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APPENDIX

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN
BRAZIL

by

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Frequent use of "class" and
"revolutionary" impart a
socialist flavor which should
be avoided.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN
BRAZIL

1.

THE VIOLENT SOCIETY, MYTH & REALITY

The rapid escalation of political violence in Brazil in recent years contrasts sharply with that country's previous reputation for political and racial tolerance, certainly when compared with other Latin American nations. Persistent reports of political killings, growing numbers of political prisoners and use of systematic torture have bewildered many people, both at home and abroad, making them ask why, so suddenly and unequivocally, Brazil should have lost its tolerant reputation.

To some extent, the non-violence and tolerance were always a myth. Brazil has always been a violent society, most of its people struggling constantly against the violence of a climate which, as in 1970, often inflicts searing drought on wide areas. Many, too, experience daily what has been called a system of institutionalised violence in a society which only as late as 1888 formally ended slavery, and which still maintains the most gross inequalities of wealth, opportunity and access to such basic human requirements as medical care and adequate diet. And it is arguable that the tolerance, both racial and political, was largely due to the complacency of a white elite as yet not seriously challenged. Certainly, there has always been extreme violence in local politics - which suggests that relative tolerance at the national level merely reflects apathy about national issues in an essentially local or regional political system.

Such myth demolishing, however, is only part of the answer; for undoubtedly there has, over the past few years, been a marked increase in violence at every level - violence of a different quality from anything previously experienced in national politics. Nor is it merely a case of general increase in violence in contemporary politics - this has been going on over the past few years, the violence having been engendered particularly by the interaction between an increasingly frustrated opposition and the military regimes which have controlled the country since April 1964.

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2.

POLITICS TO 1964. THE ARMED FORCES AND
THE CRISIS OF PARTY POLITICS

(1) The Influence of the Armed Forces

In Brazil, as elsewhere, the political role of the armed forces can be understood only in relation to wider changes in society, and, more specifically, in terms of the persistent weakness of civilian politics up to 1964.

The armed forces have always been important in the modern period. They helped to end slavery in 1888, and, in November 1889, the army leaders, together with civilian politicians, deposed Emperor Pedro II. This brought Brazil, which had been a monarchy since it won independence from Portugal, into line with the other South American republics. For the first few years of the Republic, army officers virtually ran the country, till they were ousted by politicians of the coffee-rich state of Sao Paulo and their allies in the other major state of Minas Gerais. But, although these two states then dominated politics until 1930, the army remained important.

In 1930, their support was crucial to the success of a revolutionary movement led by Getulio Vargas - who subsequently governed Brazil, with only a short break, till his (tragic) death in 1954.

All through the Vargas years, the army either intervened decisively, as in suppressing the Communist-led revolt of 1935, or else strongly influenced events, as in supporting and under-writing the Estado Novo (New State) from 1937 to 1945, leaving their mark on government policies at every level. Finally, in 1945, it was again the army leaders who decided Vargas must go, introducing a twenty-year period of multi-party politics.

During the post-war period, the army was still shaping politics. In 1950, they allowed Vargas to return as elected president; but in 1955, they split over whether President Kubitschek should take office. Divisions widened when his successor, Janio Quadros, dramatically resigned in 1961. Finally, in April 1964, the military leadership, with civilian support, ousted President Goulart and took direct control, tightening their grip in subsequent years.

As¹³ so often the case in military politics, this long political influence depended less on the peculiar nature of the military establishment in Brazil than on the weakness of political institutions generally and especially on the absence of strong political parties working through Congress able to express and achieve the demands of Brazil's changing, expanding society. There were, as elsewhere, many reasons for this.

(2) Obstacles to Party Formation

One formidable obstacle to national integration has always been the sheer size of the country, exacerbated by primitive communications, severe regional disparities and great inequality in the distribution of wealth and resources. The fifth biggest country in the world (3.3 million square miles) and the eighth in population size (95 million), Brazil, both in land and people, comprises half of South America. With its twenty-two states, four territories, and the Federal District of Brasilia, it is also a country of enormous contrasts in the level of development. One state, Sao Paulo, accounts for 30% of the country's production, thus, by itself, outstripping most Latin American countries.

Brazil's problems, like its potential, are enormous. With a population growth rate of about 3.2% there were, in 1968, nearly as many Brazilians under twenty as there were Brazilians at all in 1950. Only about 0.8% of the relevant population finishes secondary school, and there is actually an increasing absolute number of illiterates in the population. There are grave, untackled social medicine problems, exacerbated by a rush to the cities with an urban growth rate of 5%.

Despite recent improvements in communication, especially with the aeroplane and transistor radio, regional differences in wealth and opportunity have tended to increase. There are, it is often said, two Brazils: the modernizing, rapidly expanding South and East, with all the evidence of modernization and development, and the relatively much more backward North and North-East, which still loses population and prosperity to the South, still acts as an under-developed hinterland for Southern industry and commerce - a relationship similar in many ways to that of the mezzogiorno to Northern Italy. This relationship has been reflected in national politics. Until 1930, the system was popularly known as cafe com leite, cafe au lait, referring to the control by Sao Paulo, coffee, and Minas Gerais, cattle.

But within the regions there are important differences arising from the social and economic structure. Regionalism meant that, until recently, there were no genuinely national political institutions - till 1930, there were only state republican parties. Furthermore, within the states politics were dominated by groups of families with deep-seated family feuds. This has meant that family loyalty and feudal-like relationships have always been more important than party programmes or ideology in determining the pattern of local politics.

Of greater significance - the local and, to a lesser extent, national pattern of politics reflected the socio-economic relationships of rural Brazil, which were in the main defined by the predominant system of land tenure, the latifundio and minifundio system. This division of most Brazilian land into very large or very small holdings meant that, as elsewhere in Latin America, a small proportion of the population owned the primary source of wealth and power, while the mass of rural Brazilians were totally dependent on the landowners, often as share-croppers or landless peasants.

