

Meetings: Mondays at 5:00
G-27 Anabel Taylor Hall
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CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

A Project of CRESF

Elections in Brazil: A Sign of Democracy?

On November 15 elections will be held in Brazil. Although they are not the first elections since the military take-over in 1964, they are possibly the most significant.

In previous elections held under the present regime, very few public offices were on the ballot, and the choice was limited to candidates of the official government party or the officially sanctioned opposition party. Now the popular vote will decide most offices on the municipal, state and federal levels. The state governors will be voted on for the first time, and for the newly incorporated states these will be the first popular elections ever. The presidency is one office the military considers too important to put up for grabs, and will still be determined by the top generals. General Joao Batista Figueiredo will continue as president until 1985.

Aside from their increased scale, the elections break with the past in another, perhaps more important sense. Voters are being given some real choices among the candidates, who represent a wider range of parties.

Is it accurate, then, to say that the military dictatorship begun in 1964 has reached an end? Have the generals had a change of heart? Is this really a sign of returned democracy in Brazil? A better question is this: Why are the generals allowing an election they might lose?

Political liberalization or political ploy?

The elections are a direct result of the government-directed institutional reform known as abertura, meaning a slow and gradual liberalization of the political system with the eventual goal of democracy. Abertura dates back to 1978 when then President

Ernesto Geisel rescinded some of the more openly repressive laws enacted in 1968 during the height of official brutality.

From the official rhetoric the idea behind *abertura* seems simple enough. The dictatorship's heavy hand would slowly and gradually relax its grip on society, allowing greater participation in the country's political life. Brazil would emerge from the years of authoritarian government in a smooth and orderly fashion, evolving into a first-rate democracy.

The story becomes suddenly much more complex when we view *abertura* as a political strategy. If the government was firmly in control, why did it embark on a policy that would put its power in question?

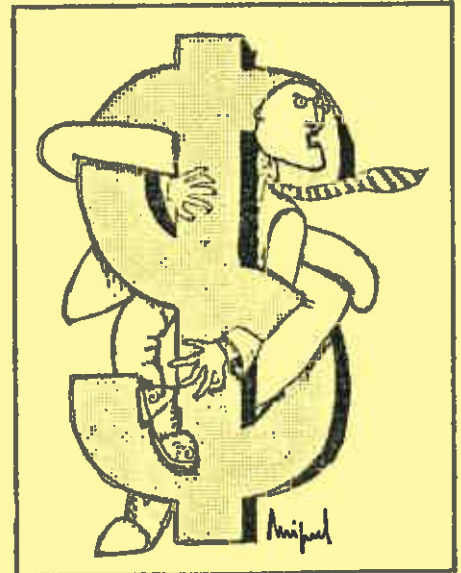
"Abertura" in context

It was to "defend democracy" that the military overthrew a popular civilian government in 1964. The deposed president, João Goulart, had been leading Brazil to communism, the military alleged. The generals would clean the political house and put the economy on its feet, all in preparation for true democracy in Brazil.

A simple plan for the economy was decided upon--increase the size of the pie first, and only later worry about dividing it. By 1968 the statistics showed that capitalism was flourishing in Brazil. Protests that year also showed how far behind social equality was lagging. Dissent

met with severe repression, including the widespread use of torture.

Between 1968 and 1973, when the Brazilian economy was growing at an average of 10 percent a year (the so-called Brazilian economic miracle), the government felt justified in using repressive measures to maintain control.



But when in the late 1970s inflation neared the 3-digit mark and Brazil rapidly accumulated one of the world's largest foreign debts (today about US\$80 billion), existing inequalities were stretched to the limit. The government saw that more repression would only create more opposition, and so sought a new form of legitimacy, namely "democracy". Seen in this light, the underlying theme of abertura, this carefully controlled "decompression" of society, is not a break with the past, but rather a new political strategy

designed by the military to maintain itself in power behind a civilian, democratic facade.

The elections: fixed or fair?

The very fact that these elections are being held makes it clear something new is going on in Brazil, but all parties involved are aware they are playing with a deck stacked in the government's favor. Rules affecting every facet of the election have been analyzed and manipulated by the government to its own advantage. This process began with the restructuring of the party system in early 1980.

There had been 13 legal political parties in Brazil before the 1964 coup. The military government subsequently banned them all and allowed two new parties: ARENA (Alliance for National Renewal), the official government party; and the MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement), the obedient opposition party. As the only legal opposition party, however, the MDB gradually became something of a united front sheltering a wide spectrum of forces.

When parliamentary elections were held in 1974, the MDB received 65% of the popular vote, and even more in 1978. In order to maintain ARENA's congressional rubber-stamp, the government took measures to prevent the MDB's electoral victory from translating into a majority of congressional seats. As an indicator of public opinion, the elections served to

embarrass rather than legitimize the military regime.

