

Brazil News



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Editorial

The Brazilian Government

Questions frequently asked by people interested in Brazil are: What about your government? Is it stable? Is it going communist? Do you feel safe there? Can you make a living?

The answer you get depends on who you ask. And that accounts for the discrepancies in what you hear.

There is an anecdote of two gentlemen who met for the first time in a social gathering in N America. Both had spent years in Africa. Soon they found themselves in the middle of a circle, fielding a wide variety of questions about the African continent.

Someone asked, "What about the people in Africa? Are most of them pagans or do you see some Christians?"

One of the gentlemen was quick to speak up, "You don't see Christians anywhere. Those people are as pagan as can be."

The other gentleman waited until the first finished speaking and said, "It is true that there are still quite a few pagans, but Christians can be found everywhere."

From religion the conversation drifted to wildlife. The question was asked, "I suppose you see lions and elephants everyday?"

"Oh no," the second gentleman answered, "It's not very often one sees such wildlife."

Now it was the first gentleman's turn to object. "What do you mean? Why I have killed..." and he went on to tell about all the lions and elephants he had killed.

What was the problem? The first gentleman was a hunter and the second a missionary.

That is the first problem. It depends what you are looking for. The second is the tendency we have to compare other governments and customs with our own (which are always better). This leads to much frustration. It's a lot like the man who loses his wife

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and later remarries. If he constantly compares his second wife with his first one and worse yet, tells her so, the marriage is doomed.

To try to understand Brazilian government, politics and customs in the light of the American way of life is totally confusing.

Following are several rules that can be helpful in trying to understand a foreign culture, whether you live there or not:

1. Accept the fact that you will never understand everything. When putting a puzzle together, we like to see every piece in its place. When dealing with a foreign culture, there are always either too many or not enough pieces to make a complete picture.

2. Each culture has its own code of values. The folks living in these countries have been born and brought up to believe their way is the right way. Very likely they will die that way. The way they do things makes perfect sense to them. So unless you have quite a lot of influence, don't try and change a nation. A past manager of our local agency of the Banco do Brasil tells of some Americans (not of our group) that came in and wanted a loan. When told the requirements, they began giving him a lecture on how things were so much easier in the USA. With typical latin courtesy he heard them out. Later, when telling me of the incident, he said he felt like asking, "If it's so wonderful back there, what are you doing here?" Moral: If you wish you were back where you came from, don't make others wish you were too.

3. Every culture has some good in it. With a little bit of humility you can learn a lot even from the most underdeveloped nations. Like the hunter and the missionary, we will find what we are looking for.

4. Most important is this: Are the people receptive to the Gospel? Will the government permit that we carry out the Great Commission and bring the Gospel to its people? Very likely some of the very things we detest the most are what create a fertile soil for mission work. If it takes the negative to make a positive situation for mission work, who are we to criticize?

Enough of philosophizing.

The Brazilian government is operated under the presidential system. On a federal, state and municipal level, there are the three powers: executive, legislative and judicial. On a federal level, the president is the chief executive officer. On a state level there is a governor. And on a municipal (county) level, a mayor.

The federal congress is made up of two houses. The senate consists of three members elected from each state. The *câmara dos deputados* (house of representatives) elects members on a proportional basis according to population. On a state level there is only one house, that of the *deputados*. Locally there is the *câmara dos vereadores* (county commissioners).

The judicial system is made up of lower courts, courts of appeal, state courts, and finally the Supreme Court.

Never in the history of Brazil has there been a true balance of power between the three branches of government. The executive branch traditionally is very strong. Consequently, if things go well, the president is a hero. If they don't, he is a villain.

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Basic policy, monetary, domestic and foreign, is dictated by the president. Congress normally concerns itself with items of lesser importance. Since constitutionally the presidential decrees require congressional approval, he issues what is called a *medida provisória*, that is, a provisory or conditional measure. Congress then has 30 days to accept or reject what the president wishes to become law. Normally it accepts.

Our judicial system is fairly efficient. All judges and public prosecutors are appointed not elected. Most of them seem to be honest and efficient. Doubtlessly there are exceptions. The Supreme Court has a very reduced role in comparison to its US counterpart. It is very seldom called upon to make landmark rulings (No Wade vs. Roe decisions).