This socio-economic structure greatly influenced the character of Brazilian politics, especially as regards the political aspects of the client-patron system, which is still prevalent. Slavery, which did not end till 1888, has left its mark at every level: the labour movement is not very militant; a class conscious workers' political organisation has evolved slowly. Patronage is even more important. Everyone had to have a patrao or patron, not only in rural society, but also later in the towns. In the country, this system of political patronage was known as coronelismo, or rule of the colonels, the name coming from the National Guard. Essentially it was the caciquismo system, or rule of local bosses, common to Latin America and apt to be found wherever a representative electoral system is imposed on a scattered, illiterate, dependent rural population. The local boss, coronel, organised the vote, consequently was known to be 'worth' so many votes, which he delivered to a higher political chief, usually the state governor, who, in turn, answered to the federal president.

With this machine, backed by coercion and violence where necessary, the government never lost an election in a system rife with corruption. But such corruption merely marred the politicians' image more - particularly in the case of army officers anxious for national security and development. Also, as frequently happens, it affected the pattern of party politics. As the electorate expanded, often the voter, even in the country, could auction his votes to rival chefes, thus extracting some immediate, tangible benefits from the system. It was this aspect of rural politics which later evolved in the growing cities. Favelados, shanty-town dwellers, would similarly barter their votes for, say, a building permit or drainage system, or some other amenity. Direct buying of votes became a regular feature of post-war elections.

Much attention has recently been focussed on this client-patron system of politics, especially on the way it has hindered development of strong parties, representing class or group interest, to work through Congress. This system, it is argued, stifles group interest by buying off group and class spokesmen. More seriously, it leads to a vertical structuring of politics into chains comprising representatives of all classes, interest groups and races. Thus it has produced a party system in which all parties contain much the same kind of people, so perpetuating the weakness of the old rural system. This has been conducive to the development of multi-class mass politics, particularly urban populism; but it has greatly hindered the growth of a genuine class political system able to function effectively in Congress. Hence the tendency for all groups in Brazil, including the armed forces, students, trade unions, even clergy, to try to act directly in the political sphere. They have short-circuited the party system, thus further debilitating both it and Congress and increasing the likelihood of direct military intervention in the event of a crisis.

Throughout the 1930s, there were attempts to form a really national political party, following the Communists' initiative in 1922. Such efforts paralleled Getulio Vargas' moves to achieve greater national integration by weakening the grip of the states and strengthening in every sphere the influence of the federal government. But the political initiatives were the least successful. An early attempt to form a Revolutionary Legion or National Revolutionary Party clashed with the entrenched power of the local and regional politicians. A popular front movement, started in 1935, also collapsed, mainly because of a sudden swing to a revolutionary policy. This constituted a major set-back for all radical or popular political groups. The only at all successful movement, begun in 1932, was more or less a copy of European Fascism - which, significantly, was widely supported by army officers, middle class people and professional groups.

How about farmers, "bourgeois" middle class?

But the existence of only a very small industrial proletariat hindered the formation of any mass movement or really class conscious workers' party. Brazil was industrialised late in the day. The electorate was small - only about two million adult males voted in the crucial 1930 election out of a population of over thirty million. Furthermore, the urban working class, estimated at about 275,000 in the 1920 census, was, by the mid-1930s, still only about 700,000 and still lacked political consciousness - a legacy of slavery and the feudal political system. Moreover, the new urban workers had virtually no bargaining power as they were swamped by an endless supply of cheap labour.

Some early attempts to mobilize - mostly conducted by immigrant European Anarcho-Syndicalists - were not for the most part successful. Nor were efforts by the Communist Party as it developed after 1922. The party remained small and noticeably elitist. It was out of touch with the workers, and one of its early leaders was an Old Etonian. Thirty years after the failure of the popular front movement, Carlos Marighela, a member of the PCB since the 1920s, could justifiably complain that it was out of touch with the workers.

Rural workers were even more inaccessible. The one attempt to mobilize them was an epic march through the interior from 1925 to 1927 - its leader, Luis Carlos Prestes, despaired of ever reaching the peasants. In later years, as leader of the Brazilian Communists, he the urban industrial workers; but he never employed a revolutionary strategy.

too leftist

X

X

X

The corporate Estado Novo, which existed from 1937 to 1945, a further major obstacle to the forming of a rational party; for parties were dissolved and Vargas established an authoritarian government; centralisation and federal control were increased. Trade union militancy was diminished by the Estado Novo, which involved the incorporation of the unions into the state structure, making them an arm of the administration, at the same time weakening the trade union movement as a challenge to government and employers.

In 1942, Brazil, after much hesitation, entered World War II on the Allies' side. It was largely the prospect of victory which cracked the base of the Estado Novo and led to the hurried formation of three major parties to fight the 1945 election. They were to dominate national politics for the next two decades until the 2nd Institutional Act of 1965. But they were a rush job and lacked roots and coherent programmes. Two were Vargas' own creations: the PTE, Brazilian Labour Party, and the PSD, Brazilian Social Democratic Party. The third, the UDN, National Democratic Union, was a heterogenous collection of all anti-Vargas elements. It was a poor start to the new period of 'democratic' politics being so hurriedly ushered in, largely because of foreign (mostly United States') pressure.

over how many years?

(3) Post-War Parties and Politics

The growth of United States' influence was one of the most important features of Brazilian politics during the war. The commercial influence of the United States, together with that of Germany, had been increasing all through the 1930s, replacing the British. The war augmented U.S. influence, for Brazil received lendlease grants of \$330 million - a third of the sum given to the whole of Latin America. This greatly facilitated the industrialisation of Brazil. This U.S. influence was to grow steadily in the next two decades, affecting national politics, especially with regard to the army and economic development.

not clear.

