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**ON DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL
PAST AND PRESENT**

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It is a great honour to be invited to give the first John Brooks Memorial Lecture. I knew – and admired – John Brooks for more than twenty years. As an economist at the Bank of London and South America/Lloyds Bank, as the editor of the *South American Handbook*, as a writer, and as a lecturer, not least for the Anglo-Brazilian Society, John Brooks made an important contribution to the understanding of Latin America, and especially Brazil, in this country.

In choosing as my theme ‘Democracy in Brazil, Past and Present’, I am, I think, reflecting John Brooks’s interests – in Brazil, its history and politics as well as its economy and society – as much as my own. I am not, I hope, being merely fashionable. Theories of democracy and democracy in practice in different periods in different parts of the world are, as you may know, academic topics very much in vogue; you might even be forgiven for thinking that democracy is nowadays the *only* topic of interest to political historians and political scientists. In pointing out the past failures (and present weaknesses) of democracy in Brazil I certainly have no wish to be judgmental, nor to imply that democracy has been more successful historically (and is stronger today) in other Latin American countries, or for that matter most European countries, than in Brazil. Democracy in the United States, past and present, has also not been without its problems. Finally, although Brazil in the early/middle 1990s, like all the other Latin American republics (except Cuba and Haiti), can unquestionably be counted a democracy, I would also wish to avoid any hint of end-of-history (or end-of-century) triumphalism. Brazil will not *necessarily* continue on the democratic path, even in the short term, although it is to be hoped that it will (and successful elections in 1994 will make it much more likely). And I am prepared to consider – intellectually at least – the proposition that the majority of Brazilians are not *necessarily* better off under today’s democracy than they were under less democratic or even authoritarian regimes in the past, and would not *necessarily* be worse off under some hypothetical populist and/or military regime, of Right or Left, or indeed some revolutionary regime in the future. For the purposes of this lecture I have simply chosen a theme, democracy in Brazil, that seems to me interesting and important, that can be explored historically, and that has contemporary relevance.

Let me begin with three statements. First, Brazil has been an independent sovereign state for 170 years (since the end of Portuguese colonial rule and the establishment of an independent Brazilian Empire in 1822), during which time, it should be remembered, its population has grown from under five

million to over 150 million. Secondly, Brazil has been a republic for a little over 100 years (since the overthrow of the monarchy, or rather the Empire, in 1889). Thirdly, Brazil has been a fully-fledged democracy – and so far a somewhat fragile democracy¹ – for less than five years (only since 1989-90). The first two statements are simply factual, the third some would regard as controversial, even provocative, certainly open to debate.

It is, of course, as it so often is, a question of definition. Therefore, it is important to be clear at the outset what is meant by democracy here. I am not insisting that democracy cannot be truly said to exist unless it is in all respects a fully functioning political democracy and, moreover, functioning within the context of a society with a high degree of equality or, if you prefer, without significant structural inequalities based on class, race, religion, language or gender. There are, and have been, very few democracies of this kind anywhere in the world. At the same time it is clearly not enough to define democracy simply in terms of the *source* of power (the will of the people) or even the *purpose* of power (the good of the people); indeed both these concepts are more frequently associated, not least in Latin America, with undemocratic than with democratic political institutions. Following in the well-worn footsteps of Schumpeter, Huntington, Dahl et al., I have chosen to adopt a straightforwardly institutional and procedural (North American) definition of liberal democracy: that is to say, a political system in which those who govern are periodically elected by, and are responsible to, the people they govern; in which elections are direct, fair, open and competitive; in which all adults (or at least the vast majority of the adult population) have the right and opportunity as citizens to choose between different and differing parties and candidates for office, both executive and legislative, and possibly judicial; and in which the rule of law guarantees basic civil liberties (of speech, association, assembly etc.).

This somewhat narrow definition of democracy, focusing almost exclusively on elections, still begs all kinds of questions concerning, for example, the level of education of the electorate, its political awareness, the extent of financial support given to parties and candidates and, in the modern world, the influence of the media. Is the electorate capable of choosing rationally? What degree of real freedom of choice does it have? And it fails to address the key question of how to characterise governments that are democratic in origin (i.e. freely elected), but do not exercise power democratically. What institutional arrangements are required – for the separation of state and government, for the strengthening of links between government and civil society, for an effective legislature, for an independent judiciary, for a free press and electronic media, for civilian control of the military, etc. – in order that democracy should obtain *between* elections? Nevertheless, while elections, competition (or, to use the term more frequently found in the political science literature, contestation) and

participation (universal, or near universal, suffrage) may not be entirely sufficient, they are surely necessary for us to be able to define a polity as democratic. Unlike some political scientists, notably Robert Dahl who prefers to emphasise contestation, I would insist on participation as a key factor. This is central to the argument that follows since, as we shall see, Brazil has a history of elections with some measure of contestation which compares favourably with most countries in the world, but not until the 1980s (and, crucially, in the case of presidential elections, not until 1989) with the level of participation necessary, in my view, for democracy to be said to exist.

The rest of this lecture will be divided into five parts: I will examine, all too briefly, (1) the independence of Brazil and the political system of the Empire (1822-89); (2) the political system of the First Republic (1889-1930) and the Revolution of 1930; (3) the so-called 'democratisation' of Brazil at the end of the Second World War and the nature of the 'democratic' system established in 1945-6, which survived until 1964; (4) Brazil's second, more gradual – but more genuine – democratisation in the 1980s at the end of two decades of military rule, culminating in the elections of 1989; and (5) democracy in Brazil since 1990 – a report card, if you like, on its health and future prospects.

I

We need not spend much time on the three centuries of Portuguese absolutist rule in Brazil.² The first colony-wide election in Brazil – the election of Brazilian delegates to the Portuguese Córtes meeting in Lisbon in the aftermath of the revolution of 1820 – took place between May and September 1821.³ That was followed in June 1822 by elections – indirect elections on a strictly limited suffrage after the extreme liberals or radicals of the period (many of them republicans) failed to secure direct popular elections – to a Constituent Assembly in Rio de Janeiro as Brazil moved towards separation from Portugal.

