

Brazilian Mayor Tries to Smother Critical Newspaper

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Brazilian weekly newspaper *Jornal Atual*, which is based in the inland town of Itaguaí, in southeastern Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro, has suffered a significant reduction in its distribution since November 6, after the local mayor showed his dissatisfaction with the publication.

According to the newspaper's owner, Marcelo Godinho, approximately 15 street newsstand vendors have refused to put the newspaper out for sale to their customers. All of the newsstands in question belong to the same owner, known as Rodolfo, who is a close friend of the town's mayor, Carlos Busatto Junior, better known as Charlinho.

Jornal Atual had been publishing feature articles criticizing the recently re-elected mayor's administration.

Godinho claims that the mayor met with some of the town's councilors and told them that "nobody has any business saying anything negative about us." During the conversation, the mayor apparently quoted the newspaper several times and mentioned the name of the individual responsible for the articles.

According to Godinho, four of the councilors attending the meeting confirmed to him the issues that were the subject of the meeting.

In the same meeting, the mayor was quoted as saying that he was planning to talk with the newspapers' advertisers to have them halt their investments in *Jornal Atual*.

Godinho contacted one of the newsstand vendors, who told him, "As long as you keep talking negatively about the mayor, I am not allowed to circulate your newspaper. Orders from above."

The newsstands in question are concentrated in the towns of Itaguaí and Mangaratiba.

On November 7, the Brazilian Press Association (*Associação Brasileira de Imprensa, ABI*) sent a telegram to Mayor Busatto, asking him to stop the harassment and reprisals against *Jornal Atual* and Godinho. The text of the request was as follows:

"The Associação Brasileira de Imprensa appeals to Your Excellency to avoid harassment of and reprisals against the

Jornal Atual newspaper and its publisher, Marcelo Godinho, so as to make it clear that Your Excellency is not an enemy of press freedom. We trust that we will receive some reassuring words from you as regards this subject. Cordially yours, Maurício Azêdo, Chairman, Associação Brasileira de Imprensa."

When contacted by reporters, the press department at the mayor's office said that there have been no reprisals whatsoever, but that the Mayor has filed legal complaints regarding some of the articles published by the newspaper.