The three parties created in 1945 dominated elections for the next twenty years, winning 75% of the votes in the five congressional elections. By 1962, there were another ten smaller parties. The Communist Party was again banned in 1947. There remained grave tension between the executive and legislature. To a large extent this was because illiterates did not vote; instead states returned deputies whose number was determined by each state's total population. This meant the more backward states with more illiterate populations had relatively less voters (who would often be conservative landowners), yet returned many deputies because of the large overall state population. Such a situation regularly resulted in a conservative congress at odds with a president elected on a nation-wide, hence more popular, urban vote. The consequent severe tensions persisted throughout the post-war years.

how that?

how that?

(4) Vargas to Castello Branco, 1950-1964

The political crisis which came to a head in 1964 originated in these early post-war years. The two most significant events were Vargas' suicide in August 1954 and Janio Quadros' resignation in August 1961. Both occurrences demoralised the politicians and increased the likelihood of a military coup by disillusioned officers. After he was elected president in 1950, Vargas had been subject to more pressure from the army, whose position had been strengthened by the foundation in 1949 of the Escola Superior de Guerra (National War College). This was due to the influence of the United States, with its 'cold war' preoccupation. Eventually Vargas' suicide in 1954 was provoked by a military ultimatum. His influence persisted however - his friend and protege, Juscelino Kubitschek, was elected Vice-President under President Kubitschek in 1955. This election resulted in an immediate confrontation with hostile army groups, and it was only thanks to a 'constitutionalist' military group led by Marshal

Lett that Kubitschek was able to take office.

Kubitschek's presidency (1955-61) was a further demonstration of the difficulties facing civilian presidents in Brazil when challenged by critical army officers and constrained by the limitations imposed by foreign financial interests.

how?

Kubitschek aimed to develop Brazil's infrastructure, with new hydro-electric projects and road-building, and rapid advances in the petroleum and new motor industries, which, in turn, stimulated both the quantity and quality of Brazilian steel, almost doubling its production between 1955 and 1960. He also built Brasilia, an imaginative project deep in the interior, and took other initiatives in regional development, notably SUDENE, Superintendency for the Development of the North-East.

This was the period of nationalist euphoria in Brazil, but critics pointed out that the boast, "fifty years' progress in five" really meant "fifty years inflation in five". Money in circulation increased from 69 billion cruzeiros in late 1955 to 202 billion in early 1961; the exchange rate fell from 70 cruzeiros to 210, and the cost of living rose 300%. Foreign financiers began to take fright and threatened to withdraw support. This underlined the vulnerability of the country, dependent as it was on foreign decisions that were not always in its own long-term best interests. Eventually there was a head-on clash and Kubitschek broke with the I.M.F. This raised the question of how far genuine national development in the 'Third World' is possible within the framework of international finance.

what basis?

The crisis became more acute under the next president, Janio Quadros, who was elected mainly because of his promise to purge the administration of corruption and restore sound finances. He too tried to act more independently - for instance, Che Guevara was granted Brazil's highest honour. But he too faced an intractable congress and complained of unwarranted foreign pressure. He resigned abruptly after only seven months in office, to be replaced (to his followers' dismay) by Joao Goulart, who was at that time on a visit to China. This exacerbated anti-Communist hysteria.

Civil war again seemed likely. It was averted by means of a clumsy compromise: Goulart should take office on September 7th, 1961, but with his power considerably reduced by a hybrid 'parliamentary' arrangement designed to keep him under control. It was a delicate situation, not improved by Goulart's ill-conceived campaign to win popular support. The campaign was marred by the demagoguery of his brother-in-law, Leonel Brizola, with his idle boasts of substantial military backing. A plebiscite in January 1963 restored the president's power, but by this time foreign capital was in full flight. By late 1963, the cost of living was nearly 35% of the 1961 average, and the exchange rate had fallen from under 300 cruzeiros to the dollar to 1,200. Food was scarce and strikes frequent. Non-commissioned officers mutinied in Brasilia, and financial and business enterprises, already alarmed over waning confidence abroad, learnt with horror of proposals to enfranchise illiterates, nationalise private oil refineries and expropriate private holdings along federal roads and waterways. Such proposals were certainly not radical, but they were sufficient to provoke further panic, which resulted in the army-led revolution of March 31st, 1964. Goulart immediately fled to Uruguay, and, on April 11th, Marshal Humberto Castello Branco replaced him (or rather; Quadros) as president.

→ impossible. Brazilian regulations forbid transfer of money into foreign countries without gov't approval.

who are they?
Where these
communists -
inspired?

(5) The 1964 Coup - A Revolutionary Situation?

This military coup damaged the constitution, and changed the government by show, if not by force, of arms. There had already been serious disturbances, but it was the coup which was really the first link in that chain of violence which has bound Brazil ever since. It is noteworthy that all the evidence suggests that fear of a Communist take-over was greatly exaggerated, although some did fear this.

The Communist movement remained weak, and, in 1962, a break-away group was formed - the P.C.do B., the Communist Party of Brazil - to challenge the P.C.B., the Brazilian Communist Party. There was much wild talk (by Brizola for example) of widespread military support for Goulart's proposed measures. The so-called 'Groups of 11' were especially guilty of this. But it was mostly just wishful thinking or idle boasting, typical of the often irresponsible rhetoric which characterizes a mass, populist appeal.

