfellows.

Churchill, as we have mentioned in previous writings, embodied the stamina, the courage and the vision that carried the Allied cause to a victorious end.

Roosevelt, aware that his nation was still traumatized by the loss of so many native sons on foreign soil during World War 1, resisted active involvement in this yet another war on European soil, although he did send convoys of armaments and other war essentials to the staggering nations, especially England. Even as London shook and burned under nightly trans-Channel raids by hoards of Nazi bombers, he held back. It wasn't until Hitler declared war on the United States, some time after Pearl Harbor, that Roosevelt began sending troops to Europe, thus being drawing into a two theater war. In summit conferences with Churchill and Stalin, Roosevelt bent over backward to appease the latter, much to Churchill's disappointment and frustration.

Stalin occupies an indisputable and well-deserved place in the Despot's Hall of Infamy. With Lenin's death, Stalin picked up the reins of power in the early 1920s (and ruled into the 1950s). It was he who ruthlessly enforced collectivization of property, which abolished private ownership, one of the cardinal precepts of communism. Knowing that such extreme and unpopular policies would elicit strong opposition, and eventually revolution, he set in motion that which today attaches itself to his name as a leech: “purges”—Stalinist purges.

Through these purges Stalin and his associates sent to the firing squad, or Siberia, anyone whom they believed might possibly resist the changes being implanted. Since there was no due process of law, those responsible for these purges soon had their heyday eliminating personal enemies or those against whom they held a grudge. Because of the very nature of these purges, the hardest hit were the *intelligentsia*, that is, anyone with superior intelligence, which effectively destroyed future leadership of the nation.

Included in the *intelligentsia*, were many of the best army officers. It is calculated that approximately one half of the 75,000 Army officers were shot or sent to Siberia during the 1937–38 purges, which included three of the five marshals who held this rank at the

time. Officers thus removed were replaced with inexperienced, often incompetent, men of inferior rank.

No one, from the greatest to the humblest, could rest secure while purges were the order of the day. Karl Martovich Ots, a gentlemanly industrial executive, was responsible for the production of the T-28 tank. One day, while going through final inspection, a bolt was found missing on a tank. This was immediately attributed to “enemy saboteurs.” Knowing full well it was a simple oversight of one of his workers, Ots refused to permit a witch-hunt, but to no avail. A purge of party members who worked in the factory took place and hundreds vanished. Later Ots was promoted to head the great Izhorsk. Shortly he too vanished, as did his successor.

Then there rose a new police chief, named Beria, who instituted a “purge of the purgers,” thus giving the dreaded secret police a fatal dose of their own medicine.

So it was when Hitler began invading neighboring nations, beginning with Poland, that Stalin watched, almost approvingly. He eagerly signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler and began supplying him with enormous amounts of raw materials to sustain the Nazi war machine. This he did, first of all to appease Hitler, and secondly, hoping to cash in on German spoils and reclaim or annex adjoining territories overrun by the Nazis. Finally, as events clearly show, Stalin was utterly terrorized by Hitler and his blitzkrieg, possibly, in part, because of the debilitated state of his own armed forces.

Ignoring all intelligence and patent signs of bellicosity, Stalin continued sending raw materials to Germany—raw materials that were transformed into weapons and munitions and soon used against him. When German troops began invading Russia, Stalin ordered his own troops to not fire on the enemy, thinking this might be taken as a provocation and start a war, which in reality was already started.

Hitler’s panzers made enormous inroads on Russian soil. When Stalin was forced to face reality, he suffered a mental collapse and scarcely gave an order during a number of weeks. His generals, fully aware of the fatal consequences of falling from Stalin’s grace, avoided controversial decisions, which could so easily land them in front of a firing squad.

When Stalin finally came to his senses, the situation was desperate. Unbeknown to Hitler, his situation was also desperate, for he was now fighting a two-front war. Unable to learn from history, he was repeating Napoleon’s historic error, which led to his Waterloo. It was exactly this second front that gave England a breather, a reprieve from certain defeat.

In one of the great ironies of history, the United States and Great Britain, both foundation Christian nations, were allied to the Soviet Union, an atheistic nation with a ruthless, despotic ruler, to defeat Nazi Germany.

At this point we will leave general considerations and concentrate on one specific aspect of the war, the siege of Leningrad, known as The 900 Days.