The American system of government with no irony intended is probably the most perfect system to have ever been developed. It is true that today it is being severely abused by civil rights movements and other extremist groups. Nevertheless, the basic system surely is a great example for all nations.

Or is it?

Yes, really it is. But to expect that a third world nation set up a similar government is vain thinking. The reason is simple. For a government to be truly democratic with a workable balance of powers, political parties must be stable and durable. This implies that they be based on definite guiding principles. When political parties begin to proliferate like rats in a granary and become a mere springboard for politicians to launch themselves into political orbit, true democracy doesn't function properly.

At present Brazil must have between 15 to 20 political parties down considerably from what it was a year ago. It is true that only three or four of them are large enough to have any amount of political clout. But, depending on the circumstances, alliances are constantly being made between them and the smaller ones. These alliances may be good for a couple of weeks while an issue is being debated, for a couple of months, or for a couple of years.

There is no rhyme or rhythm to these alliances. A party from the right suddenly finds it has something in common with another from the left. These usually are shotgun romances that end as quickly and noisily as they began.

Very few political parties have a life expectancy of more than 10 to 15 years. Most die in infancy. The higher the mortality rate, the higher the birth rate to replace the defunct parties.

What about communism? It is no longer popular to be communist not even in Russia. Has communism ever been a threat to Brazil? A threat, yes. Did Brazil ever almost go communist? No. What about the military revolution in 64 to overthrow communism? That is a most interesting subject that will be discussed at length in a future issue.

How was communism a threat? Any country with a large poor class is a prime candidate for change. Communism is a change for the worse. Poor people become desperate and believe anything. Communism, a system based on the untruth, is swallowed hook, line and sinker by the masses who have lost hope. Communism works

until put into practice. It is in this respect that communism was a threat. To understand why it never really had a chance, it is necessary to understand the mentality of the middle and upper class Brazilians, who after all, run the country. More of this too, in another issue.

Can you make a living in Brazil? What a question! Of course you can.

Each issue of Brazil News will have (for a while, at least) an article on what we have just been talking about. The different aspects of Brazilian government will be explained at length. What was written here was intended to give you just a quick view of what the situation is. If you have any specific questions you would like to have answered, please write me. ▲

Fogão Caipira

Last month we talked about the rancho de buriti—the house made out of rough lumber and palm tree fronds. Today we're going to discuss the big attraction of these ranchos. That is the fogão (stove) caipira (rustic or backwoodish). In other words, a backwoodish stove.

To give you an idea of what it is all about, we're going to go back around 22 years when Pedro Pão was our neighbor several kilometers downstream on the Monte Alegre River. Since there were no roads back in those days, we'll go to his place on foot.

We cross the river a little below the falls on Daniel Kramer's place on a pinguela, that is, a log cut down so as to fall across the river creating a footbridge without a railing. Once on the other side, we gingerly step through a swamp and head on up the hill to dry ground. Now we make our way to Pedro Pão's place. Going is slow and it takes approximately an hour to get there.

Finally we see the roof of his rancho de buriti. Dogs announce our arrival. As we walk up to the front door, Pedro's wife, Nenzinha greets us with a broad smile. "Vamos chegar! Vamos chegar!" ("Come in" or literally, "let's arrive")

We walk into the little living room. Seating consists of stout forked branches driven into the dirt floor along the walls. Small logs have been split and placed in the forks. The conversation begins by Nenzinha asking us if we are all well. Then one by one she asks about any members of the family that haven't come along. Are they well too?

We now ask how they are. Are they all well? Did she get over the flu? What about Pedro? Where is he? Nenzinha explains he is up in his roça de toco (slash and burn field) hoeing his corn patch.

Now Nenzinha gets up. "Dá licença" ("Excuse me"), "I'm going to make us some coffee." We follow her into the kitchen and this brings us to the fogão caipira.

A fogão is a stove approximately two meters long and 80 centimeters wide, usually made of brick and plastered. The plaster has a hard, red finish. It is made up of three basic parts (see illustration): a) The rabo (literally, tail), a low platform on which the wood rests that is slowly fed into the stove. People rest on here too when it is cold. b)

The chapa, a cast iron plate approximately one meter by 30 centimeters. This plate, with four removeable lids, is more or less 25 centimeters higher than the rabo, resting on bricks on either side. c) At the other end is a built-in oven.

