

## Brazil Finance Minister Held Hostage and Robbed of All His Money

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Brazil's Finance Minister, Guido Mantega, was taken hostage for several hours while visiting a friend's ranch in Ibiúna, interior of the southeastern state of São Paulo, during Carnival, which lasted from Friday night, February 16 to Wednesday, February 21.

Several politicians including former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso have a getaway house in Ibiúna.

Mantega, his wife and two children plus his hosts, businessman Vitor Santi and family, were not physically harmed, but the robbers took their time, almost four hours, including a break to go to ATM machines, before they were happy with their loot and left.

According to Mário Jordão Toledo Leme, São Paulo's general police chief, the invasion of the house where the minister was occurred around 11 pm on Tuesday, February 20, but the robbers only left around 3 am the next day.

The gunmen were never aware that there was a minister among the people they were terrorizing. Mantega's press office is not making any comment and the minister himself hasn't yet decided when he is going to testify.

Employees of Santi told reporters that there were about 20 people in the ranch, including the minister, the host and some friends. They were kept all the time under the barrel of guns. Since it was an informal visit the minister was without his usual bodyguards.

Unlike many affluent properties in the area, which are surrounded by a wall, the minister's host didn't have such protection around his property. The robbers, who entered by the back, were wearing hoods.

They started by subduing the employees who were already asleep in the caretaker's house. Then, with the workers under the gun, they entered the main residence. Since the hostages were constantly reminded to not look up nobody seems to know the number of gunmen who participated in the robbery.

According to a maid, the robbers didn't seem interested in electronics or even jewelry. All they wanted was money, she said. But they have taken more than money, including jewelry and two guns. They got away with about 20,000 reais (US\$ 9,600) in cash.

An employee of the Santa Bárbara ranch confided that Mantega maintained his cool during the whole ordeal, "He stayed calm the whole time and didn't say a word. It was our luck because if they knew it was the minister things might have been worse." As everybody else the minister gave all his money and valuables to the robbers.

The owner of the house had to leave with one of the gunmen to withdraw money from an ATM. They ended up going to São Paulo, 40 miles from the ranch. After the robbery Santi was then forced to give a ride to the gunmen to a nearby neighborhood.

The police arrested three suspects who were caught robbing other houses in the area and called the ranch's maid and caretaker to recognize them. They employees, however, said that they had no idea who the robbers were since the gunmen had their faces covered.