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arguing!

Once jailed as radical, theorist seeks rebirth of Sao Paulo schools

By JAMES BROOKE
New York Times News Service

SAO PAULO, Brazil — Twenty-five years ago, Paulo Freire's world as a radical educator crashed.

Caught on the losing side of a conservative coup, the 43-year-old Brazilian professor was jailed as a subversive, then exiled for 15 years. During two decades of military rule, his world-renowned education theories were banned in Brazil.

After a quarter-century, Freire's beard has turned white. But at 68, he speaks animatedly of his new job: education secretary for Sao Paulo, the largest school system in Brazil.

"We want to create schools where questioning is not a sin," Freire said of his plans for Sao Paulo's system, which includes 654 schools and 550,000 students.

"It's no sin to make a critical study of Brazil's reality," he said. "A small percentage own land. Most people don't."

The turn of the wheel that brought Freire to the top of the schools in Sao Paulo is a part of a large upswing of the left in Latin America's most populous nation.

Last November, candidates of Freire's party, the socialist Workers Party, were elected mayors in three state capitals, including this megapolopolis of 12 million people.

In November, Brazilians are to elect a president in the first direct elections since 1960.

According to public-opinion polls, the top two favorites are leftists — Luis Inacio da Silva, a deputy of the Workers' Party, and Leonel Brizola, a former governor of Rio de Janeiro who was also exiled in 1964.

During Freire's exile, his theories became better known around the world than at home.

He lectured at Harvard and in Havana. He set up literacy programs in Chile during the presidency of Salvador Allende, in the new nations of Portuguese-speaking Africa, and in Nicaragua after the Sandinista revolution.

'We want to create schools where questioning is not a sin.'

Paulo Freire, professor

In his travels, he refined education techniques first devised in the late 1950s in literacy campaigns in Brazil's impoverished northeast.

Disseminated through his best-seller, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's techniques involve using everyday vocabulary and concepts to teach illiterates to read — and to question the status quo.

His emphasis on consciousness raising was adopted in Brazil by advocates of "liberation theology," a Christian philosophy that encourages poor people to seek social justice in addition to personal salvation.

"We want to impart a critical understanding to students, not just the transfer of an accepted body of knowledge," he said in his living room in Sao Paulo, which is decorated with a Bantu head from Angola, religious figurines from Mexico and a boat prow from Brazil's northeast.

Looking back on his first 100 days in office, the theorist said the most daunting problem he faced was the physical condition of Sao Paulo's public schools — broken desks, leaking roofs, exposed wires, blackboards without chalk and pools of water in classrooms.

"The military government mistreated public schools," he said. "We have repaired 4,000 desks. When second semester starts in July, Sao Paulo's 50 worst schools will be repaired."

Despite the Brazilian politicians' "mania for inaugurations and banquets" in maintenance, Freire vowed not to build, but to repair.

are adopting American rhetoric for approval." In this hemisphere, the democratic government is required by law to maintain institutional arrangements, he said. In the next 10 years, the continent will be a very different place: very different sectors of gross domestic product, he said.

Outbreaks of violence in America is a time in the history of the country that the tonic of democracy faces a new era.

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LA PAZ — The ruling Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR)

American nations will seek international backing this week for a \$380 million plan to help more than a million people who have fled their homes to escape conflict.

Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua have drawn up a plan of