But, as many analysts have since emphasised, there was a vast difference between mass, populist politics and a well organised, class-conscious, genuinely radical political movement. Populist politics depended on a multi-class alliance stimulated by emotive rhetoric. In Brazil, as elsewhere, such politics were difficult to institutionalise, let alone turn into a revolutionary movement. Nor, in fact, did the populist leaders want this. They were often landowners and members of the traditional elite themselves, and lacked either the courage or the capacity for revolutionary sacrifice. The labour movement too, although highly vocal, was not revolutionary. Its members were a working class elite, evidently more keen to improve their wages and defend their position against threats from below than to offer an effective challenge to the establishment.

Most of the alleged instances of revolutionary activity (often seized on by the right wing press at home and abroad) have since been viewed in a different light. For example, the Peasant Leagues of the North-East were colourfully described as Communist cells, led and financed by dedicated revolutionaries. In fact, right from the start in the 1950s, they were peasant self-help projects, mostly led by the more privileged peasants, the foreiros, who got worried about economic changes in the sugar-growing zona da mata of the North-East. They were a purely North-Eastern phenomenon, as is clear from the statements of their leading spokesman, Francisco Juliao. The Leagues provided no more justification than the other allegedly subversive movements for armed intervention and the violent termination of constitutional government in 1964.

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3.

THE CHANGING ROLE AND PERCEPTION OF THE ARMED FORCES

The crucial factor in this decision to intervene was the military leaders' view of the political situation and of their role within it. It is a changing view, and, since 1964, has resulted in the increased repression and violence. It will determine any policies in the near future. Several major trends in military thinking over the years are noteworthy.

The first recurring theme is the military leaders' defence of their own interests - their anxiety over career prospects, promotion, pensions and salaries; also their sensitivity to any hint of civilian disparagement of their role. This attitude was most clearly revealed in post-war years when there was any move to run down the military establishment and reduce its share of the budget. The best example was the army's reaction in the 1880s.

which led to the end of the Empire. On many subsequent occasions, army leaders have displayed similar indignation over alleged insults. The most recent instance was in late 1968 when a deputy to Congress was said to have insulted the army. This was used as the pretext for dissolving Congress and introducing Institutional Act, No. 5 which established military government.

A more persistent army self-image is that of it as defender of the constitution and interpreter of the nation's true interests. This view of its role is often held by the military - and not only in developing countries. It was well expressed by one influential army leader, Benjamin Constant, who described the army as being a povo fardado - 'the people in uniform'. A rejection of the idea of the army as a caste apart; rather an assertion of the often claimed relationship between the soldiers and the mass of Brazilians. This notion is partly derived from the fact that the officers come from all parts of the country. This is not conducive to political regionalism; and it makes the officers think that, having been active all over Brazil, they are more familiar with its people and problems than are the regional and local politicians operating on behalf of their local followers. Hence the army's frequent emphasis on the good of the nation as a whole as distinct from that of any particular faction, which they consider essentially corrupt. It is also the basis of their often reiterated sense of mission - a concept implying an almost Rousseauesque interpretation of the general will. It is a claim which even allows the soldiers to oppose what the people say they want, thus forcing them to be really free. Consequently they hold little brief for the idea of majority opinion being expressed via the ballot box - they know from experience how frequently this has involved corruption and intimidation.

A closely associated attitude has been the army's firm belief in nationalism, especially economic nationalism, which has focussed their attention on the need for economic development. This was illustrated by the young tenentes (lieutenants') challenge throughout the 1920s to the oligarchic system dominated by Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais. They were concerned about the exploitation of Brazil: by its neo-colonialistic treatment by such countries as Britain, and by the exaggerated role of coffee in a national economy so vulnerable to shifts in prices determined abroad. From this followed demands for industrialisation, greater economic independence and more control of the country's natural resources, especially steel and petroleum. Hence the tenentes' insistence during the Estado Novo on the development of steel and later petroleum, their ban on the export of mineral wealth, and the army's support for Vargas' policies of national integration, tighter federal control and a more powerful executive committed to the nationalisation of industry.

This emphasis on nationalism, on brasileidade or 'doing things brasileiromente', (in a Brazilian way) tied in with the other main strand in military thinking: concern over security, seguridade. In the 1920s and 30s the army was primarily afraid of Argentina. Their concern that Brazil should control its own mineral resources and build up a steel industry illustrated how anxious they were to develop their own arms industry rather than depend on foreign supplies. True security, they argued, could be achieved only by a truly autonomous Brazil, just as true nationalism presupposed a country secure from internal and external threats.

Internal security problems were posed in a new way during World War II, and more particularly during the subsequent 'Cold War'. The abortive, Communist-led revol of November 1935 had been annually commemorated with a parade. Now,

as U.S. influence increased, officers were exposed to intense 'Cold War' propaganda, both while in Brazil and when on frequent courses abroad. Courses at the Escola Superior de Guerra (National War College), founded in 1949, and at other military colleges, stressed the need for both internal and external security. Previous concepts of national integration and development were combined with elaborate theories of sub-politics which emphasized the danger of Communist subversion. In the Communist Party was again blamed, and there was a growing tendency to describe any popular, reformist or even liberal group as subversive. As a result, a fatally over-simple world view evolved - a neo-Francoist division of the world into good and bad. This was particularly dangerous considering the highly rhetorical nature of Brazil's populist politics with their tendency to make sweeping generalizations. Many officers certainly, like Marshal Lott and his 'constitutionalist' group, believed soldiers should merely intervene in a crisis, in order to safeguard the constitution, then withdraw. But, as Quadros' failure was followed by inflation and uncertainty under Goulart, there was increasing pressure for more radical intervention. This led inexorably to the coup of April 1964.

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4.

CLEVELLE BRANCO TO COSTA E SILVA, 1964-67.