The independence of Brazil can be regarded as part of the so-called 'democratic revolution' of the Atlantic world in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Brazil was, if you will, a child of the American and French Revolutions. Liberal democratic ideas were widely used by dominant groups in their struggle against Portuguese colonialism and absolutism. The aim, however, was political and economic autonomy – without sacrificing the stability so crucial for the maintenance of the unity of Brazil and existing socio-economic structures built, above all, on African slavery. There was never any intention of establishing in Brazil anything that, even at the time, looked remotely like liberal representative democracy, based, however theoretically, on the sovereignty of the people. In the event, independence

was secured without major social upheaval, without significant mobilisation of popular forces. A conservative 'revolution' was effected. Brazil did not even become a republic.⁴

The political system of the Brazilian Empire (1822-89) was based on the constitution of March 1824.⁵ This was imposed by the first Emperor, Dom Pedro I, after he had forcibly closed the elected Constituent Assembly. Power was concentrated in the hands of the Emperor himself, his ministers, the counsellors of state he appointed for life, the provincial presidents also appointed by the Emperor, and the administrative and judicial bureaucracy. There was a Senate (senators being appointed for life by the Emperor, though from lists submitted by each province after a process of election and selection) and, more important for our purposes, an elected Chamber of Deputies to which governments were to some limited extent responsible. Elections for the Chamber were contested by national political parties – Liberals, Conservatives and, after 1870, Republicans – and Dom Pedro II during the Second Empire (1840-89) ensured that there was a certain alternation of parties in government. Moreover, by 19th century standards the suffrage in Brazil was unusually extensive. Under the Constitution of 1824 men (not women, of course) who were 25 years old (21 if married), Catholic, born free, and with a quite low annual income (initially 100 milreis) from property, trade or employment had the right to vote. In 1870, Richard Graham has calculated, one million Brazilians out of a total population of a little under 10 million, that is, 10 per cent of the population or half the free adult male population, including many of quite modest means, illiterate and black, were registered to vote.⁶ (This is a far higher proportion of the population than in England, for example, after the reform bill of 1832 and even after the reform bill of 1867.) On the other hand, elections were indirect. These so-called *votantes* voted only for *eleitores* (who were required to have a higher annual income), and it was the *eleitores* – only some 20,000 of them in 1870 – who actually voted for the members of the Chamber of Deputies. Moreover, the turn out was generally low; voting was open (and oral), not secret; and, not surprisingly, fraud, intimidation and the exercise of patronage by local landowners and others and by agents of the Crown were widespread. To call this political system *democracia coroada*, crowned democracy, as did the historian João Camillo de Oliveira Torres in the title of a well known book on the politics of the Empire is clearly a little far fetched.⁷

There were a number of electoral reforms in the course of the 19th century – for example, 1846, 1855, 1860, 1875 and 1881 – all attempting to make Brazilian elections more honest and more effective. By far the most important was the Saraiva Law of January 1881. This has sometimes been presented as a democratic conquest in the sense that elections for the Chamber of Deputies were made direct and what is wrongly called universal suffrage was

introduced (universal male suffrage, of course; women were still excluded). The voting age was indeed lowered to 21; the income qualification to vote was removed; non-Catholics, naturalised citizens and even ex-slaves (freedmen) could become voters. At the same time, however, a new requirement for voter registration was introduced: literacy. Between 80 and 85 per cent of Brazilians in the 1880s were illiterate. Under the Saraiva law, which was regarded as a political reform, close to a million Brazilians were deprived of the right to vote, albeit in indirect elections. The number of electors registered to vote in direct elections for the Chamber of Deputies did increase – from under 25,000 to about 150,000. In 1881 96,400 and in 1886 117,700 actually voted. But this was less than 1 per cent of the population of Brazil (now 13-14 million).⁸

Thus, in 1881 the vast majority of Brazilians, even most free males, were consciously and deliberately excluded from political participation. The background and explanation for this decision is interesting and not often explored. Brazil was the last great slave society in the Americas in the 1870s and 1880s. Slavery was, however, coming to an end, the shift from slave to free labour was gathering momentum, abolition was on the horizon. There was consequently a growing fear that freed slaves ('barbarians') – in the rural areas and, more particularly, in the rapidly expanding urban areas – would readily acquire the low income sufficient to secure the right to vote. The existing suffrage in Brazil already threatened, as José Antônio Saraiva himself put it, the dominance of the poor and ignorant over people with property and education. To give the vote to even wider sections of the 'dangerous classes' (the vast majority black, mulatto or mestizo) would put at risk social stability and, it was argued, produce not democracy but demagoguery and tyranny. In the parliamentary debates on the Saraiva bill reform-minded Liberals took the lead in demanding that the vote be restricted to 'the intelligent and superior classes', that is to say, to those who were at least literate (between 15 and 20 per cent of the population).⁹ Liberalism may have been the dominant ideology in 19th century Brazil but, as in Spanish America, it was liberalism of a predominantly and increasingly conservative variety as it adjusted to the realities of an authoritarian political culture, economic underdevelopment and a deeply stratified society.

II

The establishment of the Republic in 1889 was the first major change of political system in Brazil after independence. The ideology of republicanism, especially radical republicanism, supported by progressive urban middle class intellectuals, was profoundly inspired by the French revolution. It really is no accident that the republic was proclaimed in the centenary year of the French revolution. But there was no revolution in Brazil in 1889; indeed, as

in 1822, there was very little even in the way of popular mobilisation. As a French visitor to Brazil in the early 1880s, Louis Couty, had remarked 'O Brasil não tem povo' (Brazil has no people),¹⁰ not at least in the sense of a recognised popular force that could be organised and mobilised for political ends. The Brazilian republic came out of a military coup born of a conspiracy between disaffected army officers and representatives of the coffee-producing Paulista landed oligarchy, both groups alienated from the Empire. A greater degree of democracy within the political system of Brazil was not their main objective.