In a secret directive, No. 1a 1601/41, entitled, “The Future of the City of Petersburg [Leningrad], German generals were informed:

The Führer [Hitler] has decided to raze the City of Petersburg from the face of the earth. After the defeat of Soviet Russia there will be not the slightest reason for the future existence of this large city...

It is proposed to blockade the city closely and by means of artillery fire of all caliber and ceaseless bombardment from the air, to raze it to the ground.

If this creates a situation in the city which produces calls for surrender, they will be refused....

There are three essentials for withstanding a siege:

Water. Dehydration is a swift, merciless killer.

Food. Malnutrition is a slow, agonizing killer.

Defense. In ancient times this defense was often the walls surrounding a city, or a privileged location that denied the enemy easy access. Contemporarily, weaponry and munitions, with the necessary manpower, is indispensable to keep the enemy at bay. Once again, geographic location has a strong influence.

Leningrad was a large city with upward of three million souls. A cultural center and historic cradle of fine arts, Leningraders were a vibrant, energetic people, although deeply traumatized and directly affected by Stalinist upheavals.

Had Stalin not eliminated some of his finest military officers, there is a good chance the Leningrad siege would have never taken place. But through a series of blunders, the Germans closed in on the city.

Yet there was some organization and a great deal of civic spirit. The inhabitants of Leningrad, in this case the majority of them women, managed to dig 450 miles of antitank ditches, 18,000 miles of open trenches, 15,000 reinforced-concrete firing points, 22 miles of barricades, 4,600 bomb shelters. Without this supreme, last hour effort, the siege of Leningrad would have been short. Very short.

The harsh reality of what was to come hit the Leningraders on the night of September 8, when at 6:55 p.m., 27 Junkers (German bombers) dropped 6,327 incendiary bombs on the city, which set a total of 178 major fires. At 10:35 p.m. a second wave of bombers dropped 48 high-explosive bombs on the city. A pumping plant at the city waterworks was hit, as was Badayev, the city's largest food warehouse. The heavy stench of burning meat, the acrid smell of carbonized sugar, as well as the scent of burning cooking oil and flour filled the air. Almost all of the city's 168 firefighting units were called on to combat the four acre warehouse fire. Thus, this first massive bombing raid was aimed at two of the essentials for survival: water and food.

(We must remember that under communist rule, food was stored in central warehouses, and not in individual stores, as happens in capitalist societies. When asked if all had burned, an official answered, "It's burned. We kept all these riches in wooden buildings, practically cheek by jowl. Now we will pay for our heedlessness. It's a sea of flames. The sugar has flowed into the cellars—two and a half thousand tons.")

Even before the Badayez fire, with food imports cut off, Leningrad's food situation was desperate. Shortly before the fire, on August 27, the city had on hand the following supplies, expressed in days: flour, 17 days'; cereals, 29 days'; fish, 16 days'; dried fish, 22 days'; meat, 25 days'; butter, 28 days'.

As can be imagined, food rationing became the order of the day. The bread ration was cut to 21 ounces a day for workers and 14 ounces for dependents and children under twelve. The meat ration was cut to three pounds a month, the same being true

for cereals. Fats were cut to a pound and a half and sugar and candy to five pounds. Even so, in less than three weeks, Leningrad's cupboards would be bare. Unless food could somehow be brought in, German shells and Soviet hunger would soon bring the city to its knees—and annihilation, since Hitler had precluded the possibility of surrender.

September was a terrible month. There were 23 major raids, carried out by 675 German planes, which dropped 987 explosive and 15,100 incendiary bombs.

It was rumored that the city was infiltrated with Nazi sympathizers. There was truth to this. Some were actual infiltrators; others, Leningraders who detested communist rule and naively believed that German victory and consequent Nazi rule would offer them relief. Because of this, proclamations were posted throughout the city with an endless list of violations, each ending with an unmistakable message, that the offender “...will be immediately shot.” This was martial rule in its most literal and terrible sense.

In the initial days of the siege, the fighting was fierce. In one section of town, a small stream ran red with blood for days. Officers were ordered to attack. Any unauthorized retreat would be considered treason. They had two options: Attack the enemy, no matter how unequal the odds, or be shot as a traitor.

