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FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

- [Article: ``Aeronautics in Good Hands'' by Helio Contreiras]
- [Text] In the crusade to cut government spending, President Collor de Mello has found in his aeronautics minister an immediate ally: Brigadier General Socrates Monteiro, a fighter pilot who loves to tell jokes on the Portuguese (his parents are Portuguese immigrants), began to auction off the cars assigned to his ministry, starting with the very ones used by his own office. Completely devoted to the professionalization of the Air Force, this 59-year old Rio native is admired by his branch of service for his finely-honed strategic vision and skill in flying the sophisticated Mirage fighter planes. A homebody of modest habits, he swapped his official mansion on Peninsula dos Ministros for a simple middle-class apartment, without amenities or swimming pool.
- Like Churchill who retained his sense of humor even when London was being bombed almost daily by the Nazis during World War II, Minister of Aeronautics Gen. Socrates da Costa Monteiro, 59, is unfailingly relaxed. He is a great storyteller, specializing in jokes on the Portuguese (his parents are Portuguese immigrants) rendered with a heavy continental accent. Once, when he headed the Integrated Center for Air Defense, a reported asked him if the radar would be able to identify a flying saucer. He answered ``yes,'' and added that he would invite the press to his first interview with the extraterrestrials.
- The general is also an amateur guitarist. But he is better at flying an airplane, since he does not always obey the commands of the keys and really attacks the musical notes. But when he picks up the guitar, his wife is his favorite vocal accompanist. She displays her talent in gatherings with friends in Brasilia, but actually these occasions are rare, limited mainly to weekends when he has no

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professional commitments, since it is usually very late when he leaves the Ministry of Aeronautics.

5. Certainly his irreverence and good humor has been part of him since the days when he lived at Icarai beach, in the Rio de Janeiro city of Niteroi. Even then he was able, in family gatherings, to perfectly imitate the Portuguese accent. Socrates Monteiro and his wife Marilia, an attorney, regularly invites friends over, either in Brasilia or in Rio. The entire family does not get together very often since his daughter Beatriz is taking an advanced course at Oxford. He also has a son Claudio, an engineer, and three grandchildren: Eduardo, 9; Livia, 6; and Gabriela, 5.

6. Flying is no longer just for birds. Fighter pilot Socrates Monteiro can fly a supersonic Mirage and remain totally concentrated on what he is doing. As soon as the plane starts to move, all his attention is directed toward the technology. After all, he is a military man who clearly has chosen to lead by example. For that very reason, in a veritable dogfight against excessive privilege, the cars selected for the first auction of official aeronautics ministry vehicles were the ones used by the minister's own office. Cutting expenses to the bone, without compromising effectiveness; this was the route he chose in order to concentrate the resources in priority areas.

7. Considered to be very articulate and a military officer of strategic vision, the minister of aeronautics confesses that he is devoted to the cause of professionalism in the Brazilian Air Force and aware that a military institution takes no sides in the political scene "but is the armed fist devoted to preserving the sovereignty of the Brazilian air space and our national security." He considers unfair and inappropriate any suggestion that the military are not themselves making any sacrifices in order to reduce public spending. He has already moved out of the official residence on Peninsula dos Ministros and into a middle-class apartment at Superquadra Sul 110 with no amenities, nothing ostentatious, and no swimming pool. And we would not advise anyone who wants to discuss party politics, the concerns of special interest groups, corporativism, etc. to seek out Brig. Gen. Monteiro. He makes it clear that he believes in the politicians who were elected on the basis of a commitment to contribute to perfecting democracy, and he believes in the civilian institutions and in the strengthening of those institutions. Furthermore, as regards the major national issues, he says he will never sit on the fence when, as a private citizen, he has to take a stand.

8. 'Aerospace Program a Priority'

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9. He says he would put the interests of Brazil over those of the Air Force if forced to choose. But he adds a proviso by saying: "Most of the time, obviously, the two coincide." And he observes: "In our field there is no room for technological hiatuses (an Air Force cannot lag behind, it must keep abreast of progress through research). We are committed to working together to achieve the efficiency that is essential to aviation. You must always remember that aviation demands that man aim for perfection, humility, and team spirit. All of us in aviation are responsible for each other's lives, and we are paid by the citizenry, to whom we must always be accountable, if we are to be effective."

10. Socrates Monteiro also makes it clear that he has the interests of every segment of the aeronautics ministry at heart every day: the Air Force, civil aviation, the infrastructure, science and technology, manpower training. The program to nationalize aviation equipment, a priority goal of the aeronautics ministry under previous administrations, will certainly be continued, the minister insists. The space program, supported by the Aerospace Technical Center (CTA) created in the 1950s by Marshall Casemiro Montenegro Filho, is a priority because of the advances it brings not only to its own sector but to several areas of civil aviation. "Even with our economic and financial problems, we must always be of service to the citizen, the taxpayer."

11. And what will relations be like between Aeronautics and the congressional leadership? Now we hear the minister speaking: "The door to my office is always open to the legislative branch; after all, we operate on the basis of the Constitution and laws of Brazil. We do not even think of skirting the letter of the law. Obedience to the law is fundamental for any government agency and is the foundation of the democratic regime. In administering this portfolio we also take as our points of reference sovereignty, the common good and, of course, professional character and dedication. Faced with the budgetary restrictions, we will always opt for the feasible and for efficiency when we have to choose between the ideal and the established limit."

12. The minister himself had a few more comments on his leadership strategy: "We are always mindful that this is the time to spend on essentials, without excesses, for the sake of the economic recovery effort and the resumption of development. We are committed to ensuring a well-trained Air Force that identifies with the citizen, his values and his cultural and personal heritage. We cannot disassociate ourselves from the daily life of the people, whether they live in the cities or in the most remote point of Brazilian territory."

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13. Socrates Monteiro states that "in the political realm, the FAB [Brazilian Air Force] intends to use its influence whenever it can make a contribution to strengthening the institutions and, in the realm of aviation, guaranteeing maximum security, both in the Air Force itself and in civil aviation. The two are integrated in their aim to furnish a high standard of economy and operational ability, while giving due credit to the aviator and showing respect for the air space and the passenger."

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