The primary aims of the new regime, as expressed in the first Institutional Act of April 1964, were to restore sound finances and end Communist infiltration and corruption. With an external debt of nearly four billion dollars, and with 1,300 million dollars in foreign debts due to mature in 1964 and 1965, the government set about winning confidence abroad. They established a policy-making monetary council, with a central bank to implement its decisions; and economic growth was encouraged by generous tax concessions to industrialists. Significant departures were made from the policy of previous economic nationalists: the amendment of the Profit Remittance Law of 1962, repealing the 10% annual limit on profit remittances, and a decree of December 1964 encouraging private competitive development of iron ore reserves and the improvement of a port near Rio de Janeiro. Such measures were criticised on the grounds that they encouraged foreign exploitation and served as a tool for neo-colonialism. However they succeeded in re-introducing foreign investment, especially by United States' companies. All the same, they made the regime very unpopular; for prices continued to rise, rapidly outstripping wages, and inflation continued at over 40%. Many people felt the new regime was defending international financiers and their allies in Brazil at the expense of the poorer classes.

The government soon set about getting rid of political opponents: 112 holders of elective posts lost office; about 4,500 federal employees were dismissed; several hundred army officers were forced to retire; prominent national figures, including Kubitschek, Quadros and Goulart, were deprived of their political rights. However, this sort of thing was typical of new Brazilian administrations. The political parties continued, although weakened by loss of key figures, Congress kept going, and the press was remarkably free to criticise the government.

But the situation changed in October 1965. Civilian political leaders who had supported the coup were reluctant to conduct the elections of governors scheduled for October, mainly because they knew their men would not be

returned. Castello Branco insisted that they be held, but the results were widely interpreted as a major defeat for the regime in its first public test, and the president found himself under great pressure. As a result, on October 27th 1965, the Institutional Act No. 2. was passed.

This first major step since the coup towards direct, authoritarian rule gave the president power to suspend Congress, govern by decree, issue further complementary edicts, abrogate the mandates of federal deputies, suspend citizens' political rights for ten years, and exercise more direct control over expenditure. The act also dissolved existing political parties and called for indirect presidential elections. After the passing of the Complementary Act No. 4 on November 20th, 1965, the parties were replaced by two new political organisations: the Aliança Renovadora Nacional, ARENA, and the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, MDB. ARENA included most of the government supporters; MDB the opposition. Only two groups could be formed, for the Act allowed the registration only of organisations backed by at least 120 federal deputies and twenty senators. To many, this appeared a cynical caricature of party politics manipulated in the interests of a new elite. This view was confirmed when Marshal e Silva, usually thought of as heading the 'hard line' in the armed forces, accepted nomination and was indirectly elected president by the emasculated Congress.

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5.

COSTA E SILVA, URBAN GUERRILLAS AND THE GROWTH OF VIOLENCE
1967 - 69

As Castello Branco's term of office drew to an end, criticism on all sides increased. There was a significant rift (not completed till October 1968) between the soldiers and the old conservatives who had helped engineer the coup, but now found they could not control the military leaders - as was clear from the Institutional Act No. 3. passed on February 5th, 1966, introducing indirect elections for state governorships.

And there were others who criticised the regime, including some dissident army officers. The most important groups of critics were students and intellectuals, who frequently had strong reservations about previous populist politicians, but were now very alarmed by the increased military control. There was a growing demand for more concern over social issues - a concern that appeared not to be felt by most of the economic experts and tecnicos, who were less interested in the distribution of resources than in economic growth. Church leaders in particular expressed this concern, notably Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife in the North-East. Camara had already become widely respected as a champion of the poor while he was auxiliary bishop of Rio de Janeiro from 1952 to 1964. He was among the many to express growing anxiety lest the regime were ruling in the interests of a narrow class at home and foreign allies.

It seemed just possible the army might withdraw when Castello Branco quit office on 15th March, 1967. There was talk of an amnesty for those deprived of political rights; and the incoming President promised to pay more attention to crucial matters like education and agriculture. He also talked about 'humanising' the government, normalising the political situation and restoring democracy. But unfortunately such hopes were soon dashed; it became evident that Costa e Silva had less control than his predecessor over the more extreme elements among his army colleagues.

The demoralisation of former civilian leaders and their inability to offer the government an effective challenge did not help. This ineffectiveness was well illustrated by a feeble effort at a marriage of convenience - the so-called Frente Ampla or 'Enlarged Front' - between the former political enemies, Carlos Lacerda and Juscelino Kubitschek. Such attempted reconciliation merely further convinced many soldiers of politicians' cynicism and opportunism. Lacerda in particular lost much support thereby, especially in the air force.

But this rejection of the pre-1964 situation was by no means confined to the soldiers - which helps to explain the subsequent escalation of political violence. Most of the students shared this attitude, so did left-wing radicals, who strongly disapproved of the manipulation and self-interest inherent in the client-patron system. Even the official Communist Party, the PCE, was considered to have compromised and regarded as moribund - as indicated by the formation of the rival P.C.do B. The split between the two Communist groups widened during the first few months of Costa e Silva's government in 1967.

August 1967 was a turning point in left-wing history in Latin America: the conference of the Organisation of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) took place in Havana. The holding of this conference reflected the need for some kind of organisation to link the various revolutionary movements in the area, and it exposed the strong disagreements within Latin American Communist Parties. A number of these sent only unofficial representatives, including Brazil, whose only delegate was a schismatic member of its Central Committee, head of the Party's committee in Sao Paulo, - a man called Carlos Marighela.

Marighela has only recently become well-known abroad - mainly as the author of the Manual of the Urban Guerrilla, and as leader of the urban guerrillas in Brazil until his violent death in November 1969. But by 1967, he was already fifty-six and one of the most experienced Party members, having joined in 1927. By 1967, however, he, like many others, considered the PCE too sluggish and compromised. Only violence, he believed, could break the grip of a military regime wedded to international capitalism and backed by American power. So after 1967, he took to direct action and adopted urban guerrilla tactics.