As the siege progressed, starvation became a reality, a daily reality. We listen to Nikolai Chukovsky's description of starvation: “If a man had nothing but a slice of bread to eat, he suffered terrible hunger pains the first day. And the second. But gradually the pain faded into quiet despondency, a gloom that had no ending, a weakness that advanced with frightening rapidity. What you did yesterday you could not do today. You found yourself surrounded by obstacles too difficult to overcome. The stairs were too steep to climb. The wood was too hard to chop, the shelf too high to reach, the toilet too difficult to clean. Each day the weakness grew. But awareness did not decline. You saw yourself from a distance. You knew what was happening, but you could not halt it. You saw your body changing, the legs wasting to toothpicks, the arms vanishing... Skirts slipped from the hips, trousers would not stay up. Strange bones appeared. Or the opposite—you puffed up. You could no longer wear your shoes. Your neighbor had to help you to your feet. Your cheeks looked as though they were bursting. Your neck was too thick for your collar. But it was nothing except wind and water. There was no strength in you. Some said it came from drinking too much. Half of Leningrad was wasting away, the other half was swelling from the water drunk to fill empty stomachs.”

He goes on to say that that which people feared most wasn't their own death, but what was most terrible was to see others dying.

It was in November, as the cold became more intense, that the secondary effects of starvation began to appear. Lack of nutrients and lack of bodily resistance go hand in hand. A common cold was fatal. Young and old fell as so much grass under a scythe. Any previous chronic sickness became fatal.

Even the little bit of food eaten was inedible. It was believed that anything was better than nothing. People began tearing the wallpaper off the walls and scraping off

the paste, which supposedly was made of potato flour. Some devoured the paper itself, thinking that because it was made from wood, it should have some nourishment in it. Finally they began chewing the plaster, just to have something in the stomach. Dogs and cats soon disappeared from houses and streets. They didn't die of starvation...

Distrophy and diarrhea deprived the digestive tract of its ability to assimilate nutrients, bringing on death in a matter of a few hours. Curiously, it wasn't the elderly who died first. It was the young, those 14 to 18 years of age, who succumbed first. Men died before women. Since they led more active lives than women, they required more nutrients. As of October 1, children 12 to 14 years received a paltry seven ounces of black bread as their daily ration. Even though children, their organism required as much food as a worker, which explains their high death rate.

Yelena Skryabina wrote in her diary: "You just begin to lose interest, than you lie on the bed and you never again get up." Her heart was torn as she watched her 16 year old son lose all interest in life, even though she tempted him "with such delicacies as she could contrive—a jellied pâté made by boiling old leather, soup thickened with cellulose."

Yelena tells of an experience of walking down the street and seeing a man who was a deathly blue tottering and then sinking to the pavement. She took several steps and looked back. He was dead.

As the siege progressed, he who had bread was rich. A diamond ring could be traded for several pounds of bread.

Death became as commonplace as life. A soldier, just back from the front was walking by the front of a store where women were standing in line, waiting their turn to go in, when suddenly a German shell exploded, blasting bodies to pieces. He was dumbfounded to see the survivors pick themselves up, step over the carnage and emotionlessly form a new line.

Death's great ally in Leningrad was the unceasing cold. With no wood, coal or fuel oil to heat houses, houses became virtual freezers. While this hastened death, it, mercifully, also preserved death. As the cold became more intense, corpses were tied to children's sleds and pulled to the cemetery. As the populace grew weaker, all too often the one taking a loved one to the cemetery would succumb before reaching the destination. So bodies were simply placed outside the front door in hopes that an army truck would pass by and pick up the dead. Finally, they were left where they died—in bed, in the living room, in the kitchen, wherever. As spring approached, houses were searched by officials. Often they found only the dead bodies of entire families, preserved by the cold. On the streets, thawing snow uncovered rigid bodies.

The bodies that did reach the cemetery were buried in large, collective graves, dynamited out of the frozen soil by sappers taken off the front.

How did Leningrad survive the 900 day siege?

Lake Ladoga, in ancient times known as Lake Nevo, is the largest in Europe—125 miles long and nearly 80 miles wide, at its widest point. This lake was the only breach in the German encirclement of the city. Thus, as the ice thickened, the Lagoda Ice Road

came to be known as The Road of Life. Over it—and this is a story in itself—food, munitions and other essentials flowed in and Leningraders were hauled out. Once the ice broke, barges plied the turbulent waters of Lake Lagoda.

While Lake Lagoda was literally a Road of Life, it was also a road of death. The German Luftwaffe untiringly bombed and strafed convoys crossing the lake, sending tremendous tonnages and countless passengers to the bottom. Yet with each successful passage, food reached the starving city, which in turn required less food because of the survivors leaving the city.