To get the fire going, Nenzinha shoves in just a bit, several pieces of firewood with smoldering ends that are lying on the rabo. She now stoops and gently blows the embers until they leap up into a cheery little flame.

Now we follow her out the back door to get water from the bica. If there is anything that comes close to being as nice as a fogão caipira, it is a bica (pronounced Bee-ca). A bica is a tree trunk usually between eight to 15 meters long that has been laboriously hollowed out to resemble a long trough. In Pedro Pão's case, it is a hollowed out palm tree.

To make a bica work, it is necessary to go upstream far enough to get sufficient drop and then dig a small ditch to carry water up to the house. One end of the bica is placed in the ditch that has been dug. From this point until the end of the bica the terrain must slope downward. The other end of the bica is then placed on a large stump (with several smaller ones in between for support). Due to the slope of the ground, this end of the bica is usually waist level. It is here that Nenzinha gets her water to make us some coffee.

While the water is heating, Nenzinha gets out some toasted coffee beans and places them in a small hand grinder. Slowly she cranks the handle until getting enough to make a batch of coffee. Now she gets a small flannel cloth sack held open on one end with a circular wire and places it in an empty liter can that serves as a coffee pot. The finely ground coffee and appropriate amount of sugar are put into the sack and the hot water is now poured through it. The brew that drips through the bottom is some of the best coffee in the world. Really, the stuff you folks in the States drink shouldn't even be called coffee.

While drinking our coffee, Pedro Pão shows up from the field. We shake hands and answer his questions, assuring him that all our family members are OK. We sit talking for half an hour about a variety of subjects. Finally we say, "Well, we must be going." Both of them exclaim, "Está cedo!" ("It's early!") Nenzinha now says, "Oh no! You can't go. You haven't had dinner yet. I am going to make dinner for you."

There is absolutely no point in arguing.

She gives Pedro a look he understands. He excuses himself. He calls one of his little dogs and points out a plump frango caipira (frango: fryer) A frango caipira is a cross between a chicken and jungle fowl. It is tremendously resistant and can survive on its own. The little dog is now in hot pursuit of the frango. It runs around the house, into the garden and finally into the marsh. The dog is the eventual winner. Carefully it clasps the frango's neck in its jaws and waits for Pedro to get there. Without the slightest injury, Pedro takes the frango to the house and places it under a crate. Now the process is repeated with another frango.

In the meantime, Nenzinha has pushed the firewood farther into the stove and added more. In a matter of minutes the fire is roaring. Water is heating. Once it is hot, the frangos are killed, picked and cleaned on a wide board by the bica.

Now, shuttling between the bica and the fogão caipira, this lady, probably illiterate, does something that very few modern women would dream of doing, making a meal from scratch literally starting with the chicken that is scratching out in the backyard.

The frango she is now preparing was raised loose in their backyard. The different spices she uses were raised in her garden.

The rice she is preparing was raised in the roça de toco near the house.

The mandioca (cassava, manioc: a long up to over a meter long tubular root, used in place of potatoes) that is cooking on the stove was raised on their little plot.

The beans boiling away were raised in their roça de toco.

The squash was raised in amongst the corn.

The bananas she is frying come from trees right outside the house. The banana maçã (apple bananas), to be eaten raw were also raised at home.

Now Nenzinha is opening a 20 liter can that appears to be filled with lard. With a laddle she dips deep and comes up with large pieces of pork that have been fried down and preserved in lard. This meat was raised in a pig pen down below the house. The water from the bica runs through it giving the hogs a constant supply of water.

Now comes the best part the part that sets a fogão caipira aside from all other types of stoves. Not all of the smoke goes up the chimney. Some smoke escapes when the wood goes into the stove. Taking advantage of this, Pedro Pão has wired several slender poles horizontally from the thatched roof, running parallel to the stove. Hanging on these poles, curing, are long coils of sausage. This is real sausage. When Pedro and Nenzinha butchered, they carefully cut up, into very small pieces, any meat trimmed off the larger cuts. All of these little pieces were mixed with different spices, including ample amounts of green peppers. This meat was then stuffed into the casings through a small stuffer, so small it would fit in the palm of the hand.

