

SPECIAL ISSUE

To mark the launching of Brazil's new
audio-visual production

BUILD ON SOLID GROUND

which describes the story behind rehousing
300,000 people in Rio de Janeiro

Brazil builds on solid ground

by Terence Blair

DAILY WE READ about tensions in the Middle East, or Southern Africa; about the money shrinking in our pockets; about millions who have not enough to eat or no decent place to live. Often one wonders: 'Can any plans to solve these things be made to work? Are we in the grip of uncontrollable economic and political forces, or can individuals do something about it?'

Apart from outright hunger, the thing which causes more suffering and frustration to most people all around the world is bad housing. In big cities in the West, as well as in poor developing countries, people live overcrowded, without privacy, perhaps without water, light, sanitation or even protection from the weather.

Those who have good houses are often indifferent to the problem or contemptuous of the 'slum-dwellers'. Those living in these conditions are often too apathetic or irresponsible, too uneducated or unorganized to take constructive action. Or sometimes bitterness drives them to action which alienates those whose help they most need. Governments, harried by pressure groups with greater leverage, find more urgent priorities.

From Brazil comes a heartening story of a few people whose wills were stirred to action by this problem, and who so shifted entrenched attitudes that it has been successfully tackled on a wide scale.

The story is told in a new audio-visual production *Build on Solid Ground*, described in this issue.

In 1960 about a quarter of the population of Rio de Janeiro, one of the world's most beautiful and luxurious cities, were living in slums called *favelas*, perched above some of the wealthiest areas, clinging to hillsides too steep for normal housing. There were said to be between 750,000 and 1,300,000 of these *favelados*. Some idea of their conditions of life can be gathered from the story *When I Saw the Running Water, I Cried For Joy*.

The *favelados* were regarded by the

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Edir Pereira in the kitchen of her new apartment. It is the first time in the 12 years she has lived in Rio that she has had running water in her home.

When I saw the running water, I cried for joy

The following is one incident from the script of *Build on Solid Ground*.

RIO DE JANEIRO! The name alone brought vivid dreams of work, a house, a better life. By cargo boat, truck, any means of transport, whole families streamed from all parts of Brazil to this fabulous city. On arrival the brutal truth. There was nowhere to live. Rents were too high. But the children must have a roof over their heads, a place to live. In desperation they built huts on any unoccupied land.

Little by little life organized itself in communities of shacks on swamp land or clinging to the side of steep slopes; - dirty alleys, no water, no electricity, no drains, no security.

Like many others Edir Pereira took

this road of hope to Rio. Luiz, her husband, left several months ahead of her to look for work. At her side were five children, one in arms.

Edir: My aunt lived in *favela* São João. She invited us to join her. It was the first time I had ever been in a *favela*. Everything was strange. My childhood had been quite happy. My father made a good living and my mother had a maid.

I was in despair at the thought of raising my children in such a place - but with no money, where else? In spite of this I wanted to leave. I nagged Luiz constantly to go. This created tension between us.

Our shack was high on a steep slope.

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RUNNING WATER *continued from page 1*

Luiz built an enclosure to keep the children from falling. I managed to get the children into good schools free of charge. To earn a little money I did the laundry for several families in town.

Water was my big headache. Every day I went down to the public tap and waited my turn to fill a huge oil tin, which I carried back on my head. The path was full of holes and stones; the hill was steep; the tin heavy—I often fell and had to start all over again. The children tried to help by carrying water in jam jars. This chore has left me with constant pains in my back.

Eviction threat

Rainy days were a joy. I put the cans under the edge of the roof to catch the water. I was so ashamed of being a *favelada* that I had little contact with the neighbours, but Luiz got more and more used to this environment and became very popular. He loved to *samba* and went to all the dances but he refused to take me. I became very bitter and longed more than ever to get away. But I had to put up with life in the *favela* for twelve long years.

Luiz: Tension reigned in our *favela*. The owner of the hill on which we had built our shacks threatened to have us evicted. It was his land all right—but where could we go?

We found out the date on which he planned to expel us. We knew we must do something at all costs. We organized groups to guard the entrances to the *favela*. In spite of our efforts men in the pay of the landowner destroyed 37 shacks. We and many others took into our huts the families who were put out. Little by little we rebuilt their huts. There was always a spirit of unity and solidarity among us.

Soon after this I met a man of Moral Re-Armament from another *favela*. Through him I learned to turn to God. I began to take time quietly at the beginning of each day to ask Him to guide me. One day, when we were in danger of finally being expelled, I took time during my lunch break to listen to the inner voice. I had the clear thought to phone the Minister of the Interior. Crazy as it seemed, I obeyed. To my utter amazement I got straight through to him. I explained our situation and he told me to come and see him. This talk eventually resulted in the Ministry building new apartments a few hundred yards from our *favela* into which all 560 families were moved.