Death itself contributed to the survival of the city. Because of inaccurate statistics, estimates of deaths vary wildly. The communist penchant to distort and hide negative information certainly contributes to this variation. Yet, on the high end, it is estimated that as many as a million Leningraders perished. Even if the number were only half that—and surely it is much more—it would be a lot, making the casualties in Hiroshima and Nagasaki look mild. By the end of the 900 days, there were 637,000 people residing in Leningrad.

During the 900 days, every single soul in Leningrad had to have a ration card. Any chance of survival of the siege depended on this little card. In an attempt to thwart corruption, a new card was issued at the beginning of each month, which had to be picked up by the holder.

Thus to lose or have a ration card stolen, in most cases was tantamount to a death sentence, especially so when occurring during the beginning or middle of the month. For Leningraders, these little cards became their highest treasure, for it represented life, a chance at survival.

Police and party leaders were ever on the lookout for defrauders. In a clear-cut case, a single bullet was often the chosen deterrent.

The poignant story is told of an occasion when General Mikhail Dukhanov was told of an outbreak of dysentery among children in a boarding school. Saturated by the suspicious Soviet mentality, he immediately suspected that school officials were stealing food, thus depriving the children of necessary nourishment.

The following day the general appeared at school shortly after daybreak hoping to nab the thieves. He watched as the food was brought from the storehouse, as it was cooked and served. He observed as each child received less than an ounce of bread and a mug of hot water spiced with salt. After “breakfast,” the strongest children put on heavy clothes and walked down the street, where they helped dismantle an old house, bringing wood back to be used as firewood. Many of the children didn’t have strength to take part in this activity.

Lunch consisted of 1.75 ounces of bread, a pat of butter, a little soup made of frozen beets and some cereal apparently made of linseed oil cake.

General Dukhanov noticed that many of the children put part of their soup and cereal in little jars, which he believed they would eat later. Imagine his surprise when the stronger children soon emerged in heavy clothes, clutching the jars, saying they were going to visit their relatives. Unbelievably, these children who were starving,

racked by dysentery, were taking part of their paltry daily ration to a starving mother, brother or sister. . . .

The general reported his findings to the party secretary, who picked up his phone, called to troops defending the city and requested that within 40 minutes a heavy barrage be put down on German generals Gnidin and Witte, as a reprisal for the suffering they were inflicting on innocent children. He also promised to have the children evacuated.

Soldiers were becoming too weak to fight. Yuri Loman, the commissar for a truck unit, reported seeing four soldiers joining efforts to load a 40 pound mutton carcass, but unable for lack of strength. Five thousand men were needed to clear snow drifts from the railroad track. Normally only 400 or 500 men were strong enough to go to work.

One of the greatest tragedies of modern times is what communism did worldwide to hundreds of millions of unfortunate souls. The first and most terrible atrocity committed was to deprive them of religion. The suffering of the Leningraders would have been mitigated had there been at least a shadow religion. Never once do we read of a religious rite as bodies were hauled to mass graves. Nor were Scriptural words of consolation ever offered on the radio. Rather, when men were too weary or weak to broadcast, a metronome would be placed in front of the mike. The relentless tic . . . tic . . . tic . . . reminded people time was passing. Each tic was bringing them closer to an often welcome death, or to the rupture of the iron ring.

In spite of all the strikes against them, this valiant people showed uncommon stamina during the siege. They held up as the 900 days ticked by. Then, slowly but surely, something began to change; the enemy weakened at their gates. As German fortunes waned, so did food, armor, fuel and munitions. No longer could they hold to their positions. Tens of thousands of their soldiers were killed or taken prisoner. Until finally Leningrad was again a free city. Yes, a scarred city, a mourning city, with nearly a third of its inhabitants scattered in mass graves. Yet, for the living life had to go on. The city had to be cleaned up, rebuilt, and repopulated, a task which Leningraders approached with zeal.

(This again is a terrible, a brutal story, as thousands were singled out as culprits for what happened—exactly the bravest men and women—and shot or sent to Siberia. All newspapers, writings and official records of how this brave people survived were either destroyed or stored away, some of which only recently are coming to light. The aftermath of the Leningrad siege show one of the most Godless faces of communism.)