Many others already shared his views. Some were in the PCBR, yet another organisation - the Revolutionary Brazilian Communist Party, headed by Mario Alvés. Many like-minded students and others took part in mass demonstrations in Rio de Janeiro and other large cities in March, April and June 1968. One such demonstration in June involved over 100,000 people, and, when the student organiser was arrested in August, there were further marches and protests. Costa e Silva now spoke of an 'international plan of subversion', but student leaders, such as the arrested Vladimir Palmeira, did not belong to any international revolutionary organisation. Most of them had not even read Marx or Lenin, let alone more recent theorists. But by 1968, people clearly were, albeit reluctantly, coming to the conclusion that violence was the only viable method of challenging the institutionalised violence of the military regime.

Throughout 1968 therefore, the breach widened and violence escalated on both sides. Urban guerrilla groups evolved, and 'Death Squads' (often comprising off-duty policemen) started systematically to eliminate opponents. Right-wing groups such as the C.C.C. - Commandos for Hunting Communists - also joined in the killing. At the end of August 1968, troops invaded Brasilia University, killing a student and brusquely ignoring senators' and deputies' protests. On Sunday 15th September, the Jornal do

Brazil printed a document by Marighella, dedicated to Che Guevara, advocating guerrilla war in Brazil. This call was published just before the opening of the conference in Rio de Janeiro of staff of the Organization of American States, attended by, among others (in the fury of the Left), General William Westmoreland, fresh from Vietnam.

In October 1966, an American, Captain Charles Chandler, was killed in Sao Paulo. He was accused in a note left by the 'creators of revolutionary justice' of being a C.I.A. agent and a 'Victims war criminal'. His death was preceded by numerous beatings and violent clashes with students. In one of these, a student was killed in Sao Paulo, apparently by the C.C.C. There was also evidence that another self-appointed execution squad of the right existed - the 'Feroz-Sar', an air force parachute group. In October, there were further arrests of students during a supposedly secret annual congress of the now illegal U.S.B. (National Students Union).

Throughout these months, new guerrilla organizations were formed. There were more beatings and frequent air raids, and, on November 15th 1966, a large store of weapons and ammunition, apparently belonging to Marighella's group, was discovered at Vitoria in Espirito Santo. The administration now appeared thoroughly alarmed and was prepared to ignore the activities of the C.C.C. and of the U.S.B. - the anti-Communist movement, which, in late 1966, machine-gunned the house of D. Rolden Gama.

In December 1966, the government took a tough line with an opposition deputy to Congress, Marcio Alves, who was accused of insulting the Army. The government then rapidly took advantage of the resulting congressional crisis to pass, on 15th December, very stringent, illiberal laws that were before. They were the Institutional Act No. 1 and the Supplementary Act No. 10. Taken together, they resulted in the indefinite dissolution of Congress, dissolution of state and municipal assemblies, bestowal of sweeping new powers on the president, and imposition of a rigid censorship on the press and other media. This was the so-called 'Army within the Army' - a major break with the allegedly democratic objectives of post-1964 governments: the most overt, direct military rule in Brazil's history. Now even the tenuous coalition between soldiers and the predominantly anti-Communist, anti-Communist politicians of April 1964 was at an end: the break, apparent for some years, was complete. By the end of the year, the soldiers were in sole command of Brazil.

In the new year, these repressive measures were consolidated: the Supreme Court was purged and the judiciary brought under direct military control. In February, there was further evidence of the growing influence of the army leaders - who favoured harsher measures, also a greater role for foreign capital and technology. The Minister of Internal Affairs, leading spokesman for the nationalist group, General Albino Torres, was removed. He was someone apparently less concerned about subversion than about the urgent needs of his active North-East and the importance of mobilizing support behind an increasingly unpopular regime. At the time of his removal, critics were quick to note that United States financial aid to Brazil between 1964 and 1966 had amounted to loans of over 700 million dollars.

In January 1967, there were further bank raids and beatings. The urban guerrillas now gained a most important recruit: army captain Lucio Lamare abandoned his unit in Sao Paulo and joined them, accompanied by three other soldiers and a large load of ammunition. Lamare was the army's shooting champion, and an anti-guerrilla warfare instructor. After the death of Marighella, he became one of the most important guerrilla leaders.

Throughout 1969, the guerrillas grew stronger and more confident, and political violence intensified. There was the brutal killing in May of P. Pereira Neto, D. Helder Camara's personal assistant - an example of the right-wing's much more extreme viciousness. Several independent guerrilla groups by now existed, the most important being the F.L.N., the National Liberation Front, twelve of whose members were arrested in Brasilia in February. Others were captured in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Some of these were members of the M.R.S. (The 8th October Revolutionary Movement)

- so named because of the date of Guevara's death. This group was now working with Marighela. There seemed to be greater cohesion among the guerrillas, who, on 15th August, occupied a radio station, Sao Paulo-Rio, and announced that they were about to stage a major coup. This occupation followed the burning of three television stations in Sao Paulo; and pressure on the president to take even tougher reprisals increased. But late in August, Costa e Silva had a heart attack. On August 31st, he was replaced by a triumvirate - in accordance with the Institutional Act No. 12, which demanded the passing over of the civilian who should have succeeded him, Vice-President Pedro Aleixo.

Almost immediately, on September 4th, the promised coup occurred: U.S. ambassador Burke Elbrick was kidnapped - it was a dramatic gesture of defiance and a major embarrassment to the regime. Later, such kidnappings were to make less impact; this one, however, caught the public imagination - it seemed a startling, courageous act. Moreover, it focussed international attention on the guerrillas, and finally achieved the release of fifteen prisoners. The widely publicised guerrilla manifesto referred to 'revolutionary war'. It now appeared that two main groups were involved: the ALN, National Revolutionary Vanguard, led by Marighela, and the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard, led by Lamarca. They were backed by smaller groups.