The MDB is split

The two-party system was clearly not working to the government's advantage. The MDB was growing in size and diversity, attracting all types: from conservatives disenchanted with the military government, to members of the outlawed communist parties.

In early 1980, with major elections promised for 1982, the government decided that a more "democratic" party structure was needed. Ostensibly, both parties were to be eliminated, allowing a new party system to develop out of the political environment.

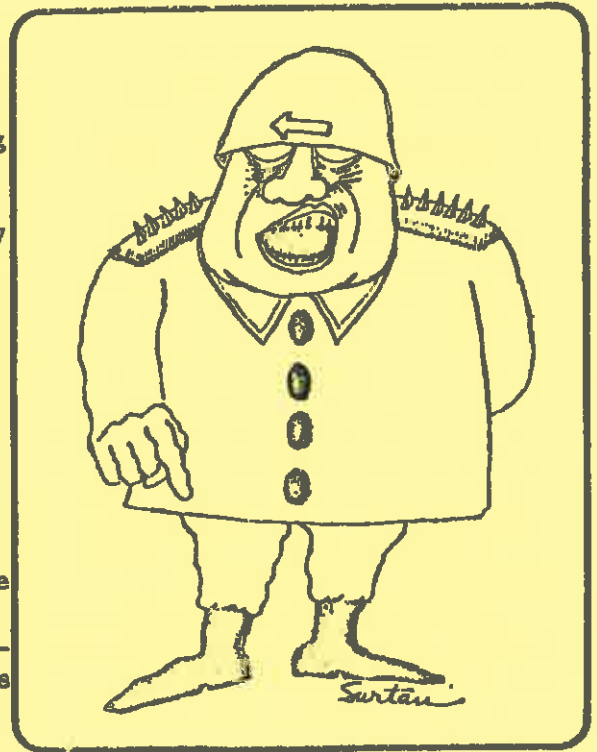
But in reality, since the government controlled the certification of political parties, the plan was to "encourage" the division of the opposition into a configuration which would prevent any single sector from dominating.

As part of this plan the government declared an amnesty allowing the return of those exiled after the 1964 coup. By allowing the return of old politicians and popular figures, the government hoped to encourage a rift between the opposition leaders who had remained in the country and those forced to leave.

Government strategy appeared eminently successful. While the government party, renamed the Partido Democratico Social (PDS), remained essentially intact, the opposition had split five ways. This split occurred precisely along

the lines the government had hoped for. In fact, the acknowledged architect of abertura, General Golbery do Couto e Silva, is quoted in a 1978 article predicting the new party alignment as it emerged in 1980. The emergence of the Workers Party (PT) was the only development Gen. Golbery failed to foresee. This left wing party with grassroots support is led by Luis Lula Ignacio da Silva, the leader of the powerful Steelworkers Union in the industrial state of Sao Paulo.

Although forced to play the game by the government's rules, the opposition still threatens to surpass the government party at the polls. The opposition's growing strength results from both increased social discontent and from talks between the new parties aimed at developing electoral alliances. It is important to note that Gen. Golbery conceived of the abertura process as including long-term economic planning to avoid popular dissent as part of a wider electoral strategy. However, Golbery was forced to resign on Aug. 6, 1981. His rivals within the government who gained ascendancy (chiefly Delfim Neto, the Minister of Planning, and General Octavio Aguiar de Medeiros of the SNI, the Brazilian intelligence agency) felt that no such long-term planning or popular economic concessions were possible. In this context, an electoral reform package was proposed in November 1981 without the con-



comitant social reforms that had originally been envisioned.

The November Package

Under the pretext of strengthening the new parties, the government pushed through the November package of electoral reforms. Its chief provisions established the "linked vote" (voto vinculado) and prohibited electoral alliances between political parties. The linked vote means that Brazilians must vote for a single party's candidates to all offices. A split ticket would nullify the entire ballot.

The obvious intent of the November package was to capitalize on the powerful political machine which the government party maintains on the local level. A vote for the government candidate for mayor would also require a vote for the government-backed gubernatorial candidate. The impact of this measure is clear. In past elections the opposition has fielded mayoral candidates in at most 1,000 of Brazil's 4,000 municipalities and the government party currently holds 3,600 of these mayoral positions. On the regional and state levels the opposition candidates have fared much better, as shown by the electoral victories over the government in 1974 and 1978. The linking of the state and federal candidates with those on the local level was made possible by delaying the scheduled 1981 municipal elections for one year to coincide with the congressional and gubernatorial contests.