Edir: I had never been to visit our new apartment. I did not want to get my hopes up too soon for fear my dream would never come true. When I saw the kitchen, bathroom and the running water, I cried for joy. A new life had begun even more so because Luiz had



A typical scene in a Rio de Janeiro *favela* or shanty-town. Peter Howard, speaking in 1965 to a thousand residents in a *favela*, said: 'Poverty is hell! But sometimes in the midst of poverty is born a spirit of community which is a bit of heaven on earth. The true spirit of solidarity which exists in some of these *favelas* is something the whole world needs.'

photos: Terence Blair

changed so much. He no longer drank—and he even invited me to go out with him. Bit by bit I too began to believe in God.

Later I tried having a quiet time and found myself thinking a great deal about my mother. The last time my mother came to visit us in Rio ten years before, we had had a terrible fight. She was always telling me to leave the *favela*. She kept talking about the nice homes and pretty clothes my sisters had. I was terribly jealous of them because I had nothing, and I got furious with my mother. After one of our quarrels she said she was leaving and would never come back. I said in that case I would never see her again. We had had no contact since.

I realized that day that I owed much to my mother. I must say sorry to her. It was not easy to swallow my pride, but I finally wrote to her, though I was sure she would never answer. To my surprise I got a reply almost by return of post, which spoke of many of the things she felt most deeply. She wanted to see me.

The children were delighted and my son gave Luiz and me our fares to visit her—three days and two nights by bus. What a joy to see her! I am so grateful to God for this experience, because my mother died six months after our reconciliation.

Now that we have the basic material things we need, I do not feel we should go on trying to get more and more for ourselves. What I really want to do is to learn to share more with others.

It is not easy to do what is right. It's a long hard fight, but when I feel I am getting off the track, I go to my room and ask God to help me. It brings a great inner peace. I have learned that those who have suffered much can do much to humanise society.

In poverty I found true riches

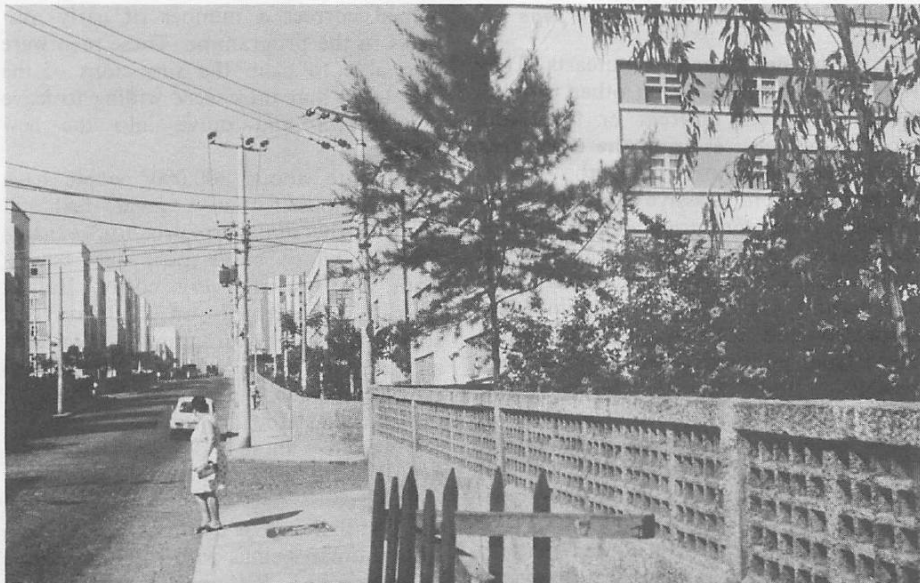
by Geneviève Lejeune —
script writer of
Build on Solid Ground

THERE IS A SAYING that those who have once been to Brazil feel an irresistible call to return. One leaves one's heart behind. I spent three teen-age years there. During that time my mother worked, with her characteristic devotion, to help some of the families in a São Paulo *favela*. Result: two little orphans joined our family and the number of my brothers and sisters suddenly rose from seven to nine!

Last year I went back to Brazil to work on the production of *Build on Solid Ground*, an audio-visual about the *favelas*. I felt it was a chance to give something of myself to a people whom, through Luiz and Ghislaine, we have



Geneviève Lejeune (standing) and Danielle Maillefer react to a tragic incident in which a woman from a *favela* is killed by a train.



Blocks of apartments built for the *favelados* by the government-financed Company for Popular Housing. In the past 10 years 300,000 people have been rehoused, mostly in blocks like these. The residents buy their flats over 20 years with monthly payments which should never exceed one quarter of the family income.

