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SAO PAULO, BRASILIA, PORTO ALEGRE

FROM : Amembassy RIO DE JANEIRO

DATE: June 16, 1969

SUBJECT : Brazilian Labor Minister, Jarbas PASSARINHO

REF :

Introduction and Summary

The Brazilian monthly magazine Realidade published in its June 1969 issue a long and revealing article on Jarbas Gonçalves Passarinho, Minister of Labor and Social Security, based on an interview with him and his wife. Passarinho has been one of the principal spokesmen within the government for a rapid normalization of political processes (see Brasilia's 117 of March 13). He was quoted in the Realidade article as expressing his firm belief that President Costa e Silva is seeking to bring Brazil back to political normalcy, with all of the individual liberties re-established. "There is no one who doesn't know the adage," he claimed, "that the best of dictatorships is not worth the worst of democracies." Passarinho disclaimed speculation that he will be a candidate for President in 1970, stating that the only election in which he is a candidate then is for Governor of the state of Pará, a position which he previously held from 1964 to 1966. Following are interesting excerpts from the article, which supplement information previously reported in Belem's biographic report of September 24, 1966.

Early Life

Born January 11, 1920 in the town of Xapori, Acre, near the Colombian frontier, Passarinho contracted malaria for the first time at the age of three, and was brought by his mother to Belem for treatment. He spent his childhood there. In 1932 he participated in a takeover of the police headquarters in Belem by students, in support of the São Paulo revolutionary movement.

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They gave up after 24 hours, when their only machine gunner was shot and killed by the police. In high school Passarinho developed his skills as a debater and a leader, and steering a course between the extremes of student opinion, managed to get himself elected president of the student organization.

Military Schooling

With an excellent academic record in hand at the age of 17 and with money given to him by his brothers and sisters, he left for Rio to make something of himself. On arriving he applied to be admitted to the Realengo Military School, but failed the entrance exam. He managed, however, to be accepted by the Cadets Preparatory School in Porto Alegre, and during that year was selected to be the official orator and director of the school magazine. The following year (1939) he was admitted to the Realengo School in Rio. In his second year there he became official orator and in his third year president of the Military Academic Society.

Career

In 1943, with Brazil a participant in the Second World War, Passarinho as an aspirant officer joined a company which was training to be sent to Europe, but the War ended while he was still in Belem as a lieutenant of artillery.

In the meantime he had become engaged to a law student, Ruth Sodré de Castro, a grandniece of Lauro Sodré, Governor of Pará in the late 19th century. Her family was opposed to her marrying a military man, since she, their only child, would have to leave Belem whenever he was transferred away. Nevertheless, the marriage did take place eventually in Rio, where Passarinho had been transferred to instruct at the Military Academy of Agulhas Negras. Their first child, Jarbas Passarinho Junior, was born in 1948.

Passarinho was transferred to Belo Horizonte the next year to instruct at the Preparatory Center for Reserve Officers. While there he was promoted to captain. In 1950 he moved to Deodoro in the state of Rio de Janeiro to take an advanced officer course.

Memorable Events

During that assignment he experienced what he considers one of the greatest moments of his military life. General Estilac Leal, Minister of War, was a candidate for re-election as president of the Military Club. However, because of dissatisfaction with a leftist tendency manifested by the Club's magazine, an opposition movement to Estilac Leal began among some of the

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officers. Their candidate was General Alcides Etchegoyen. Captain Passarinho was chosen to speak against the Minister of War before the Club. His friends tried to dissuade him, but to no avail. His speech received tumultuous applause. In the following election Etchegoyen won by more than six thousand votes.

In 1951-52 Passarinho was again at the Academy of Agulas Negras as an artillery instructor. At the end of the 1952 school term, an unprecedented event occurred. In elections for the honorary term spokesman, there were three candidates -- Marshal Mascarenhas de Moraes and two active duty generals. But a last minute movement formed by the students succeeded in electing Passarinho to the honor. After being visited by the military hierarchy, however, who were upset by the grave miscarriage of protocol, he renounced the award.

Literary Achievements

From 1953 to 1955 Passarinho took a course at the School of Command and General Staff in Rio. While there he became successively chief editor and director of the Military Club's magazine. Returning to Belem to serve on the General Staff, he wrote in his spare time a novel of the Amazon, Terra Encharcada (Swampy Land), which he entered under a pseudonym in the major literary competition in Pará. He won first prize, as well as a seat in the Academy of Letters of Pará, and later became secretary and president of the Academy.