The elections for the Constituent Assembly which was to provide republican Brazil with a new constitution were held in September 1890 under the same rules as elections held in the late Empire. The Constitution of February 1891, modelled on the US Constitution, incorporated most of the electoral legislation of the Empire. It is true that the Republic was more democratic than the Empire in that president, vice-president, state governors, municipal *prefeitos* (mayors), both houses of the legislature (the Senate as well as the Chamber of Deputies), state assemblies and municipal councils were all now elected. But under the Electoral Law of January 1892 the literacy qualification was retained as a requirement for voting. A quite serious effort to extend the vote to women had been made in the Constituent Assembly, but it had been rejected. Thus the Republic, like the Empire, deliberately excluded from the electoral system the great mass of adult Brazilians. The presidential and congressional elections of 1894 and 1898 were more open and more competitive than elections before 1889. In 1898 almost half a million Brazilians (462,000) voted, including sections of the emerging urban middle class and even some workers in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Porto Alegre and elsewhere, which represented a substantial advance in participation. But this was still only 2.7 per cent of the Brazilian population (now 17.1 million).¹¹

During the first three decades of the twentieth century the potential electorate grew at a slightly faster rate than the population as the level of illiteracy declined somewhat – to between 60 and 70 per cent of the population. However, the electorate remained relatively small. Moreover, we have to distinguish between those with the right to vote, those registered to vote and those who voted. Let us look, for example, at Rio de Janeiro, the political and cultural capital of Brazil, where if we are to find it anywhere we would expect to find a robust citizenship. The population of Rio de Janeiro was half a million in the early part of this century. José Murilo de Carvalho has calculated that 20 per cent of the population, about 100,000 people, had the right to vote, but in all national elections between 1890 and 1910 only around 25 to 35 per cent of them ever registered to vote and only between 7 and 13 per cent actually voted.¹² The latter represents less than 3 per cent of the population (5-10 per cent of the adult population) of the capital, a

figure not much different from that for the country as a whole. Until 1930 in even the most competitive presidential and congressional elections with the greatest degree of political (mostly urban) mobilisation – for example, 1910 and 1922 – never more than 5 per cent of the population voted. And, as under the Empire, voting was still not properly supervised or secret; fraud, intimidation and corruption were commonplace; above all, the *coroneis* (local political bosses) controlled the rural areas. Like the phrase *democracia coroadada* to describe the Empire, what some political scientists like to call oligarchical democracy (surely an oxymoron?) is hard to swallow as a description of the political system of the First Republic.

It is true that after the First World War the political system opened up somewhat under pressure from the urban middle class, from urban workers, and from women. Brazil's first political party to include the word 'democratic' in its title, the Partido Democrático, was formed in São Paulo in 1926 though recent research has suggested that it was as much the instrument of the dominant coffee interests as the hitherto hegemonic Partido Republicano Paulista. The following year saw the creation of a Partido Democrático Nacional to include political groups from Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Sul. But the opposition to the *situacionistas* in 1929-30 called itself the Aliança Liberal, not the Aliança Democrática, and although it included in its programme some demands for electoral reform and the 'moralisation' of the electoral system, it did not aim for anything that we would recognise or that, say, Argentines, Uruguayans or Chileans at the time would recognise, as an opening to democracy. In March 1930 1.9 million Brazilians voted (the first time more than a million had done so), and this represented much the largest proportion of the population to vote in an election so far (5.7 per cent – for the first time more than 10 per cent of the adult population).¹³ But the Aliança Liberal lost the election and Getúlio Vargas, its candidate for the presidency, came to power in November 1930 by revolution – or rather by an armed rebellion which led to intervention by the military to overthrow the First Republic.

Nevertheless, Vargas's provisional government in the early 1930s did feel some obligation to electoral reform. It set up an Electoral Reform Commission, and the Electoral Code of February 1932 lowered the voting age to 18 and for the first time gave women the vote. (Brazil was second to Ecuador in Latin America in extending the suffrage to women and fourth after the United States, Canada and Ecuador in the Western Hemisphere.) The vote became secret and, for men and women in public employment, compulsory. Under a new system of Justiça Eleitoral an attempt was made for the first time to provide for the supervision of honest elections in Brazil. All these were democratic conquests, particularly the women's vote. But, overshadowing everything else, the literacy requirement to vote remained in place. And in part because of complicated new registration procedures many

fewer Brazilians in fact registered to vote (1.5 million) and actually voted (1.2 million) in the elections for a Constituent Assembly in May 1933, following the Civil War of 1932 in São Paulo, than in 1930.¹⁴ Women were particularly slow to register; only 15 per cent of those eligible did so. And only one woman, Carlota Pereira de Queiróz (São Paulo), the first woman elected to the national legislature, was elected to the Constituent Assembly. (Another, Berta Luz, was elected a *suplente* (alternate) for Rio de Janeiro and finally took a seat in Congress in 1936.)¹⁵

The 1934 Constitution incorporated the Electoral Code of 1932, and presidential and congressional elections under the new rules, which would have represented a real advance towards democracy, were set for January 1938. However, they were aborted by an institutional military coup, as we would call it now, in November 1937, which led to the establishment of an authoritarian Estado Novo. Getúlio Vargas (elected, it is true, but indirectly – by Congress – in 1934 and for a four year term only) remained president for the next eight years. Congress and state assemblies were closed down; all political parties declared illegal; elections cancelled.