...ned to love as our own kin, without distinction of colour.

We had been looking forward so much to meeting the people whose stories we were to tell. Edir Pereira and her friends from Lins housing estate arranged an open air reception for my photographic colleague Danielle Maillefer and myself one hot winter night. The table was so long it practically filled the little courtyard. From their apartments they had brought chairs, bouquets of plastic flowers, little sandwiches and biscuits. Awed children in one corner watched their mothers, decked out in their best dresses, give us a welcome. One could not but be moved by such generosity, such spontaneous warmth of heart.

One of the moments I remember with special joy was our first visit to Euclides and Horondina da Silva in their simple home in Favela Parada de Lucas. Ex-president of the Residents' Association and former 'boss' of the place, Euclides vividly described one of the old-time elections. 'The voting ended so late we had to wait till next day to count the votes' he told us. 'But where could we put the ballot boxes? Nobody trusted

anybody else. We ended by putting them in the middle of the street and all sitting round them the whole night to keep an eye on them.' 'Later on,' he said with a twinkle, 'when I changed my attitude towards others, we began to trust each other more.'

Spider was hate

Mrs da Silva spoke of her visit to the MRA centre in Caux, Switzerland. 'One night I dreamed about the four banners over the platform in the big hall with the four absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love written on them. One of them had an enormous spider on it. I woke up. It suddenly hit me that the spider was my hatred for a man who had wronged Euclides. By the grace of God I got free from that hatred. This helped me to say sorry to my father for something I had done wrong long before. If millions of others would deal with their spiders we could soon have a better world.'

There was such a wealth of material – enough for a TV serial. It needed much quiet meditation – and a sense of humour – to reduce it to a 30-minute script.

Working with the production team of *Build on Solid Ground* – writing, going on photographic expeditions, working out the knotty points, has been a challenge and deeply moving experience for me. Challenging, because I have had to learn to keep my ego quiet in order better to find the objective and go all out towards it: moving, because I have seen men and women with so few advantages sincerely trying to direct their lives according to God's will, and finding in the process true riches. Once again I have learned something from the people of the *favelas*.



...create, for the audio-visual *Build on Solid Ground*, an while carrying water from the only tap in the area.

A production anyone can use

THE AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTION *Build on Solid Ground* tells the true story of tens of thousands who took the 'road of hope' from the poverty-stricken interior and North-East of Brazil to Rio de Janeiro in search of work. Finding nowhere to live, they built vast slums of huts known as *favelas*, mostly clinging to near-vertical hillsides or in swamps where no one else wanted to build.

Build on Solid Ground also tells the story of a few, some themselves living in *favelas*, others from 'the asphalt' (the city where streets are paved), who have taken responsibility for creating a new moral climate and better living conditions for all the *favelados*.

The purpose of the show is to encourage people of all classes in all parts of the world to join the *da Silvas*, the *Pereiras* and their friends in the great adventure of building a new society.

Build on Solid Ground tells this story in 30 minutes with the aid of 140 vivid colour slides and a cassette or tape of story and music. Anyone with a slide projector and tape recorder can use it in his living room or in a hall for 100 people. It makes an excellent sequel to the film *Men of Brazil* which shows how Rio dockers ended gangsterism and corruption in their port.

The show is an accurate factual account told by the people themselves. The music is by Remo Usai, who has composed the music for over 70 Brazilian films, including *Men of Brazil*. The script was written by Geneviève Lejeune and translated into English by Demie Blair and Ann Corcoran. Production and photography are by Danielle Maillefer and Terry Blair with the aid of Luis Puig, Bjorn Ole Austad and many others.

Build on Solid Ground will be available at the end of July in English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish. For those who send payment with their order before 31 July there will be a special discount price of 250 Swiss francs (\$100 or £45). After that the price will be 300 Swiss francs or its equivalent in other currencies (at present \$120 or £54). An extra cassette in another language costs 45 Swiss francs (\$18 or £8).

Orders may be sent to T Blair (Audio-visuals), 12 Palace Street, London SW1E 5JF or Réarmement moral, Département diaporama, Case Postale 3, 1211 Genève, Switzerland.

Minister of Education backs handbook

Extract from the 'Official Journal' of the Brazilian Government, 20 Nov 1974

'I ENDORSE the Statement (below) of of the National Commission for Moral and Civic Education in commending the moral and civic value of the one volume work *The Black and White Book** by Sydney Cook and Garth Lean, translated by Professor Luciano Lopes, of the Souza Marques Foundation for Technical Education.'

NEY BRAGA,
Minister of Education.

Statement of the National Commission

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, *The Black and White Book* is a small volume whose ideas are of very high content. Reading it arouses the desire to adopt sound values and to reject false values.