What we have just described didn't happen during the Dark Ages, nor did it happen a hundred years ago. It happened during the lifetime of some of you readers. As we read of such a merciless, senseless siege, that brought on so much suffering and death, we struggle with feelings of deep indignation. We must forcefully remind ourselves that the Lord's death on Calvary covered the sins of Hitler and Stalin, and their "children."

The Leningrad siege was noisy. A survivor tells of times in which the firing was so

intense that individual shots and bursts of gunfire became one long, solid roar. Not a single soul with an active mind had the slightest doubt: Leningrad was under siege.

Today another siege is taking place. The children of God over the face of the earth find themselves in an unparalleled situation, which we will call a reverse siege. During hundreds of centuries of open bombardment, an effort was made to bring God's children to starvation by destroying Bibles, by burning meeting places, by confiscation of all earthly goods and deprivation of a means of making a living. Even though hundreds of thousands lost their natural lives, spiritual life flourished.

In today's reverse siege, just the opposite is taking place. The Word of God is sold in supermarkets at a price that even the poorest can afford. Not only are worship services tolerated, but looked on favorably and advertised in local papers. Indeed, God's children often have better credit than the children of the world.

In the reverse siege, the enemy is quietly bombarding the besieged city with every imaginable kind of goods, services, comforts and pleasures, which range from necessary and good to totally unnecessary and corrupt, with no dividing line. Today's siege is evocative of a mural painted by a modern artist, in which colors are randomly splashed about in a deliberate effort to defy order and tradition. So we, when going shopping, weave down colorful aisles, unable to discern what we need and what we don't need, what is proper and what is off-limits. We pick up an item with a twinge of conscience, we pay for it with a twinge of conscience, we take it into the house with a twinge of conscience, we begin to use or display it with a twinge of conscience, but soon, soon our conscience is quieted and we feel an irresistible desire to go shopping again.

The reverse siege erodes our sense of contentment and gratitude. We purchase a new microwave oven with all the latest features (like our neighbor just bought). We use it every chance we get, or can make. This goes on for several weeks, until we walk into the mall and see a new model revolving on an elevated stand, glittering in the glow of a strobe light. Strangely, after seeing the new model, our old model loses its glow. We begin asking ourselves if it wouldn't be a good idea to put our "old" microwave in the basement and get a new one.

The church believes that photography, recorders, radio, television and the Internet don't fit into Christian living. The position taken is clear-cut. Yet, taking into consideration that we are living in a world that is saturated by all this, we recognize that as we go about our daily duties, we will be indirectly exposed to that which we consider off-limits. One alternative to this stance would be to become recluses, which hardly fits into the tenor of the gospel.

While it hasn't always been easy to maintain the desired distance from that which we have not accepted as becoming, the basis for this position has never become beclouded.

We are not opposed to scientific progress. The telephone has been accepted from its inception. Today we can't even imagine what life would be like without telecommunications. Thus when the cell phone came on the market, we saw it as a convenient extension of what had become a basic necessity of life.

The first cell phones, large and clumsy (here in Brazil called "bricks," because of

their size and weight) underwent a rapid evolution, which we have accompanied by purchasing ever smaller, better and more advanced models. Recently a yellow light began to flicker. As we look to the near future—one to five years—a red light flashes. Soon we will be seeing cell phone that include camera, video, recorder, DVD, radio, television and Internet (and who knows what else). Oh yes, I almost forgot, it will be possible to make calls on these cell phones too.

For a while—a little while, at least—there will be a certain option. We will be able to purchase less loaded models. But as the options become more limited, or rather, more obligatory, how will we react?

The cell phone is but the tip of the iceberg. As/if time continues, the siege is going to become more and more devastating. Constantly we will be called upon—by our own conscience—to make decisions. Should this conscience be corrupted, death will be but a step away.

God's people have proved they can stand up and prosper under persecution. We exclaim about the faith and staunchness of those brethren. Should those brethren rise up and observe us in these last times, they would almost certainly exclaim, "What they are going through is much worse than what we ever suffered. How can anyone stand?"

The *Martyrs Mirror* tells of an incident in which a group of faithful brothers and sisters were imprisoned because of their faith. When none of the known tactics would induce them to recant, a reverse tactic was used. A brother and a comely maiden were locked in a cell by themselves, believing that the lust of the flesh would accomplish what the torture of the flesh was incapable of doing.