Thus it finally became clear, if there had ever been any doubt, that the Revolution of 1930 was not about democracy. It was about state and nation building, economic development and modernisation, the relations between state and society, especially organised labour. Getúlio Vargas, the key figure in the history of Brazil in the 20th century, never showed much enthusiasm for democracy in the sense of competitive elections with a degree of popular participation. He was particularly hostile to what he called *democracia liberal*, because for a hundred years in Brazil this had meant elite, oligarchical politics with heavy doses of corruption and fraud. Insofar as Vargas believed in democracy at all in the 1930s he believed in *democracia nova*, *democracia autêntica*, and even (would you believe?) *democracia autoritária* – all of which placed much more emphasis on economic and social than on political citizenship. As Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, wrote in his classic *Raízes do Brasil* on the eve of Estado Novo, ‘democracy in Brazil was always a lamentable misunderstanding’.¹⁶

III

We have looked briefly at three defining moments in the first century or so of Brazil’s history as an independent state: independence itself in 1822, the establishment of the Republic in 1889, and the revolution of 1930 leading to the Estado Novo, none of which much advanced democracy, and in particular political participation. In 1945, however, Brazil was undoubtedly democratised, though how far remains to be discussed. What happened in Brazil was part of the world-wide wave of democratisation at the end of the

Second World War. Brazil, like most of the rest of Latin America, had allied itself with the United States in the war against the Axis powers, on the side of democracy against fascism. As a result the Vargas dictatorship came under considerable international (as well as mounting domestic) pressure to liberalise Brazil's political system. Both Vargas himself and the military were well aware of the need to make political adjustments at the end of the war and finally promised 'free' elections. The *estadonovistas* were confident that they had the means (through control of the state apparatus) and support (especially from the ranks of organised labour) to win them. There was to be no return to *democracia liberal*; rather a further advance towards what Vargas now called *democracia social*.

The Electoral Law of May 1945, besides announcing presidential and congressional elections for December (with elections for state governor and state assemblies to follow later) and confirming that both men and women aged 18 and above had the right to vote, always provided they were literate, included two interesting new features: first, the mandatory vote; and, secondly, automatic voter registration for employees in public and private companies (many of whom were in fact illiterate). The latter was designed to ensure the political participation of the urban working class (though not the rural population, around 60-70 per cent of the total) on a significant scale for the first time in Brazilian history. Also for the first time under the Republic national political parties were created. The two most important – the opposition União Democrática Nacional (UDN) and the party created by Vargas to continue the work of the Estado Novo, the Partido Social Democrático (PSD) – signalled in their names their commitment (at this point largely rhetorical) to democracy. Both parties chose military figures as their candidates: the PSD General Eurico Dutra, the UDN Brigadier Eduardo Gomes – neither with much popular appeal, certainly less than either Vargas or Luis Carlos Prestes, the leader of the Brazilian Communist party (PCB). It was to be, it seemed, *democracia do general* versus *democracia do brigadeiro*.

So far, democratisation in Brazil had been initiated and controlled *pelo alto*, from above. But between May and October Brazil – or, to be more precise, Brazil's major cities – experienced unprecedented mass political mobilisation, orchestrated in part by the PCB, with its call for *democracia genuína*, and more particularly by the so-called *queremistas* (from the slogan 'Queremos Getúlio', We want Getúlio), offering a kind of *democracia populista*. There were growing fears among those conservative sectors in Brazil newly committed to 'democracy' not only that popular forces were being dangerously radicalised but that the elections scheduled for December would not in fact be held (hence the slogan 'Lembrai-vos de "37"', Remember '37). It took a 'soft intervention' by the United States and a

military coup, in which Vargas was removed from power, to guarantee the elections.

The elections of 2 December 1945 were the first reasonably free and fair (despite a certain amount of official manipulation), competitive (even the Brazilian Communist party was allowed to take part), relatively popular elections ever held in Brazil. 7.5 million Brazilians registered to vote in 1945 (half of them by means of the ex-officio registration through the workplace). This was 4 or 5 times the number who registered in 1930 and a substantial proportion (17 per cent) of the population (35 per cent of the adult population). The turn out was huge (83 per cent, 6.2 million voters). Victory in the presidential elections, however, went to General Dutra and in the elections for Congress (which was to serve first as a Constituent Assembly) to the PSD, both essentially representative of the authoritarian Estado Novo – and not without a little last minute help from Getúlio Vargas.¹⁷

During the next twenty years, three further ‘democratic’ presidential elections – in 1950 (won by Vargas), 1955 and 1960 – and four further ‘democratic’ congressional elections – in 1950, 1954, 1958 and 1962 – were held.¹⁸ As a result of the growth of the population (from 40 million in 1940 to 70 million in 1960), urbanisation (35 per cent of the population was classified as urban in 1940, 45 per cent in 1960) and some improvement in literacy rates the electorate grew steadily and reached 18 million in 1962. A dozen political parties were in competition. And, particularly in the light of what followed, the post war period came to be regarded as a golden age of civil liberties. On the other hand, since the transition from dictatorship to democracy had been controlled by, and the elections won by, the forces that had sustained the Estado Novo, Brazil’s newly instituted democracy was restricted in scope and fundamentally anti-popular in nature.

In 1946 the Constituent Assembly, dominated as it was by what have been called *democratas autoritários*,¹⁹ had insisted on retaining literacy as a requirement for the right to vote. As a result, under the ‘democratic’ Constitution of 1946 more than half the adult population of Brazil remained disenfranchised. (In 1950 Congress also incidentally restored individual responsibility for voter registration – on the face of it a liberal measure but in the circumstances of Brazil at the time a blow aimed at the political participation of the working class.) The distribution of seats in the Chamber of Deputies ensured, as it does to an even greater extent today, that the less populated, less developed, more conservative regions of Brazil, especially the Northeast and the North, were overwhelmingly over-represented in Congress at the expense of the South and Southeast, especially the state of São Paulo. Built into the system were enormous possibilities for conflict between Congress and a reform-minded president directly elected by majority vote. In May 1947 Congress declared the Brazilian Communist Party, the only

significant party of the Left, once again illegal, after only 18 months of *de facto* legality, even though in both the elections of December 1945 and the supplementary Congressional, gubernatorial, state assembly and municipal elections of January 1947 – which represented a further stage in the democratisation of Brazil at the end of the Second World War – it had polled 10 per cent of the restricted vote (half a million votes).²⁰ The Brazilian Left, which was not for its part always fully committed to legal strategies and the electoral road to power, was now effectively excluded from ‘formal’ democratic politics (and remained so for the next forty years). Finally, and most important of all, the military retained the independent political power it had exercised during the Estado Novo, indeed since the Revolution of 1930. The military was largely beyond civilian control; without its support it was impossible for any democratically elected president to survive in power.