The government was quick to respond. It too talked of relentless warfare, and violence breeding violence on both sides. On September 9th, only five days after the kidnapping, Institutional Act No. 14 was passed. It imposed the death penalty (which was unprecedented) for the 'crime of psychological warfare and revolutionary or subversive war'. An Order-in-Council on September 27th dealing with national security explained what was meant by this: the government, in what was mutually agreed to be a war situation, had unlimited powers to act against any individual or group it chose to describe as subversive within the very wide terms of its new legislation. These powers were now formally ratified by the new constitution of 17th October 1969, thereby repealing a stroke the earlier constitution drawn up by Castello Branco's advisors at a more potentially peaceful time.

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6.

GARRASTAZU MEDICI, 1969 -- VIOLENCE INTENSIFIED

Costa e Silva's successor was chosen on October 25th, 1969, by which time the National Security Council had become the supreme executive body. He was not chosen by the people, nor even by Congress, but by the armed forces. The new president was another four-star general, Emilio Garrastazu Medici, a former head of the National Intelligence Service. The moment he took office, well authenticated reports came in of arbitrary arrests, intimidation, torture and violence.

On November 4th, the new administration won an early victory: Carlos Marighela was ambushed and killed in Sao Paulo. It was alleged that Dominican priests had betrayed him. Such allegations were encouraged by the government, out to discredit the radical Catholic groups and split the opposition. In December, there were further mass arrests. By now, torture was being widely used by the military police (PM), the DOPS (Security Police) and the security services of the armed forces, especially those of the navy (CENIMAR).

Other important opposition leaders were captured in January 1970: Carlos Lamarca's principal lieutenant, Jose Mariani Ferreira Alves, co-founder of the P.C.B.R.; Mario Alves, and Apolonio de Carvalho, a former Brazilian member of the French underground. All were tortured, and eventually Mario Alves was reported to have died of his injuries.

The authorities now claimed that the guerrilla movement was smashed - about 380 had been captured. In February 1970, they launched a major campaign, which was particularly vigorous in Sao Paulo (Operation Bandeirantes'). The launching of this campaign was accompanied by an appeal in Rio de Janeiro by General Syseno Sarmento, commander of the 1st Army, for all loyal Brazilians to denounce "Communist cells" or "suspicious" neighbours.

Meanwhile, torture continued. It was often well documented, and it was condemned by the Vatican. Torture charges were vigorously denied by the government, who officially condemned the practice and attributed the reports to malicious foreign sources. In March, Sergio Paranhos Fleury, a police agent accused of torturing, visited Paris, apparently to acquire information about Brazilians living in Europe. On March 13th, Mario Alves, arrested on January 17th, was reported to have died under torture on the now notorious Ilha das Flores in Rio de Janeiro.

At about the same time, on March 7th, General Medici gave his first press conference. He described his regime as a 'revolutionary state', and said that the army would stay in power as long as necessary. Full powers should, in fact, have been assumed before the passing of the Institutional Act No. 5, he asserted, and he himself had recommended this to Costa e Silva. Referring to the absence of representative government, he stated:

"Full democracy is an ideal which, if it has been achieved anywhere in the world, has certainly never been achieved in Brazil."

The most dramatic response to this was the kidnapping of the Japanese Consul General in Sao Paulo, Nobuo Okuchi on March 11th. He was later released in exchange for five prisoners and some of their children. Among these prisoners was a nun, Mother Marina Borges Soares, arrested the previous November, and tortured.

On the sixth anniversary of the coup, the president promised 'hard, implacable repression'. The following day, there were reports of the arrest of 140 suspects in Sao Paulo and others in Recife. In May 1970, according to a Commission of World Jurists' report, there were about 12,000 political prisoners in Brazil. In early June, the Brazilian bishops, in a joint pastoral letter, condemned the torture of political prisoners.

On June 14th, the guerrillas seized another diplomat - the West German ambassador, von Holleben. They increased their demands this time, and achieved the release of forty political prisoners, including the French Resistance hero, Apollonio de Carvalho - he, like the rest, claimed to have been tortured.

So the violence continued. On the first anniversary of Marighela's death there were mass arrests of suspects. Just before the anniversary, his chief lieutenant and successor, Joaquim Camara Ferreira, was shot. But the guerrillas did not give up. They kidnaped their fourth diplomat in eighteen months - the Swiss ambassador. He was their victim partly because the Swiss had recently expelled some Brazilian exiles. This time the guerrillas demanded the release of 69 prisoners.

There was no respite in 1971. The president, in a major speech, stated that he saw no reason at all for changing present policies - despite criticism from both MDB and ARENA, of the government's emergency powers. He was in fact under pressure from some military colleagues to employ still tougher measures. Yet the administration claimed to be concerned over the quantity of blank voting papers returned at the previous November's congressional election, therefore permitted the Minister of Justice, Alfredo Buzaid, to set up a commission to look into the question of how far Brazil's political institutions were unrepresentative. Many considered this blatant hypocrisy, coming, as it did, from the self-same people who were doing their utmost to strangle democratic institutions. And calls for the establishment of a third party by such discredited politicians as Pedro Aleixo in March 1971 seemed mere trivial posturing, especially in view of the new press censorship imposed at about the same time. Certainly there was little evidence of mutual understanding developing - the government's assassination of more guerrillas resulted in the murder of a Danish businessman in Sao Paulo in 1971. Merely tinkering with the system: reshuffling the emasculated political parties or changing the formal electoral rules could hardly revive a system already, by 1964, debilitated and subsequently destroyed.