These two faithful souls proved that "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

The siege of Leningrad lasted 900 days. Approximately one third of the inhabitants lost their lives. We don't know how long the reverse siege of the people of God will last, nor do we know how high casualties will run. What we do know, with absolute certainty, is that as the Lord preserved the brother and the maiden in prison, so He will make a way of escape for us. The question is: Are we interested in escaping? ▲

Brasília

President Lula

Lula is now president of Brazil. So far he is sending out conflicting signals. Fidel Castro and Hugo Chaves were present at his inauguration. On the other hand, he appointed Henrique Meirelles as president of the Banco Central. Meirelles, who

lived in the US for many years, while president of the Bank of Boston, is highly competent and promises to keep Brazil on the road of capitalism.

A few brave commentators are beginning to offer their opinions of Lula. They believe he has what it takes to make a good president. It appears he will have a leftist rhetoric to keep his party radicals at bay, while in actual practice he will carry on with the basic policies of his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

One very good sign in his favor is that the exchange rate is slowly dropping, coming down from a high of 4 reals to the dollar, to 3.3 reals. The exchange rate accurately reflects the feelings of international bankers, who, after all, are today's de facto rulers, to whom presidents and prime ministers do obeisance.

On one point Lula's most ardent supporters and vocal detractors must agree. Lula is honest. No one has the slightest doubt about his total honesty. The fact that all he has accumulated in life to date is a modest home attests to this fact. Needless to say, this honesty will be severely tested now that he is in power. If he can stand up, he will be in a position to zero in on high-level corruption. If he can cut official corruption in half—and mark what I'm saying—Brazil will rapidly shuck its developing nation status and enter the elite club of modern nations. ▲

Inflation in 2002

After a number of years of 4-5% inflation per year, 2002 jumped to nearly 12%. This was due largely to the convulsive behavior of the exchange rate, which in turn portrayed the financial world's lack of confidence in Lula's ability to conduct the economy. Indirectly, much of Brazil's economy is harnessed to the dollar exchange. Farm products and other basic commodities such as steel and petroleum products, among many others, are all attached to the dollar. Most of all, Brazil's mountainous foreign debt is payable in dollars. Thus, the higher the exchange rate, the more reals it takes to make payment.

If Lula proves himself a competent administrator, capable of winning and keeping the confidence of business and industry, the exchange rate will continue to drop, and so will inflation.

On the other hand, it will take but one serious misstep for Lula to send Brazil into a tailspin. He knows this. His appointment of Henrique Meirelles to preside over the Banco Central may be his key to success.

Just a word on Henrique Meirelles. Before the elections, his nephew Marco stopped by on business. He said, "My uncle will be best-voted congressman in the state of Goiás. He will assume the Central Bank..." Right on both scores. "And from there he will go on to become the President of Brazil." Time will tell. ▲

Rio Verde in the News

The El Dorado Goiano

That's the title EXAME Magazine gave to yet another article on the Rio Verde area, written by Bruno Blecher:

Today Brazil is going ahead at full steam in the southwestern part of the state of Goiás, where 18 municipalities compose an area of 21,735 square miles, with 350,000 inhabitants. This area was recently chosen by experts as a model *agricluster* (a word coined by Prof. Michael Porter, from Harvard University).

Blecher goes on to tell about Evaristo Lira Baraúna's trajectory in the area. Born in the neighboring town of Jataí, in 1976, then 24 years old, Baraúna moved to Rio Verde, where he began working in the local Coop, where he soon outgrew his britches. He set up his own business, buying and sell farm products and commodities. Today his annual cash turnover is in the neighborhood of 10 million dollars, which gives an idea what kind of opportunities this area offers to those who are willing to roll up their sleeves and go to work.

All these years the Mennonites have done business with Baraúna and I so far as I know he has always treated everyone fairly, which doesn't means his price is always the best.

There are a number of factors that contribute to Rio Verde's rapid growth.

First of all is the weather. With an annual rainfall of 50 to 80 inches, even years when rain is scarce, there is enough to raise a fair crop. The month of December in which we averaged an inch a day, crops still did relatively well. For diligent farmers, there is no such a thing as a general crop failure.

Another plus for the area is abundance of lime. Since the aluminum content of the soil is quite high, lime is an absolute necessity.

The land itself. *Cerrado* ranges from bare land in its natural state, to fairly heavily wooded. Here on the Colony all it took was a heavy disk to clear the land. In other cases a long, heavy chain or cable would be tied between two tractors and the brush drug down, after which a tractor with a front-end blade would shove everything into piles or windrows. In some areas the woods were tall and had to be cleared with a dozer. This soil responds well to lime and fertilizer and within several years good crops can be produced.