Democracy (of this limited kind – ‘middle class democracy’ Hélio Jaguaribe likes to call it) survived in Brazil, as it did not in many Latin American countries, beyond the immediate post war years (which coincided with the early stages of the Cold War), not least because of this military tutelage. In the mid-fifties Brazil was one of only four ‘democracies’ in Latin America, alongside Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica. Brazil’s democracy was underpinned by the rapid economic growth of the post war period. It survived several political crises, notably those leading to, and deepened by, the suicide of President Vargas in 1954 and the resignation of President Quadros in 1961. In the early 1960s, however, with by now a much higher level of popular political participation, a number of factors, principally a sharp economic down-turn but also including the impact of the Cuban revolution, combined to radicalise and therefore to polarise politics in Brazil, and to challenge democracy itself. Important political actors were no longer willing to make the compromises necessary to ensure democracy’s survival. Labour and the left were prepared to take risks outside the democratic framework in their pursuit of radical social and economic change. The right (including now large sections of the urban middle class) was prepared to support (indeed encourage) a military coup if this was the only way of preventing radical economic and social change. In the ensuing political turmoil President João Goulart (1961-64) misread the relative strength of political forces in Brazil. Overestimating the strength of the organised popular forces for change and underestimating the strength of the existing power structure, civilian and military, and its unity and decisiveness when its interests came under threat, he attempted to create an opening to the left. The result was the overthrow of Goulart by the military, bringing to an end Brazil’s post-war ‘experiment with democracy’.²¹ In his speech of 13 March 1964 that so provoked the right, besides advocating agrarian reform, the legalisation of the Communist party, and various nationalistic economic measures, Goulart had argued in favour of extending the vote to the illiterate half of the population – the first

time a president of Brazil had ever done so – prompting Antônio Callado, the journalist and novelist, to comment at the time of the *golpe*: ‘Brazil is a country that can be governed by illiterates but not elected by illiterates’.²²

The ‘Revolution’ of April 1964 made use of a good deal of democratic rhetoric; it aimed to ‘restore democracy’ and the phrase ‘guided democracy’ was frequently heard. In fact, during the following years, and especially after the ‘coup within the coup’ of December 1968 and the establishment of the ‘national security state’, the military regime destroyed or at least undermined the democratic institutions so precariously maintained during the post war period. Presidents were ‘elected’ after 1964, but indirectly elected by an Electoral College of legislators in which (until 1984 at least) the regime could count on a majority. In practice all five military presidents were imposed by the military high command. State governors (until 1982) and mayors of state capitals and other cities of importance to ‘national security’ were also appointed by the military. Congress and state legislatures, it is true, continued to function for the most part, though with their powers much reduced. And, one of the more curious features of Brazil’s military regime, they continued to be elected every four years by direct secret vote. Elections were not free, of course: the old party system was completely restructured, leaving (until 1979) only two parties, the pro-government ARENA (later Partido Democrático Social, PDS) and the opposition MDB (later Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, PMDB); constantly changing electoral rules guaranteed majorities for the ruling party; the opposition was controlled in a variety of ways. It was, President Geisel used to say, *democracia restrita*. But, as a result of population growth, even more rapid urbanisation and further advances towards universal literacy, the electorate actually expanded – dramatically, from under 20 million to over 60 million – during the period of authoritarian military rule (1964-85).²³

IV

Brazil’s second democratisation, much more far reaching than that of 1945, was completed in 1989. But when did it begin? In 1974, with President Geisel’s unexpected announcement in March that he wanted a slow, calm, secure ‘decompression’ of the political system and the congressional elections in October in which the MDB behaved for the first time like an opposition party and was rewarded by the electorate for doing so? In 1979, with the amnesty, the extension of civil liberties, the party reform, the emergence of a new unionism and the formation of the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT)? In 1982, with the direct election of state governors for the first time in almost 20 years and the victory of the opposition (PMDB and, in the case of Rio de Janeiro, Leonel Brizola’s Partido Democrático Trabalhista, PDT) in 10 of the 23 states? (For political scientists interested

in the process of democratisation this was Brazilian democracy's 'founding election'). In 1983, when the business community first signalled its willingness to abandon the military regime? In 1984, with the mass mobilisation for *diretas já* (direct elections, i.e. direct presidential election, now)? Certainly Brazil's was the slowest and most complex of all the transitions from authoritarian military rule to democracy in Latin America at the time.²⁴

Like that of 1945, the democratisation of the 1970s and 1980s was initiated and – at least until 1984-5, and some would argue perhaps even then – controlled from above. It was not even clear that basic democracy as we have defined it here – free, fair and competitive elections, based on universal suffrage, to decide who should govern Brazil; i.e. in a presidential system, genuinely democratic presidential elections – was ever the intended outcome. Rather the regime sought to consolidate and advance its own institutionalisation and reduce the costs of repression. The democratisation process was not primarily a response to opposition victories in elections (as in 1974 or 1982) or international pressure and example or mass mobilisation for political change (as in 1984), although these all played their part. The movement for *diretas já* between January and April 1984 for a time threatened to overwhelm, even de-rail, the process of controlled democratisation from above. The point to remember, however, is that it was defeated. Its principal demand – constitutional change to permit direct presidential elections in 1984 – failed, by 22 votes on 25 April 1984, to secure the necessary two thirds majority in Congress; presidential elections in 1984 would once again be indirect.

Against a background of deepening economic crisis and social unrest, however, at the height of the debt crisis, the Figueiredo administration – crisis ridden, factionalised, incompetent, corrupt – lost control of the presidential succession. When the PDS split over the succession and the regime could no longer count on a majority in the Electoral College for an acceptable candidate, the military threw its weight behind a deal struck between PDS dissidents (who formed the Partido da Frente Liberal, PFL) and the PMDB, and settled on the relatively safe 75 year old, liberal-conservative opposition politician, Tancredo Neves as the presidential candidate of what became known as the Aliança Democrática. On 15 January 1985, Tancredo was duly elected (by 480 votes to the 180 cast for Paulo Maluf, the candidate of the PDS, also a civilian), a victory which signalled the end of military rule in Brazil. But Tancredo never took office. He was taken ill on the eve of his inauguration and died a few weeks later. The presidency went to the vice-president-elect José Sarney who was, though a civilian (and therefore the first civilian president of Brazil in more than two decades), the former president of the PDS.