This seemed to be born out in July 1971 when the government published its new organic law for political parties, codifying in 122 articles the existing repressive laws. Once again, the regime was directing the formation of the parties as it thought fit. And, ironically, all organisations were to be rejected whose aims were "against a regime of political democracy." Official reaction revealed how remote Brazil by now was from genuine parliamentary government. Some MDB members protested loudly, but most realised they could do little. Others at a party congress in Recife even announced that the "revolution of 31st March (1964) is irreversible". Party politics at last were, it seemed, as so many soldiers had for so long wanted them to be. It was a situation in which, as one Brazilian was remarked, one party turns to the government and hastily says, 'Yes!', and the other as quickly replies, 'Yes, sir!'

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7.

THE ROAD AHEAD

It is easiest to understand the current political violence in terms of a clash between a severely repressive military regime and an increasingly frustrated opposition. Unfortunately, it must be admitted that, at least in the immediate future, the armed forces will remain in control of the country. The present parliamentary opposition is little more than a facade: it can offer no effective challenge. The guerrillas may achieve occasional dramatic successes, but there are only a few of them. They need to avoid a direct confrontation with the regime. They symbolise opposition, but have so far failed to mobilise large-scale support.

As they themselves admit, they epitomize the politics of frustration in a system where all other means of protest have been stifled.

The government has more immediate benefits to offer in order to win support. Many Brazilians may be bitter, but the majority appear impressed by a growth rate which in 1970, for the second year running, was over 9%. Simultaneously, inflation was kept down to 20% - an acceptable level in the opinion of Finance Minister, Delfim Neto; anyway, the lowest level for a decade. The figures for 1971 are still better, and there is much talk of an 'economic miracle'. Even more important as regards winning popular support are the indications that **now at last** the regime is contemplating redistribution, thus preventing the question: "Growth - but for whom?"

Many view a bountiful military regime with suspicion. Recently, however, redistribution has featured more prominently in ministerial and presidential speeches. Modernisation and growth, it is stressed, can create the basis for a just distribution of wealth in the near future, and often there are intimations of Vargas' dictum that you cannot divide poverty. And there are signs that wage increases over the last year have begun to redress the earlier imbalance, which had provoked bitter complaints by workers that it was they who were subsidising the dramatic growth.

And at long last the government even appears to be carrying out real agricultural reforms, especially in the North-East. It is implementing plans drafted in 1968 but delayed by the bad droughts in 1970. The proposed measures could be far-reaching if enforced. First, a detailed agrarian census is to be conducted. Afterwards, any large estate judged to be badly worked is to be expropriated and the land redistributed to the peasants. The forming of co-operatives and the end of long-standing abuses such as the 'landlord's shop' are envisaged.

Time will reveal whether these reforms are introduced. Brazil's recent history is littered with unimplemented grandiose schemes. Such initiatives, however, are all part of a change which has only over the last few months become apparent: the emergence, or re-emergence, of a military populism eager to win support.

This movement, which is in the tradition of development-oriented nationalism (typified by the tenentes of the 1920s and 1930s) suffered a set-back when General Albuquerque Lima retired. But the government then had to act fast, banning press reports in April 1971 of his speeches or comments; and this revealed the degree of conflict there was between different groups in the armed forces. Medici himself had, indeed, previously been thought to belong to the more nationalist populist group. As he himself stressed after becoming president, he was proud of his connection with the 1930 revolution of his fellow-gaucho, Getulio Vargas.

Recently, there have been other straws in the wind; for instance, the appointment of General Rodrigo Otavio Jordao Ramos to the sensitive post of Director of the Escola Superior de Guerra. His inaugural speech in June 1971 had a markedly populist tone, and this suggested a more aggressive form of nationalism had developed among the armed forces. Certainly, many officers are known to be deeply disturbed by the increasing role of foreign capital and technology. (By the end of 1969, foreign investment had reached 1,185 million dollars, 37.3% of this coming from the U.S.). Many now ask whether this expansion of foreign investment in the country is not too high a price to pay; and this question above all provokes argument among the military.

These are only faintly discernible changes, but they make sense in terms of military politics over the last few decades. The army, despite a noticeably middle-class post-war cadet intake, has never consciously identified with the urban professional and commercial bourgeoisie. Quite the contrary: as previously stated, it has seen itself as representing 'o povo' - the people as a whole. And, as is frequently the case in a client-patron system, its prime concern has been for national development. Its self-image has been that of a reformist, development-oriented, nationalist elite. This means that the reappearance of a military populism (similar to that prevalent in Peru) is in fact merely a return to an earlier tradition that preceded the cold-war witch-hunting of more recent years.

Ironically, this apparent re-emergence of nationalism is partly due to growing confidence over security (the other major preoccupation) now that cold-war phobia is declining and internal opposition from the guerrillas is clearly minor and containable. This means the latent nationalism can freely emerge, unhindered by the need to depend too much on the United States.

But this new, authoritarian, fascist-style, military populism will not necessarily mitigate political repression, even though it may try to be more popular and comprehensible to the general public. All its spokesmen so far have consistently refused to allow any interference with their work for national recovery - as they call it. They exude self-righteousness and appear determined to carry out their self-appointed mission. Nor is it likely they would be responsive to foreign criticism - although the currently more dominant pro-United States element, keen on economic growth and dependent on foreign investment, might respond to external pressures, especially from North America. The nationalist groups, on the other hand, have always been more resentful of what they see as presumptuous foreign interference in Brazil's affairs. Criticism or protest only makes them more intransigent.

The quality of political violence in Brazil has, in recent years, changed from anything previously experienced in the country. It is due to the breakdown since 1964 of all other forms of political communication; and it is a reminder of how quickly violence breeds further violence. Above all, it reveals the damage done in recent years to the country's already weak, inadequate democratic structure, so much more easily destroyed than rebuilt. Economic growth can be achieved with less difficulty than political maturity. After seven years of military rule, Brazil is slowly and painfully learning this.