But that isn't all that is hanging there. The Monte Alegre river flows through Pedro Pão's backyard. He fishes in the evenings. These fish he opens, salts, and hangs over the fogão caipira in the smoke.

That's not all. When the last pig was butchered, the tenderloin was carefully sliced the long way and opened up to where it looks like a wide thin piece of meat. This is placed on a spit and propped up on the rabo of the stove to slowly cook over the coals.

The tomatoes and lettuce in the salad were also raised in the garden.

You ask, did Nenzinha prepare all this for dinner? Absolutely. Not necessarily because they had company, but because that is how the poor folks living out on the fazendas ate when we first came to Brazil.

How long did it take until the kettles were all lined up along the edge of the fogão caipira, ready for us to fill our plates? From the time the dog went after the frangos until we were filling our plates probably took somewhat less than an hour.

Notice: Not one can was opened, other, of course, than the one the pork was stored in. About the only thing bought in town was the salt and black pepper. Not a single electrical appliance was used. There was no table in the kitchen.

What about the sugar? Wasn't it bought in town? Nope. That is a story all of its

own. Geraldo Honório, Pedro Pão's boss, raised his own sugarcane and made his own sugar.

That is the fogão caipira. Together with the delicious food produced, there was the constant aroma of the meat curing above it. Unfortunately, my younger children don't know what I am talking about. While writing this article, I was talking with Faith about a rancho. Otávio, age 8, asked, "Daddy, what is a rancho?" He knows what McDonalds is. He thinks it is great to eat their junk food. But he doesn't know what a rancho is. Ranchos are a thing of the past.

I want my brother-in-law, Tim Burns, to build one and make sort of a restaurant out of it so that both people from here and from the States who come to Brazil to visit can experience what it is to eat a real McCoy meal. Bug him.

Another outstanding fogão caipira that existed when we first came to Brazil was that of dona Maria, Aristote's wife (the folks from whom Reno Hibner and Pete Loewen bought their fazendas). We as a family dropped in on them unexpectedly one day as they were about to eat. They invited us to have dinner with them. Dona Maria had prepared 13 different dishes, four of them meat fixed in different ways.

Know why I am lonesome for the good old days? ▲

Readers Ask

Why don't some move to another state, Mato Grosso, for example?

—Sam Coblenz

This is a very legitimate concern shared by the brethren here in Brazil. During the last four or five years, different groups have gone to different areas, including Mato Grosso, to check out the possibility of starting a new congregation. The fact that there isn't a new settlement certainly isn't due to lack of interest.

Nor is it due to lack of land.

What then is the problem? The problem is that a move in this country is a lot more complex than in a developed nation. Remember what I said in the last issue about Brazil never putting in an efficient rail system? That today is a big problem in a lot of areas. There are places where the land is fertile, the rainfall is good, and the price of land is right. The problem is that by the time you haul in fertilizer, lime, fuel, machinery, etc. and then haul the crop out, there is no profit.

There are tracts of land that are flat and fertile and not so far from a good market, but with an erratic weather pattern.

Then there are places so far out in the boonies that there is no sizeable town within a hundred kilometers. In this case, usually there is no paved road and surely no electricity.

It is exactly this kind of problems that the different ones have run into on their tours. Obviously we're talking of being able to sell one acre where we are and buy five to 10 in a new location for the same amount of money. For anyone willing to pay more

money, there is a lot of good land, close to market, and with ideal weather conditions, available all over.

To put all this in a nut shell, there just doesn't seem to have been an open door yet for a move. Sincerely, I believe it will come. Then something will open up.

Right now there is a nice tract of land available in Sorriso, Mato Grosso. I don't think the price is too far out. Also, out in the Northeast, near Acaraú where we have a mission post, they tell me land is selling for less than 10 US dollars an acre. People call it the "California of Brazil". The land is extremely sandy, but not too far from some large cities. There is actually some talk floating around about something developing in that area.