A transition from military to civilian rule (but not yet to democracy) had been effected – and peacefully effected. It was a *transição pactuada, sem ruptura*. The República Nova, like the limited form of democracy established in 1945-6, was thus compromised by its origins. It was built on the institutional foundations of the authoritarian regime it replaced. Those who were anticipating simply a continuation of military rule by other means were, however, confounded. Powerful forces now existed, and not least popular forces, determined that the transition should be continued, should be deepened and should end in democracy. Expectations had been raised that could not be denied. In the first months of the Sarney administration (May and June 1985) a series of far-reaching Constitutional amendments finally enfranchised illiterates (still over 30 million of them, between 20 and 25 per cent of the population, a large proportion black); legalised the parties of the left, including the Communist party; and declared all future elections for mayor, state governor and president direct – though in the case of the presidency not immediately. Sarney was determined to serve a full term; indeed he successfully manoeuvred the extension of the term from four to five years. The November 1985 municipal elections were the first elections in Brazil based on universal suffrage, but few *analfabetos* had time to register. November 1986 saw the first elections for Congress and for state governor on universal suffrage, although even now only half the *analfabetos* registered to vote.²⁵ The 1987-90 Congress to which had been elected 26 women (more than had been elected in the entire period 1932-86) and 19 blacks (including the first black woman, Benedita da Silva, PT, Rio de Janeiro), served first as a Constituent Assembly. Among many other interesting, not to say bizarre, features of the Constitution it finally produced in 1988 was a lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16.

The 1989 presidential election, the first direct presidential election for 30 years, was also the first presidential election based upon universal suffrage in the history of Brazil. It was held symbolically on the centenary of the Republic (15 November 1989). The electorate now numbered 82 million (in a population of almost 150 million) and the turn out was high (88 per cent, 70.2 million voters).²⁶ 70 per cent of this huge electorate voted for the first time in a presidential election. 22 parties from across the political spectrum contested the first round. In the second round Brazilians were offered a straight choice between Right (Fernando Collor de Mello, Partido da Renovação Nacional, PRN) and Left (Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, PT). The election was won (with 53 per cent of the votes cast) by Collor de Mello, a relatively unknown politician from the poor Northeastern state of Alagoas, who six months before had almost no political organisation but who, crucially, became the preferred candidate of TV Globo. Few incoming presidents in Brazil faced such daunting problems – economic, political and social. Few presidents were less well equipped (by personality, training and experience, and by the extent of their support in Congress) to deal with them.

He was always likely to fail, in my view, and fail he did. Brazil's first democratically elected president was successfully impeached less than half way through his term of office, though not essentially for his failure to deal with Brazil's economic, social and political problems but for corruption.²⁷

Yet another elected president had failed to serve out his full term: Vargas, elected in 1950, committed suicide; Café Filho, who replaced him, was hospitalised; Quadros, elected in 1960, resigned; Goulart, who replaced him, was overthrown; Collor de Mello was impeached. Only two presidents directly elected by more than one in ten of the adult population have ever served their full term: Eurico Dutra (1946-51) and, the only civilian, Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-61).

V

Finally, what are the future prospects for democracy in Brazil? There is clearly very little in the past to justify much optimism. The historical record reveals deep rooted obstacles in Brazil, as in the rest of Latin America, to the establishment, consolidation and successful functioning of a genuinely democratic political system. We have seen *democracia coroada*, oligarchical democracy, *democracia autoritária*, middle class democracy, populist democracy, guided democracy, *democracia restrita*, but not much democracy, as the Brazilians would say, *sem adjetivos, sem condições*, at least not until 1989-90.

Even in the current situation there are some negative features that cannot be ignored and some questions that have to be asked. First, there is the question of the notorious, but possibly exaggerated, weakness of Brazil's democratic institutions. Some political scientists currently obsessed with the virtues of parliamentarianism would claim that in Brazil, as in the rest of Latin America, the presidential system itself is a major obstacle to democracy.²⁸ Certainly a presidential system in which there are built-in conflicts with Congress, as in Brazil, presents problems of governability, particularly when, as is also the case in Brazil, the political parties are many, new, unrepresentative, weak, unstable and (except perhaps for the PT) without ideological or programmatic consistency. In 1986 only the Communist parties had been in continuous existence for more than 20 years. One in three Congressmen elected in 1986 switched parties before the end of their term of office, sometimes more than once. In 1990 41 parties offered candidates in the gubernatorial and congressional elections: 10 (compared with 2 in 1986) elected governors, 13 (compared with 9 in 1986) federal senators, and 19 (compared with 11 in 1986) federal deputies. One political scientist has described Brazil as the most severe case of party underdevelopment of any democratic country in the world.²⁹

Secondly, we have to ask whether the commitment of leading political actors to democracy is totally secure. Is the Left now fully and permanently committed to peaceful, electoral politics? Probably. Does the military, whose privileges and prerogatives, including the right to intervene in the political process, are explicitly recognised in the 1988 Constitution, now fully accept subordination to legally constituted civilian power? Possibly. Are the 'propertied classes' (including broad sections of the middle class) more than fair weather democrats? Who knows? When the costs of overthrowing democracy and resorting to authoritarianism are high and the costs of tolerating democracy are low, democracy is likely to survive. But when the interests of what we might call the civilian Right are threatened by forces favouring a significant distribution of wealth and power, as they were, or were believed to be, in 1961-4, there is always a possibility that it will look to the military to overthrow democracy. A real test for the sustainability of democracy in Brazil through the 1990s and beyond would be the ready acceptance by the military and the civilian Right of a possible (albeit unlikely) Lula victory in the 1994 presidential elections.