Service in Amazônia

In the years 1958-60 Major Passarinho was selected to be superintendent of Petrobras in Amazônia. He remembers those years as terrible ones. Unions took over Petrobras, paralyzing it with strike after strike. Enemies he had made during his administration of Petrobras made threats of murder and reprisal against his children. In an agitated union meeting, someone stabbed his brother. Passarinho considers his greatest act of courage then to have been the prevention of his friends from militarily smashing the union.

The Revolution

The conspiracy which resulted in the revolution of March 1964 meanwhile was underway, and Passarinho, forming groups of civilians, was one of its most articulate supporters in the North. After the revolution he returned to Petrobras as interventor to put things in order, but without rancor. He punished those who were the real culprits, but not the many others, who were simply victims of circumstance, such as the man who stabbed his brother, who became a good friend of the family.

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Governor of Para

As a result of the revolution, the Governor of Para was removed from office, and Passarinho was elected unanimously to the office by the Legislative Assembly. Everything was in disorder, and it took him six months to straighten it out. But then he initiated an administrative explosion which had never before been seen in Para.

During his 19 months as Governor, Passarinho likes to remember two episodes. One of them involved his promising and managing to have built in Belem in a period of 90 days a grammar school for four thousand pupils, despite expert disbelief that it could not be done. The other episode was accomplishing also in 90 days a 240 kilometer highway link through jungle between Marabá, until then isolated, and Belem. To get the construction machinery to the needed location he succeeded through diplomatic negotiation with the U.S. ambassador in obtaining the loan of two U.S. Hercules C-130 aircraft, one of which during the airlift was flown by amateur pilot Jarbas Passarinho himself.

With the termination of his gubernatorial mandate, he ran for the Federal Senate and received 83 per cent of the vote. In order to run for the Senate he had to resign his officer commission, which at that time was lieutenant colonel. When he had been in the Senate for only 30 days, he was called to join the cabinet of President Costa e Silva.

Minister of Labor

Since becoming Minister of Labor, Passarinho feels that his greatest test of courage was faced in Belo Horizonte, when 18 unions called a strike to protest the lack of wage readjustment in the metallurgical sector and the delayed payment of state and municipal workers of Minas Gerais. He went to Belo to address a gathering of the strikers. Using all of his speaking skill, he turned the hostile gathering into one which gave him great applause at the end, and from that moment the strike began to dissolve.

After the strike was put down, salaries were allowed to rise 10 per cent, and when industrialists protested this as inflation, he defended it vigorously, denouncing those who "think salaries should remain the same, but shut an eye, enjoying the rise in prices. And when one asks them how to put down a revolt, they, who suffer from dyspepsia from having eaten too much, respond that against a revolt of the people, the remedy is to use the Armed Forces."

Identity with the President

Passarinho is quoted as stating that he enjoys independence of action because of President Costa e Silva's unconditional support. In all he says

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he has written three letters of resignation during his period as Minister. The first was written when he had his first operation in July 1967 and had to spend a month in the hospital. The second, when demonstrations occurred in the streets, and some viewed his actions as encouraging them. The third letter was written after he had given a speech at a party honoring Brigadier General Faria Lima, who was stepping down as mayor of São Paulo. Some newspapers sought to involve Passarinho in a web of intrigue against the President, using several isolated phrases from his speech. Marshal Costa e Silva did not choose to open any of the three letters.

Personal Mannerisms

According to his wife, one can read her husband's face and see his thought processes. When everything is going well he wears appearance no. 1, a serious expression, not joking or talking much, but with the possibility of a smile always present. He gives his attention to everything and is always ready to start a good discussion, especially if his 17-year-old daughter, Julia Maria, calls the other four children (two boys and two girls) to provoke him.

Appearance no. 2 begins when he starts to stroke his right ear. It is the first signal that he is tense, preoccupied with some problem or thinking about some important decision. If the problem persists, appearance no. 2 remains, and in its final stage his left eyebrow rises and arches. He is preparing to assault the problem.

Appearance no. 3 is the plan of attack. His two eyebrows are now raised, taking space away from the wrinkles on his forehead, suspended and immobile. His right arm begins to move, his hand half-shut, taking the appearance of holding a lance. Normally his energy is contained, but now he unleashes it.

Passarinho has a stiff leg which causes pain whenever he has to move it. It results from a recent operation for meniscus, from which he is still weak and pale. Despite all this he remains a pleasant, spontaneous person, and in the opinion of at least one lady employee at the Ministry, he retains his good looks (um pão).

At 48 years of age Passarinho still has many years left to be of service to Brazil. His scholarly qualifications are considerable. On Marxism alone he has two complete shelves at his home in Brasília, believing that in order to combat communism, it is necessary to know it well. He is without any vicious habits -- he neither drinks nor smokes and is a man with only one woman, his wife.

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