

A Brazilian Mutirao for Schools B34

For weeks television and newspaper ads called for volunteers to turn out on July 1, a midwinter Sunday, for a massive Mutirao (work party) for the schools. Acknowledging the lack of plant maintenance in Espirito Santo's 500-plus public schools, the State Secretary of Education, Wilson Haese, had placed the ads. In interviews he had asserted that people are too inclined to think of the schools as the government's responsibility, not their own. As elsewhere in Brazil, Sunday usually is a day of sun, soccer, family birthday parties, and relaxation.

Here local taxes are not collected for education and there are no local school boards. The well-to-do send their children to private schools. Caught in a world-recognized economic vice, Brazilian states have been providing in some places less than \$140 per month to pay a teacher, a little for supplies, almost nothing for books and repairs.

Accompanying the Mutirao was an innovative fund-raising plan. Each school would sell "bonus" (lottery tickets). Prizes would include a car, television sets, and other appliances. These too were widely advertised.

About 10 a.m., we drive toward city center to the Carlos Xavier Paes Barreto school, grades K-8. In a new building inside a brick and iron fence are 27 classrooms for two thousand students. The school day is divided into three shifts. We are surprised to be greeted at curbside by Senhora Haese, the Secretary's wife. Several people are painting the fence. Wheelbarrows of dirt pass us on the walk. We go in.

Mrs. Haese tells us the sale of bonus has netted 800 million cruzeiros (\$550,000) statewide, with expenses only a quarter of that. The Department staff had been selling at downtown locations to cover costs of prizes and advertising, and to assist the poorest schools. Each school was urged to sell "bonus" and to use the income for Mutirao expenses. This school bought paint and snacks for the work party, among other things. A company had donated gravel. The State Traffic Department loaned trucks.

State Governor Gerson Camata and party had stopped here earlier this morning to open the Mutirao and plant a tree. The State's Traffic Department had adopted this school for the day and were busy painting basketball backboards, fixing swings, planting flowers, and the like. All 69 teachers and custodians were said to be here this Sunday, as were many other people, young and old. Perhaps 10% of this school's families were taking part in the Mutirao, and other community members also. One of the latter, the State Police Chief, was chopping brush. Said Principal Aleida: "Everybody is making their contribution." Probably more parents will come after lunch. Hoses and scrubbers were making rivers flow from classroom and bathroom doors.

We drive a short distance to a county-operated elementary school. A child says, "The teacher told us to come today." But the gates are locked.

We move on to Praia do Canto, a beachside neighborhood of high rise apartments whose residents mostly send children to private schools, leaving the handsome school here to the children of servants and the nearby favella (slum housing on granite outcroppings too steep for ordinary buildings and streets). It is Escola Irma Maria Horta, grades 1-8 by day, remedial classes for adults at night.

Here about 40 of 68 teachers have arrived. At least ten are boycotting the Mutirao, with encouragement from the Teachers' Association, saying they will participate in weekend work parties organized by the school, but not those organized by the state. It is part of a more general protest of lack of government support for education.

At sixty cents each, the lottery tickets here were said to have brought in around \$400. According to the principal, the proceeds came mostly from her going to businesses and shops asking for donations. Many gave money, tools, materials. Thanks to ordinary raffles and fund-raising parties this school already has ample supplies. Students are asked for a six-cent to \$3.00 per month pledge; "No one is to feel obligated." The industrial arts class takes care of most repairs. The principal would just add the \$400 to the "school box," the petty cash fund.

Construction workers are plastering, volunteers are chipping paint, children are hoeing what is to be a vegetable garden. Among the ample gathering of adults, are some who send their children to private schools.

On to a much poorer neighborhood, to another state school. It is another elementary school, Adao Benezath. A sign in neat script on the gate says, "We are participating in the Mutirao," but at 11:30 a.m. no one is here. We look at the courtyard. Paint is needed everywhere. Around a magnificent tree in the cobblestone courtyard are a dozen or so classrooms, all badly needing paint. Classroom floors are wet. A note on the blackboard says, "This room was cleaned by (ten names)." The doorknob needs replacing, a window is without glass, and many lights are broken.

[Two weeks later we returned to interview school director Onorita Verginia Bonella Ribeiro. She indicated she had met with parents (131 attending) and announced that no major Mutirao work should be done there because building renovation and additions were to commence within the month. She did not sell "bonus" because only weeks before, school funds had grown by \$400, thanks to a folk festival, with food and work donated by parents. A resident of the neighborhood since childhood, Ribeiro said she had no trouble getting community support for the school. Supplies appeared plentiful. Her problems, she said, were transience and early-dropout of the poorest children, and vandalism.]