Finally, there is the question, which cannot be discussed fully here, of whether democracy can properly function in conditions of such extreme social and economic inequality and widespread poverty (amounting to social apartheid, if you will) as are to found in Brazil (and which, despite Brazil's claims to be a *democracia racial*, have a clear racial dimension). It might be argued that it was the first attempt to begin to resolve these deep-seated socio-economic structural problems, which have their roots, some would say, in slavery, that brought down Brazil's first 'experiment with democracy' in 1964. They remain unresolved. Indeed, after some improvement as a consequence of economic growth and a certain amount of social mobility in the 1970s the situation has worsened as a result of the economic difficulties of the 1980s and the (albeit necessary) structural adjustment policies of the 1990s. Democratically elected governments are now responsible for dealing with these problems. When they fail, and when at the same time they are demonstrably corrupt, democracy itself is discredited and loses legitimacy with a predominantly very young, very poorly educated and very poor electorate. In the November 1990 elections for state governor, senator and federal deputy in Brazil – in which voting was mandatory for those between the ages of 18 and 70 – the number of ballot papers that were *branco* (blank) or *nulo* (spoiled), 25, 35 and 50 per cent respectively, was extraordinarily high by the standards of any democracy in the world. (Following the impeachment of the president and the congressional corruption scandals the figures could well be higher in 1994.) An electorate disenchanted to this extent with democracy is susceptible to the appeal of the populist authoritarian Right. This is now perhaps the most serious short term threat to democracy in Brazil.

There is no need, however, to be excessively pessimistic. There are some positive signs not only that Brazil's new democracy can survive but also perhaps, and equally important, that Brazilian democracy can be democratised. In the first place, Brazil is a country which for its size and population – four times the size of Mexico, the other Latin American giant, with twice its population – has remarkably few of the regional, racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, ideological tensions and conflicts that threaten democracies, old and new, throughout most of the world. In this sense Brazil is uniquely fortunate. Secondly, civil society is stronger today in Brazil than it ever has been, and stronger than in most other Latin American republics. Thirdly, important political actors on both the Right and the Left, who have not always been committed to democracy in the past, have learned some hard lessons in recent years. The impeachment of the president in 1992 was not only evidence of the growing maturity of Brazilian democracy; it was the first political crisis in the history of the republic in which the military was not an active participant. Fourthly, the international environment is uniquely favourable to democracy. In particular, under President Clinton, as to some degree under Presidents Reagan and Bush, the United States has made support for democracy a central feature of its policy towards Latin America, which has at the same time been given a higher profile. More specifically, with the end of the Cold War anti-communism is no longer available as the main justification for the overthrow of democracy as it was in Brazil in both 1937 and 1964.

Finally, and most importantly, since the best way to have democracy is to have it, as Adolf Berle, the US ambassador to Brazil in 1945, liked to say, and as it were learn it, it is important to remind ourselves that Brazil has had from its beginnings in the early 19th century strong liberal democratic traditions and aspirations. It has also had, as we have seen, a long history of contested elections, continuing even through two decades of military rule. Since 1982 there have been seven direct nation-wide elections in Brazil. Moreover, since the 1930s, and to an accelerated degree during the 1980s, wider sections of the Brazilian population – the urban middle class, the urban working class, women, the urban and rural poor, blacks etc. – have gradually been incorporated into the political process. Since 1985 the suffrage has been universal, extended in 1988 to all Brazilians over the age of 16. As a result, in the early/middle 1990s some 100 million Brazilians have the right to vote. Because of the mandatory vote the turn-out in Brazilian elections, unlike elections in the United States, for example, is always high. And in Brazil, unlike Mexico, for example, recent elections have been remarkably honest, fair and free of fraud. Next year, on 3 October 1994, Brazil will hold its second fully democratic presidential elections and its third fully democratic gubernatorial and congressional elections since the transition from military to civilian rule in 1985. For the first time since 1950 presidential, gubernatorial, congressional, and state assembly elections will be held on the

same day. It will be the greatest democratic election not only in the history of Brazil but in the history of Latin America.

Notes

1. Only yesterday (19 May 1993), the *Financial Times* reported that after a four-hour meeting in Brasília to discuss military dissatisfaction with both pay and conditions and with the military budget, and to review the political and social crisis in Brazil, following the impeachment of President Fernando Collor de Mello and the failure of successive stabilisation plans, President (former vice-president) Itamar Franco and the chiefs of the three armed services had issued a joint communiqué which, among other things, warned: 'Democracy is a delicate plant [in Brazil] requiring careful attention if it is not to wither....[It] cannot be allowed to commit suicide'.

2. There is, in fact, quite an interesting debate amongst historians about whether at the end of the eighteenth century the municipal *câmaras*, like the *cabildos* in Spanish America, were more than simply crown-appointed, self-perpetuating oligarchies; perhaps there is a sense in which they, and local judges, were nominated or 'elected' by *homens bons*, men of good standing.

3. At the time Brazilians were living under a dual monarchy, as a result of the transfer of the Portuguese court to Brazil under threat from Napoleon in 1808. Brazil was not, therefore, strictly speaking a colony.

4. See Leslie Bethell, 'The independence of Brazil', in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol III *From Independence to 1870* (Cambridge, 1985), chapter 4. See also Emília Viotti da Costa, 'The political emancipation of Brazil', in A. J. R. Russell-Wood (ed.), *From Colony to Nation: essays on the independence of Brazil* (Baltimore, 1975) and 'Independence: the building of a nation', in Emília Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: myths and histories* (Chicago, 1985).

5. On the political system of the Empire, see José Murilo de Carvalho's unpublished PhD thesis, 'Elites and state building in imperial Brazil' (Stanford, 1974). The first part, revised and expanded, has been published as *A construção da ordem: a elite política imperial* (Rio de Janeiro, 1980), and the second part, also revised and expanded, as *Teatro de sombras: a política imperial* (Rio de Janeiro, 1988). See also Richard Graham, *Patronage and politics in nineteenth century Brazil* (Stanford, 1990), which includes the best available study of imperial elections. The best brief guide to electoral legislation during both the

Empire and the Republic is Maria D'Alva Gil Kinzo, *Representação política e sistema eleitoral no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1980).

6. Graham, *Patronage and politics*, p. 109, Table 2, and p. 332, note 41.

7. João Camillo de Oliveira Torres, *A democracia coroada (teoria política do império do Brasil)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1957).