What would it take to make this a reality? It makes me think of a friend I have in town who considers himself to be a communist. I asked him one day what he thought of communism with it going farther down the drain every day. With a big laugh he told me, "We communists have come up with a plan that is bound to work. We only need three things: Money, money and money. To make the thing work in the Northeast I think would take money, money and money, as well as determination, determination and determination. But I sure wouldn't want to say it can't be done. ▲

Why We Moved To Brazil

By John & Alma Penner

It is just 22 years ago that we drove onto the fazenda that was to be our future home. It looked quite different than it does today.

We found two of our families living in temporary shelters, wondering how to begin to develop this new wild ranch country. Without a strong faith in God's leading and providence, we would have turned back.

Visitors coming here quite often ask, "Why did you come to Brazil?" I have given different reasons. The basic one is the vow I once made to God with all my heart: If thou wilt forgive my sins and give me peace, I will serve thee as long as I live.

How can anyone fail to walk through an open door of service, no matter what the cost, when a loving Savior bids us go? I cannot find words to describe the force that compelled us to leave home, loved ones, and congregation, to venture out into the unknown.

But here was a large continent where the true Church had never left it's witness. So we came with faith in the promises of God. We can now say that He never failed us. We were warned that Satan would be here too. We were aware of that from the beginning and to this day we are battling him. He doesn't like to see the light shine forth in this land. Different ones have left to find an easier road and more will likely leave. But we trust that many will also stay to continue the good work so that many more will be saved.

Death has claimed four Brazilian members. They all left with a lively hope of Heaven. In our unique setting of two cultures, we have had much to learn and have made many mistakes. But we have found that a Brazilian and an American can blend together and, by God's grace, have a happy home.

We are but unprofitable servants and have only done what is our duty. We need your prayers. ▲

Emma Burns' Diary

First Year Meals

Arrived at Brasília November 16, 1968 at 5:02 a.m. Ate in hotel and at Otis Hochstetlers. At Anápolis we ate in restaurants some, but big share of time went to supermarket or open market and bought things and ate together in hotel. Coffee real strong and sweet. Hazel Unruh didn't like it so had instant coffee.

Just a little explanation. Otis and Betty Hochstetlers are Old Mennonite missionaries who were living in Brasília at the time. Over the years, and especially in the beginning, their willingness to help when we got into jams was very much appreciated by the Colony.

Our first Thanksgiving dinner, November 28, at hotel: sandwiches, avocados, oranges and bananas.

At Anápolis and Rio Verde we would buy our bread at a bakery.

December 3.

To cook, we put a burner on a small propane bottle. We cooked this way for five months. We also used propane for lights.

We bought 10 big avocados for American 27¢ on December 4. Dicks [Toews], Homers [Unruh] and we always ate together on Sundays.

January 27.

Baked cake on top of stove in skillet with iron lid.

Moved to fazenda the first of June of 69. Used rocks for our stove. One night they exploded and flew way up in the air. One of Dick Toews' boys was cut by a flying piece of rock.

Certain rocks here in Brazil explode when heated. We had a similar experience when rocks used in the bottom of our fireplace exploded. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured in these potentially dangerous situations.

Made bed of coals and scraped them aside and set my iron skillet with the cornbread batter inside. Then put coals all around and on top. In about 25 minutes the cornbread was baked and we had delicious golden cornbread and gravy for breakfast. Baked cakes this way too. We had an iron kettle that we hung over the fire to cook our meals.

In the crackerbox we had a stove Denton made out of a barrel, upright with a door in the side. So we did some cooking on it when it was cold enough for a fire. We also baked our pancakes on top of the barrel stove.

The crackerbox that Mom talks about is a little temporary house made out of masonite.

August 13.

Baked the cornbread in the skillet inside the barrel stove.

Dried meat on wire in between poles and fire smoldering underneath.

Ate ostrich, porcupine, armadillo, blackbirds, snake, deer, wild ducks, fish.

June 10.

Started making a Brazilian stove outside with parts of termite mounds and plastered with mud.

December 3.

John Unruh built an oven on our stove outside.

Now and then had to be cooking out in the rain holding an umbrella over my head. Would be baking bread and a rain would come up and put out the fire. The bread would end up only half baked.

April 4, 1970.

Started laying blocks for fogão caipira in kitchen. ▲

History

Ships and Chips

At the beginning of the 15th century, the American continents were not yet on the map. When the Turks took Constantinople, severely hampering the spice trade with the Far East, it became apparent that a maritime route would have to be found to the Indies.