Perdigão. It is said that the history of Rio Verde will be told in terms of "before" and "after" Perdigão moved in. There is a lot of truth to this. So far 200 million US dollars have been invested in the area by the company and chicken and hog raisers. It is believed this figure will short hit 285 million dollars. This doesn't include the millions of dollars invested by other companies attracted by the local boom. State taxes generated in Rio Verde in 2001 were in the neighborhood of 15.6 million US dollars.

Perdigão chose the Rio Verde area for its operations because within a radius of 125

miles 4.8 million long tons of grains are produced annually. Today they are processing 8,000 tons of chickens and 5,500 tons of pork per month, plus 6,000 tones of sausage, ham, hamburger, etc., of which the greatest part is exported. Perdigão has 3,700 direct employees, plus another 10,000 indirect employees.

According to Arantes Abib, an electrical engineer of Arab descent, it was the foreigners and not local businessmen, who began investing in the area. By “foreigners,” he means those who came to Rio Verde from southern Brazil and others countries, such as the Dutch, the Mennonites and the Russians.

Blecher goes on to tell the story of how the Mennonites came to Brazil, using information given to him by Daniel Kramer. In 1969 Rio Verde had only a few paved streets. While crisscrossing Brazil in a VW bus, looking for a suitable place to settle, Manoel Norberto, a large landowner, offered 8,000 acres to the Mennonites for just a few dollars an acre. Eight families bought in, each one ending up with a thousand acres of land. After a number of difficult years, the Colony finally took off.

(It’s interesting to not that even good reporters can get their figures mixed up. Daniel Kramer is to have come to Brazil in 1969 with 15,000 dollars—probably true—and is now worth a billion dollars—probably not true.)

Another pioneer is Wilhemus Kompier, a Dutchman, who planted 11,000 acres of soybeans and 500 acres of corn. He hopes to harvest 460,000 bushels of soybeans and 52,000 bushels of corn. He estimates his profit at 20 percent of his investment. Kompier has 10 combines and 19 tractors.

The New Holland dealership estimates that there will be some 500 new combines sold in the state of Goiás this year and 1,540 tractors.

As we have mentioned before, the great side benefit of the Perdigão chicken and hog operation is the used litter. Kompier deeded over 87.5 acres of land to a hog raiser so that he could put up a pig operation. The only thing he asks in return is the manure. A rancher sold sold the same amount of land to a hog raiser in exchange for the manure for the next 50 years.

It is estimated that the manure produced by the Perdigão chicken and hog projects is worth approximately five million dollars. There are those who ask if land will soon become saturated with natural fertilizer and chicken and hog raisers won’t know what to do with their litter. Hardly.

The mad cow disease in Europe and an outbreak of hoof and mouth in Argentina played into Brazil’s hands. It is hoped that this year some 2.7 billion dollars of meat will be exported.

Brazilian is finding its own niche in the international market. Since most of the animals produced in Brazil are grass-fed, the cuts aren’t as tender as those raised in feedlots. Consequently, Brazilian beef is bought for hamburger. Last year 502,000 tons of beef were exported. This year Russia alone should purchase 200,000 tons, a substantial part of the 700,000 they import annually.

Of all meat exports, the chicken market continues to be the bright spot. In an effort to eliminate competition, major meat producing nations are creating ever more

stringent sanitary barriers. Nildemar Secches, the president of Perdigão, says, “Beyond being self-sufficient in corn and soybeans, the basic diet of both chickens and hogs, we have at our fingertips advanced technology in the production of animal protein, which permits us to operate efficiently.”

Brazil has been selling meat to Middle East countries and to Japan for quite some time. At present overtures are being made to China, Canada, Chile, the Philippines and Mexico.

For a country to shuck third world status and take its place with industrialized nations is no small thing. For Brazil, exporting meat will make a positive contribution. ▲

This & That

Brethren from the Boa Esperança Cong. in Mato Grosso bring good news. In several months they should have electricity. Today they are raising crop comparable in yield to Colony crops, and the price difference on produce sold is being eliminated. There have been several occasions in which they got a better price than we did over here. One feels a sense of optimism and thankfulness in the brethren. They have proved themselves to be A-1 pioneers.

Oct. 31, Marcelo & Juliana Passos had a girl, Alexandre.