It contains some deeply moving passages. It deals with the principal aim of the educational process – the TRAINING OF CHARACTER, to bring to fruition the above-mentioned objectives in the field of values.

To start with, the title is clear-cut. It indicates GOOD AND EVIL, RIGHT AND WRONG. We do not have here any half-measures, compromises, evasions, any twilight shades or points passed over in silence.

Above all, the facts which it sets out, the lines of conduct which it puts forward, the love of the COMMON GOOD which it advocates, are given validity by being constantly and explicitly referred to the source of all values – God.

The philosophical aspects of the book are in complete accord with the theistic, non-denominational lines laid down in Decree-Law No. 869, of 12.9.69, which defines the basic teaching philosophy of Brazilian education.

For this reason its wide circulation, generally and in the universities, will help to implant in the whole educational system, on clearly defined spiritual, democratic and constitutional bases, the moral and civic educational doctrines prescribed by the above-mentioned law.

*English copies can be obtained from MRA Books, 54 Lyford Road, London SW18 3JJ. Price 20p plus postage.

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rest of the population as outcasts. They were squatting illegally on other people's land. They paid no rent or taxes and received no services from the city. Even the police only dared enter the *favelas* if they came in massive strength. Politicians often promised these people water, electricity or rehousing, to get their votes, but once elections were over did nothing for them. So the *favelados* suspected and resisted anything which came from political quarters. They were resentful and without hope. Some generous private efforts to rehouse them failed because, as one *favela* leader said, 'They gave too much free and did not succeed in arousing a spirit of responsibility in the people.'

In 1960 the city of Rio was made a separate State. The new State government wanted to do something for this unorganized, poverty-stricken mass of people, but were baffled how to communicate with them.

In 1962, as shown in *Build on Solid Ground*, Air Marshal Muniz, who was head of a steel company, and his wife refound their faith in God at a Moral Re-Armament assembly. They returned to their church after 40 years. At the assembly they also met a group of Rio dockers who had ended gang warfare on the waterfront and transformed the spirit of the port. They had put their experiences into a film, *Men of Brazil*. The Munizes and the dockers together decided to tackle the great social problem of their city.

The Munizes invited to their home – an almost unheard of thing – some leaders of a local *favela* to meet the dockers and see their film. The outcome of the evening was that these men and some of the dockers went to *favela* after *favela* and showed the film *Men of Brazil*. This helped them to meet and make friends with the natural leaders. They gave them hope that, if they would take responsibility in an honest and unselfish way, they could change their situation as the portworkers had changed theirs. As the result of this campaign 110 *favelas* formed associations to bring the needs of the residents to the attention of the authorities.

These associations mobilized the people to install for themselves water and electricity systems, concrete paths and steps up the hillsides, using materials supplied by the government. Later the government launched a programme to re-house the *favelados* in new houses and apartments, which the people decorated themselves and bought on long-term credit. The housing authority worked with a committee of presidents of *favela* associations, whose advice

helped correct a number of early mistakes in the programme. These men were also able to calm the suspicions of the people so that they were willing to leave the *favelas* and move into the new estates.

To date about 300,000 people have been re-housed, but a great deal still needs to be done, to 'urbanise' existing *favelas* and to build more new estates. Both are proving very costly. But at least the problem is on the way to a solution, and the programme pioneered in Rio has been taken up by Federal Government on a national scale through the National Housing Bank.

Through these developments the people who formerly lived in *favelas* have become part of society, and even those still living in them have been seen to be human beings with the same rights as anyone else. Perhaps even more significant are the changes of attitude and growth of character of the *favelados* whose stories are told in *Build on Solid Ground*. Their leadership has created a community spirit and an experience of practical democracy through the *favela* associations for large numbers of people who had not before experienced such things.

Passion for education

In the country as a whole there is enthusiasm among ordinary people to take responsibility for the development of the country. This enthusiasm shows itself in a passion for education. Fifteen years ago 55 per cent of the population were illiterate. Thousands of educated young people enlisted in a crash programme to teach literacy, hygiene and home-making. The aim is that by 1980 everyone will be able to read and write.

Every child has the right to free primary education, and grown-ups are eager to learn more. A portworker proudly shows the certificate of primary education he won in his fifties, studied after work. A business executive is taking a Masters Degree in economics at evening school. A clerk in the gasworks catches a 6 am bus to work, returns home at 10 pm or later after a university course.

After 18 months in Brazil I have been profoundly impressed with the patriotism and energy of the Brazilian people and the way ordinary people take responsibility to do what needs to be done. Perhaps these characteristics have something to do with the fact that this nation of 100 million people, in a land one-and-a-half times as big as Europe, has in recent years greatly reduced the rate of inflation while maintaining one of the highest growth rates in the world – around ten per cent per annum.