The government's prohibition of party alliances was a defensive measure forced by a combative congress' surprise rejection of the sublegenda system as it applied to the gubernatorial races. Still in effect for congressional races, the sublegenda system allows the fielding of up to three candidates for the same position by any one party. Votes of the party's two candidates receiving lower tallies would be passed

on to its leading candidate. Had the congress approved the sublegenda system for the gubernatorial races the PDS could have effectively continued to present a united front to the opposition parties, while at the same time giving play to its own internal rivalries. As it was, government strategists feared the union of opposition parties behind a single, strong gubernatorial candidate.

The November package's prohibition of electoral alliances not only had the effect of preventing a united opposition, it also forced each party to field a candidate for governor in every state. The government attempted to require each party to present a candidate for every office, under penalty of disqualification from the election. Under pressure, this was modified to apply only in places where the party has an established branch.

The November package became law in early January 1982 by a quirk of the Brazilian constitution termed decurso de prazo. Under this provision, bills introduced by the president to congress become law if no vote is taken within a specified time.

Even as the November package was drifting its way towards approval, some PDS leaders were warning that its effect could be counterproductive. Local elections risked being "politicized"

(continued on p.8)

people to their land, and of the Indian economy: in other words, of all that these people have to fight for, and of all that enables them to continue their struggle. The results are genocide as they are massacred, and ethnocide as their way of life is destroyed. The only defense for thousands of survivors has been to flee their towns or provinces, shed traditional dress and cultural practices, and anonymously enter the Ladino world, or to leave the country. There are refugee camps in Mexico, Honduras and Nicaragua. Those in Mexico and Honduras are along

the Guatemalan borders, and like Salvadoran camps they are subject to military and paramilitary attacks.

Since Rios Montt took office, these campaigns have not only continued, but in some ways have increased in intensity. The new tactics indicate a new pattern of systematic destruction. Three aspects of the new plan are 1) the creation of "safe zones" in the capital and selected rural areas, where intense military control produces "showcases" for international observers and the press (a tactic simultaneously



(from p.5--Brazilian elections)

by making the fate of federal deputies and mayors dependent on unpopular statewide candidates.

Amending the amendment

Predictably enough the response of government strategists was to propose further electoral reforms--a "little package" (pacotinho). Voting for a straight party slate by using merely the party name was made illegal. Instead, voters have to indicate the name of each candidate separately. This is

particularly ironic since all of the candidates have to be from the same party. The objective is to take advantage of the greater recognition factor that the PDS candidates, many of them incumbents, command on all levels. However, party leaders from the impoverished Northeastern states, a bastion of PDS strength, pointed out that a large proportion of the population, being functionally illiterate, would be unable to comply with this procedure. As part of the package, the law extended for six more months the option for politicians to change political parties. The government party focused special hopes on attracting to the PDS members of the opposition dissatisfied with their parties. The little

adopted in El Salvador), 2) intensification of the "scorched earth" policy, especially the creation of a depopulated zone in the province of Huehuetenango along the Mexican border, 3) a "beans and rifles" campaign, in which survivors of massacres, whose crops have been destroyed, are offered food and survival in return for their collaboration with the military.

While there are no official US advisors in Guatemala, US military personnel engage in such activities as "teaching English" in the military training school. AID (Agency for

package also "approved itself" without a congressional vote.

The PDS-controlled congress allowed several other measures to pass. The number of seats in the chamber of deputies was increased by 5 percent. Due to the constitutional limit of 55 seats per state, the major industrial states, where the opposition is powerful, are ineligible to receive more seats. The additional positions will be distributed among the less developed states where the PDS is more powerful.

As a final precaution against an opposition takeover, the congressional margin needed to change the constitution was raised from a simple majority to two-thirds. Even if the opposition gains a simple majority

International Development) money has been used to buy riot guns and other police equipment. Other military equipment is bought from the United States. The Reagan administration is pushing for a resumption of large-scale military aid to Guatemala. We must demand that our government refuse support to a government that is conducting a war against its own people.

Recommended reading on US economic and military involvement in Guatemala: Jonas, Susanne and David Tobis, editors, Guatemala, NACLA, 1974. It can be obtained from NACLA, 151 West 19th St., New York, NY 10011, or may be read in the CUSLAR office.

in Congress, they will not have the legal power to implement their program of reforms. The simple majority rule was originally passed by the PDS-controlled congress in 1977 when they were afraid of losing their two-thirds advantage during the 1978 elections, and wanted to be able to continue to change the constitution when necessary. Once again, instead of losing, the government merely changed the rules of the game. Given the disadvantages under which the opposition is contesting the elections, a sweep of two-thirds of the congress is highly unlikely.