Nov. 8, Kevin & Elizabeth Warkentin had a boy, Trevor.

On Thanksgiving day the Monte Alegre Cong. had a carry-in dinner after the service.

Sam Coblentz, John & Diana Wedel and children arrived on Dec. 6 to spend time with their parents, Dan & Clara Coblentz, who are taking an extended “vacation” in Brazil. (Ask Dan about it.) They all went to Anápolis to visit the children’s home where Dans got Diana when just a baby. They were surprised to find that the director of the institution at least one of the doctors remembered her after more than 25 years. They were told that over six thousand children have lived in that home for varied periods of time.

Ben & Shari Froese and two girls from Canada are spending several months on the Colony.

Dec. 10 was the Rio Verde School end-of-the-year program. They follow the Brazilian schedule, which means classes will reconvene toward the end of January. We are tempted to say that Brazilians aren’t born singers. When they loudly and lustily sing their national anthem, one gets a strange sensation. Yet in that town school, made up strictly of Brazilians, the idea that Brazilians can’t sing. They sing beautifully. The school is a total success. The parents stand behind it, thankful that their children can study in a Christian environment. Doubtlessly, this school is making a positive contribution to the growth and stability of that congregation.

Lindomar & Monica Yoder and two sons arrived on Dec. 10 to spend time in Brazil with relatives. Lindomar was adopted when several years old by Ura & Rosella Yoder.

Brazil ¹⁵ News

Marvin, Paul & Rachel Yoder's son who now lives in the US, came with them. Regina, dau. of the late Enos & Clara Miller, who now works at Mercy Hospital in Moundridge, married Vance Koehn on Dec. 22. Some of the relatives from here were present at the wedding.

Dec. 15, there were five baptisms and one reacceptance in the Rio Verde Cong. Ana, a 31 year old lady, stayed with Harold & Emma Dirks at least 20 years ago. The seed was sown and after so many years, the little plant came to life. Luciana, a 24 year old girl, was one of Paulo David's students in the religion classes he gives in the city school system. On Dec. 29, there were six more baptisms in town, bringing total membership to 70. A most interesting thing is taking place. When these converts tell their experiences before the congregation, they invite their relatives to be present, as well as for the baptisms. As they hear their loved ones tell of how the Lord worked in their lives, they come under conviction and also make a decision. Doctrine classes for a new set of converts will begin directly.

Daniel & Betty Martin spent a short time on the Patos mission with their children, the missionaries, Milton & Cindy Loewen.

Dec. 20, the combined Monte Alegre/Rio Verdinho Schools presented their Christmas program at the M.A. School.

Lester & Sharon Holdeman from Missouri spent several months working out adoption papers for baby Tonya. Since both Lester & Sharon have lived here and have kept up their permanent visas, the adoption was much more straightforward than for foreigners. They were able to secure legal guardianship and take their daughter back to the US. They will have to return in February for the hearing, when the adoption should be finalized.

Dec. 25, a busload of Colony folks and visitors left for Iguacu Falls on a chartered bus. Craig & Monica Redger and boys, David & Sherrel Hibner and three children, Wendel & xxxxxxx Penners and three children, and Heidi and Rochelle Schmidt spent a short time on the Colony. The Schmidt girls came to visit the Garcia girls, Cristiane and Raquel, whom they learned to know in Montezuma, Kansas.

Eldon Penners and family, Craig Redgers and family, Harley & Adriana Penner, and Isaac Penner, took a large van to the Iguacu Falls.

The Paul Yoder family and Vance & Regina Koehn also went to Iguacu Falls.

Sounds like going to the Falls is a big deal.

Geise, a girl who works in one of the Perdigão offices, put the following saying on the bulletin board (in English): *Make sure you know where you're going, because someday you'll arrive there.*

The district attorney's office is gathering evidence on the abduction we reported on last month. Everything indicates that one of her daughters was also kidnapped at birth. Pedro, the boy who was kidnapped and raised by Vilma, spent an extended Christmas vacation with his biological parents.

You will remember that over a year ago Brazil bumped into an electrical shortage.

The government put all hydroelectric power plants in construction into high gear

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and brought back into service some that had been retired. Now unusually plentiful rainfall is filling dams to maximum capacity. The colloquial term “juice,” used for electricity in N America, takes on a literal application in Brazil, where almost all electricity is generated in hydroelectric plants. It takes juice to produce juice.