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Brazil: Questions Raised About U.S. Ambassador-designate, Richard Melton

by John Neagle

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On May 31, Brazilian congressional aide Ricardo Zaratini delivered a letter to the Foreign Ministry in Brasilia stating that Richard Melton, appointed by President Bush to serve as US ambassador to Brazil, had interrogated him in 1968 when Brazil was under military rule. Zaratini, a 53-year-old engineer and member of the Brazilian Communist Party (PC), serves as an aide to Deputy Moema Sao Thiago of Ceara state. Zaratini told AFP that he recognized both the name and photograph of Melton "with absolute certainty" as the man who questioned him when he was jailed in December 1968 in the city of Recife. Melton served as vice consul at the US consulate in Recife from 1967 to 1969. Zaratini said he was clandestinely organizing rural residents for a dissident group linked to the Communist Party at the time of his arrest on Dec. 10, 1968. Zaratini said that, after his arrest, he was tortured by then police commissioner Moacir Soares and subsequently interrogated by Melton and another US national. Zaratini said, "The interrogation was quick. They had their sleeves rolled up and they did not touch me. They told me: 'You are against the United States.' I said, 'No, and even less against the American people. I am opposed to imperialist monopolies protected by the US government.'" In his letter to the Ministry, Zaratini asked for a meeting with Foreign Minister Roberto de Abreu Sodre, who currently is in the US for medical treatment. Ministry spokespersons declined to comment on whether they would accept Melton as the new US ambassador, but added that the ministry had never refused to accept an ambassador designated by another country. Melton served as ambassador to Nicaragua in 1988, until the government in Managua expelled him for allegedly interfering in Nicaragua's internal affairs. Melton was posted to the Dominican Republic in 1965, when US troops invaded that country to help put down a leftist rebellion. Melton also served as US ambassador to Portugal from 1974 to 1979. (Basic data from AFP, 05/31/89)

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