8. Graham, *Patronage and politics*, p. 202; Joseph L. Love, 'Political participation in Brazil, 1881-1969', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1970), p. 7.

9. Graham, *Patronage and politics*, pp. 185-6 and 200. John Stuart Mill, the great apostle of democracy, was against giving the votes to illiterates in England, too, but Mill at least believed in extensive public education to reduce the level of illiteracy, not something advocated by many people in Brazil in the late 19th century. An interesting essay on literacy and the vote in Brazil is José Honório Rodrigues, 'O voto do analfabeto e a tradição política brasileira', in his *Conciliação e reforma no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1965; 2nd ed. 1982).

10. Quoted in José Murilo de Carvalho, *Os bestializados: o Rio de Janeiro e a república que não foi* (São Paulo, 1987), p. 10.

11. Love, 'Political participation', p. 7. For valuable statistical information on the elections of 1898, indeed all elections in Brazil down to 1990, see the compilation by Bolivar Lamounier and Judith Muszynski in Dieter Nohlen (ed.), *Enciclopedia electoral latinoamericana y del Caribe* (San José, 1993), pp. 93-134, especially Table 2.1 'Evolución del electorado 1933-1990' [in fact 1894-1990] (p. 99) and Table 2.9 'Elecciones presidenciales 1894-1989' (pp. 125-30).

12. Carvalho, *Os bestializados*, chapter 3, 'Cidadãos inativos: a abstenção eleitoral'.

13. Love, 'Political participation', p. 9; Lamounier and Muszynski, 'Brasil', in Nohlen (ed.), *Enciclopedia electoral*, pp. 99 and 128.

14. Nohlen (ed.), *Enciclopedia electoral*, p. 99.

15. June Hahner, *Emancipating the female sex. The struggle for women's rights in Brazil, 1850-1940* (Durham, N.C., 1991), pp. 171-3.

16. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Os raízes do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1936).

17. For a fuller account of post war 'democratisation', see Leslie Bethell, 'Brazil', in Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (eds.), *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948* (Cambridge, 1992), chapter 1. A somewhat different interpretation is provided by Stanley Hilton in 'The overthrow of Getúlio Vargas in 1945: Diplomatic intervention, defense of democracy, or political retribution?', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1987).

18. Electoral politics in the period 1945-64 have received a good deal of attention: see, for example, Thomas E. Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil, 1930-1964: an experiment in democracy* (New York 1967); Maria do Carmo Campello de Souza, *Estado e partidos políticos no Brasil (1930 à 1964)* (São Paulo, 1976) and 'A democracia populista (1945-64); bases e limites', in Alain Rouquié et al, *Como renascem as democracias* (São Paulo, 1985); Olavo Brasil de Lima, *Os partidos políticos brasileiros: a experiência federal e regional, 1945-64* (Rio de Janeiro, 1983) and 'Electoral participation in Brazil (1945-1978): the legislation, the party systems and electoral turnouts', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1983); and Antonio Lavareda, *A democracia nas urnas: o processo partidário eleitoral brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1991). Women did not do very well in the period 1945-64. Only two women were elected to Congress. See Hahner, *Emancipating the female sex*, p. 183.

19. João Almino, *Os democratas autoritários: liberdades individuais, de associação política e sindical na constituinte de 1946* (São Paulo, 1980).

20. Bethell, 'Brazil', in Bethell and Roxborough (eds), *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War*, pp. 56 and 62. For an insight into Luis Carlos Prestes's views on democracy in this period, see his *Problemas atuais de democracia* (Rio de Janeiro, 1947).

21. On the collapse of post war democracy in 1964, see Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil, 1930-1964* and also Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, *Sessenta e quatro: Anatomia da crise* (São Paulo, 1986), originally a Stanford University PhD, thesis, and Argelina Maria Cheibub Figueiredo, *Democracia ou reformas? Alternativas democráticas à crise política, 1961-1964* (São Paulo, 1993), originally a University of Chicago PhD thesis.

22. Antônio Callado, *Tempo de Arraes* (1964), quoted in Rodrigues, *Conciliação e reforma*, p. 169.

23. On elections during the period of military rule (1964-85), see Raimundo Pereira et al., *Eleições no Brasil pós 64* (Rio de Janeiro, 1984); Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, *Crise e castigo: Partidos e gerais na política brasileira* (São Paulo, 1987); Maria D'Alva Gil Kinzo, *Legal opposition politics under authoritarian rule in Brazil: the MDB, 1966-79* (Oxford, 1988); David

Fleischer (ed.), *Da distensão à abertura: as eleições de 1982* (Brasília, 1988); and special issues of the *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Políticos*.

24. On the process of liberalisation and eventually democratisation in the 1970s and 1980s there is a vast and growing literature. See, for example, Luciano Martins, 'The "liberalisation" of authoritarian rule in Brazil', in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Latin America* (Baltimore, 1986); William C. Smith, 'The political transition in Brazil: from authoritarian liberalisation and elite consolidation to democratisation', in E. Baloyra (ed.), *Comparing New Democracies: dilemmas of transition and consolidation in Mediterranean Europe and the Southern Cone* (Boulder, Col., 1987); and, above all, Alfred Stepan (ed.), *Democratising Brazil: problems of transition and consolidation* (New York, 1989).

25. For an interesting analysis of the 'black vote' in the elections of 1985 and 1986, see Elza Berquó and Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, 'A emergência do voto negro', *Estudos CEBRAP*, Vol. 33 (July 1992).

26. Nohlen (ed.), *Enciclopedia electoral*, pp. 99 and 130.

27. President Collor de Mello was impeached first in the Chamber of Deputies on 29 September and then, definitively, in the Senate on 29 December 1992, the day on which he chose to resign. He now faces possible criminal prosecution.

28. In a plebiscite last month (21 April 1993) Brazilians rejected a parliamentary system (and a return to the monarchy).

29. See Scott Mainwaring, 'Brazilian party underdevelopment', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 107, No. 4 (1992) and 'Brazil: weak parties, feckless democracy', in Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (eds.), *Building Democratic Institutions: parties and party systems in Latin America* (Stanford, 1993).