A write-in election

The design of the ballot itself has become a political controversy. The final version approved by the Superior Electoral Tribunal is little more than a sheet of paper with six empty lines. The voter must fill in the blanks with the correct name of the candidate for each office as well as the candidate's number. The vote may be nullified if the names are not correctly or clearly written, or if the indicated candidates are from different political parties. Voting is obligatory for all eligible Brazilians. Given the high level of illiteracy in Brazil, it has been speculated that more than half the ballots may be nullified, in which case the election itself would be void. The government could then use this to substantiate the oft-repeated claim that the Brazilian people are not ready for elections.

The Brazilian elections are as complex as they seem. Carnival-esque electioneering--from candidates' names sported on prostitutes' underwear to free false teeth for loyal voters--obscures the elaborate political struggle. Long-standing Brazilian problems, such as the rift in the Catholic Church, questions of censorship and freedom of the press, and Brazil's enormous foreign debt obligation have all been brought to the forefront in the course of the campaigns. The complex-

ity of these issues, coupled with the government's increasingly sophisticated maneuverings, make appearances deceptive.

Though at face value the elections seem to have created a climate in which everything is in flux and everything is at stake, in fact behind the "new democracy" the military remains in firm control. The military's backstage manipulation of the massive and labyrinthine legal facade was illustrated recently. When Brazilian President Figueiredo was hospitalized in September 1981 with heart trouble, his civilian vice-president Aureliano Chaves was constitutionally mandated to assume the presidency. Before he actually assumed office, Chaves needed the extralegal approval of the three generals who headed the military and civilian cabinets and the intelligence services. They gave Chaves the go-ahead, taking into consideration that Figueiredo would shortly be able to resoulder his command. The rules were followed in this case, but the military regime stands ready to contravene the law when it perceives its interests are threatened. Many Brazilians are justifiably fearful about the future of democracy in their country.

The question remains: What will happen if, in spite of the constant rule-changing in the government's favor, the opposition wins outright?

Bill Fisher/Matt Leslie/Stacy Pigg

On the Cuban Presence in Angola

The presence of Cuban troops in Angola has become the stumbling block in the negotiations for the independence of Namibia. The negotiations aim at the withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia and the holding of free elections, under international supervision, to elect Namibia's government. Both the United States and South Africa want the withdrawal of 15,000 Cuban troops from Angola simultaneously with South African troops' withdrawal from Namibia. Angola's government, and most African states, are skeptical that the United States can guarantee that, once the Cuban troops have left, South Africa would not attack Angola. The United States insists that the presence of Cuban troops poses a threat to the stability of governments in the region, including South Africa, and that their presence is one more manifestation of the Soviet Union's expansionist policies. Entailed in this view is the opinion that Cuban troops are being used as pawns by the USSR.

This last charge is both unfounded and inconsistent with history. Contacts between Cuba and the MPLA (Movimento para a Libertacao de Angola), the revolutionary group that rules Angola, go as far back as 1965, when Ernesto "Che" Guevara met some of the MPLA leaders in the

Congo (now Zaire). And, contrary to the views of the last three administrations, it was the MPLA in 1975, not the Soviet Union, which asked Cuba for help in the revolutionary struggle. At that time, when the Portuguese were preparing to leave Angola, Angola was being invaded by three armies - the Army of Zaire, the South African Army, and UNITA (a guerrilla group with links to the CIA); the request of the MPLA, the only group with popular support and grass-roots organizational structure in Angola, was thus based on the fear that the Angolan revolution was about to be strangled. Given the traditional solidarity of Cuba with African struggles for self-determination, the Cuban government and the people of Cuba responded earnestly to the call for help.

The threat to Angola's sovereignty continues; South African troops have invaded Angola each summer for the past three years. Guerrilla groups operating with South African support conduct raids inside Angola in an attempt to destabilize the country. It is clear that South Africa does not want to leave Namibia, nor does it want to stop its policy of aggression towards Angola. The United States is once more distorting the situation for its own and its "friends" benefit.

- calendar -

Nov. 19-20
9am-7pm

Exhibition of Guatemalan Textiles
Center Ithaca

Nov. 20
2pm

Film Atomic Cafe, special showing to benefit
local peace efforts. State Theater.

Nov. 20
6pm

Film Roses in December about the Maryknoll
nuns killed in El Salvador, followed by a
discussion with Joe Nangle, a Franciscan
Priest who has worked in Latin America for
15 years. Anabel Taylor Auditorium

Nov. 20
8pm

Concert/Dance with Guatemalan Marimba band
and local musicians. GIAC, 318 N. Albany St.

Nov. 23
4:30pm

Film The Selling of the Pentagon, Hollis
Cornell Auditorium.

Dec. 2
8pm

Film Decision to Win about El Salvador
Uris Auditorium.

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