We arrive a mile or so still further toward the outskirts in Goiabeiras. Orange dirt streets are deeply puddled, reminding us that Secretary Haese must have been anxious during yesterday's steady drizzle. Skies are gray today, but dry. The beach is little competition.

The Juscelino Kubitschek Oliveira school is gray too, an old concrete building badly needing paint, with corrugated roof. The rooms are stark. We have overtaken the Governor's entourage. Speeches are done but handshaking continues as a television camera whirs on. The Governor wears a plain T-shirt. A few in his party have "Mutirao Urgente" T-shirts. Five hundred people

stand about chatting. Most are barefoot or wear thongs.

In the open but covered "cafeteria" area, cans of cold beer are handed out, and now, a dishpan *of* steamed crabs. With shrieks, the kids swoop in. No work seems to have started yet.

There is heavy construction equipment nearby. The County Secretary of Education tells us a new school here will have space for two thousand youngsters. Inside a classroom of the old building we see 35 flat tabletop desks with chairs, concrete floors, a rough cracked blackboard, a rattan bulletin board, two or three teacher-made posters, a small table for the teacher's desk. Nothing else. The room's winter chill would probably be a welcome coolness in early fall.

We three itinerant researchers decide to drive on into the next county, Serra. We go several miles north in the direction of Salvador, recalling the newspaper story saying the Secretary of Education's group would head south. We stop at a highway town, Laranjeira. No sign of people or work at its school, a building greatly needing attention. A neighbor woman tells us there is no *Mutirao* because the principal didn't want it.

On to Nova Carapiria. The school is new, brick and concrete, and attractive. A Lutheran minister is preaching to a small group in a classroom. No others are in the building. Three loads *of* dirt have recently been dropped in the schoolyard. A man at the bar across the street says no *Mutirao* was announced for that school.

Past a mountain called Mestre Alaro we find the county seat. Just beyond a hundred-year-old church is Jerome Loyola school, built in 1937. It is a fine old stucco building, two-story around a sand courtyard with two lovely old trees. From 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. this building is a primary school, grades 1-4 (as are 98% of Espirito Santo schools). From 3:00 to 10:00 p.m. they hold classes for grades 5-12. For each period there is a separate principal, a separate faculty.

The elementary principal, Lea Ramos Pimentel, expresses great disappointment. They have 930 students, but only two parents showed up. She says she talked to many parents who said they would come. With business-donated beef and rice she has a huge meal prepared, but fewer than fifty to eat it. Six of 26 teachers are here, plus a number of municipal workers. We ask a teacher why the parents have not come. She doesn't know.

The workers are less grave. They are smiling, women scrubbing tile walkways and grillwork, men patching plaster, fixing windows and walls'. Some had started the previous day. We step into a classroom. It has 30 desks of laminated wood, similar chairs, in usable shape. The blackboard is old, its surface poor. The floors are wood, any finishing long worn away. The walls are painted gray to seven feet, whitewashed above, not recently. The electric lights work. The Venetian blind covers one-quarter of the window space and shows no vital signs. The principal says, "We have the materials to fix it all up, but no one to do the work." The materials had been donated by area businesses. In spite of her disappointment, she was planning to continue the *Mutirao* the following Saturday.

We drive south and east to Manguinhos, a beachside village, a mix of poor and middle class homes. We eat at a well-known fish restaurant, then find the one-room school, one of over 4400 one-room schools in Espirito Santo. The work party has retired. The front of the building has a new coat of whitewash. Graffiti on remaining walls testify to need. A tree trunk and roadside rocks are newly whitewashed as well. Almost all windows remain without glass. The floors are freshly scrubbed and a pitcher of fresh-cut flowers sits on the teacher's desk.

Back in Vitoria again we stop at one last school, Arnulfo-Mattos, a secondary school. It is one of the schools used for teacher training. Ten men are playing soccer in the yard while several look on. A small group of people is to gather at the school shortly. All lights of the building are on, apparently because room switches have been vandalized. We ask a student, here for the meeting, about the Mutirao. She says, "We don't need the school fixed up. What we need is supplies." She did not know if "bonus" had been sold here. The soccer game continues energetically.