With Spain and Portugal, cousin nations, dominating the high seas, a squabble broke out as to who would get what. The Pope, Alexander VI, a Spaniard, was called upon to mediate the dispute. Through a papal bull, he established the linha de tordesilhas, an imaginary line 100 leagues to the west of Cabo Verde. Everything beyond this point would belong to Spain. This would, in effect, give the American continents to the Spanish. A real mediator, this pope.

The Portuguese refused to accept the Tratado de Tordesilhas, as the papal decree was called. Seeing that war was about to break out, the pope established a new line 370 leagues west of Cabo Verde.

Obviously, other nations considered the whole affair a joke. Who was the pope to divide up the planet Earth? Frenchmen and Englishmen began asking for Adam's will in which he bequeathed the earth to Spain and Portugal.

Both nations now were obsessed with the idea of finding a water route to India. Great ships (caravelas) were outfitted for this purpose. Before them lay the greater part of a planet to be explored and conquered.

Today, about 500 years later, ships have given way to chips, in which man explores the microscopic regions of ever smaller pieces of silicon. ▲

This and That

The Kramer accident victims have all been released from the hospital. Dave and Jeff are in the States along with part of the family. John is at work at home. Dan is around but slowly. The doctor in Goiânia is very pleased with his progress. Nelson, the hired man, will be down for a while because of his hip problem. He too is feeling much better. As mentioned in the last issue, the owner (not driver) of the truck that hit the Kramers is a Dutchman who came to Brazil the same year we did. Coincidentally no, fortunately he was a client of the same lawyer, Dr. Jerônimo Carmo de Moraes, that has done our legal work since we came to Brazil. Daniel and the truck driver decided to meet in Dr. Jerônimo's office to discuss the accident. Since both Daniel and the Dutchman were his clients, the lawyer remained totally neutral, thus actually assuming the position of a judge. Daniel was very open with the man, explaining that by law he was obligated to pay everything, but that he would not press charges. He simply requested that he pay all the hospital bills and Nelson's down time. Without hesitation the Dutchman agreed. After being a silent listener, the lawyer, deeply moved, remarked, "Today I have seen two men reach an agreement." Is this not non-resistance in action?

On July 11, we were privileged to see a partial eclipse of the sun around 80%. It occurred towards evening and was a most beautiful sight to see a small sliver of sun sink below the horizon.

Luiz & Maria Duarte and children returned from the mission in Acaraú on July 23.

They returned to their old residence on Walt Redger's place. As of now, they have no plans of returning to the Northeast. Hopefully the next issue of Brazil News can have an article by Luiz on some of the interesting aspects of that part of the country. Arlo & Priscilla Hibner plan to take over the work in Acaraú. However, due to a gap of approximately a month until they can go, Paul and Shirley Koepl flew out to keep the home fires burning.

Rio de Janeiro is sort of the sin capitol of Brazil. Possibly it is this fact that accounts for all the kidnappings. So far this year there have been 49, as opposed to 11 in São Paulo, and 19 over all the rest of Brazil. Ransoms must usually be paid in US dollars, frequently in the two million range.

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Petrobrás, the state owned petroleum company of Brazil, is specializing in deep sea drilling. Its latest feat was a well where the ocean floor was 752 meters below the surface a world record.

On July 23, Antônio Cabrera, President Collor's secretary of agriculture, Lafayette Coutinho, president of the Banco do Brasil, and Múcio Guimarães, state secretary of agriculture, were in Rio Verde to discuss 91/92 agricultural problems.

Brazilian diplomats had themselves a real little scrap with officials from the International Monetary Fund. It so happens that the chief of the delegation sent to Brazil to discuss its foreign debt was an Argentine. It also happens that historically these two countries don't hit it off very well. To make matters worse, Argentina has a better soccer team right now. Brazilians refused to negotiate with an Argentine and the International Monetary Fund had to assign a new mission chief.

The Pope is supposed to be in Goiânia on October 15.

Just a reminder: When calling to Brazil, slowly repeat the name and extension only (the last four numbers) of the party you want to talk to. Mine, for example, is: one zero four zero.