



Dilemmas of the Consolidation of Democracy from the Top in Brazil: A Political Analysis

Author(s): Maria Helena Moreira Alves

Source: *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Democratization and Class Struggle (Summer, 1988), pp. 47-63

Published by: [Sage Publications, Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633790>

Accessed: 16/01/2014 05:25

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Sage Publications, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Latin American Perspectives*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

**Dilemmas of
the Consolidation of Democracy
from the Top in Brazil**
A Political Analysis

by
*Maria Helena Moreira Alves**

Current literature on the process of transition to democracy in Latin American countries often discusses the problems created by the rapid mobilization of popular sectors. From a variety of perspectives, and in the midst of discussing different dilemmas for the consolidation of democracy, most authors point to the danger of increased political and social mobilization. According to this analysis, the danger stems from the fact that fragile democratic governments are unable to cope with the explosion of political, economic, and social demands coming from working-class sectors, which, during the period of transition, tend to organize rapidly in order to pressure for entry into the political and economic scenario (O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead, 1986).

Brazil is, in this context, of particular analytical interest due to the peculiarities both of the process of transition and of the level of organization and consciousness of the working-class sectors. In this article I shall present the view of "those at the bottom," who up until now have been excluded completely from the process of consolidating a democracy "from the top." I shall concentrate on analytical points that are often cavalierly dismissed both in the literature and in political discussions.

As a contribution to the debate on the Brazilian transition from military rule to civilian electoral politics, I would like to consider some

*Maria Helena Moreira Alves is a participating editor of *Latin American Perspectives*. She has lectured extensively on Brazilian politics in the United States and in Europe. She was an Assistant Professor of Latin American Studies at Amherst College and currently teaches at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). She is the Director of the Latin American Studies program within the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros e Internacionais (ISEBI) of the UERJ. She has worked extensively as an adviser to the "new trade-union movement" and is a member of the Secretaria de Formação Sindical of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) in Rio de Janeiro.

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 58, Vol. 15 No. 3, Summer 1988 47-63
© 1988 Latin American Perspectives

important events of the period between 1984 and 1987. One of the most widespread interpretations of the transition process in Brazil points to the significant role played by the military in the planning and implementation of the *abertura* (democratic opening) policy so as to “manage” rationally the political scenario and implement a peaceful, smooth transition out of military rule to conservative civilian rule (see, for example, O’Donnell et al., 1986). This interpretation characterizes the process of transition in Brazil as a “transition from the top,” articulated between civilian and military elite groups. In my book (Alves, 1986) I argued that in order to understand fully the transition process in Brazil it is necessary to come to terms with the full implications of the dialectical relationship that has been established between opposition groups and the civil-military coalition in power from 1964 to 1985. There is no doubt whatsoever, in any political observer’s mind, that the civil-military coalition elaborated a detailed plan of “decompression” of Brazilian society and carried this plan forth with competence and a significant amount of success. That is, they successfully implemented the “timetable” of their “transition from the top” and curbed attempts to push forth more significant measures that would result not in the reform of the regime but in its structural demise.

The opposition to the military governments was organized in two political directions. The elite opposition groups engaged increasingly in what I described in my work as “formal politics.” On the other hand, working-class sectors organized in trade unions, civil associations, and neighborhood organizations, and engaged in “base-related politics.” Together, and sometimes formally integrated in joint coordinating committees, these opposition actors established a dialectical relationship with the state so as to push constantly for reforms greater than those planned in the military’s rigid *abertura* timetable. Although, as I mentioned above, the civil-military coalition in power had considerable success in “managing” the *abertura* policy, by 1984 it had become clear that the level of organization reached by working-class sectors could upset the establishment of a “democracy from the top” designed to exclude popular sectors from economic decision making and political power.

During the period of opposition to the military governments between 1964 and 1984, elite sectors engaged in formal politics were primarily responsible for the step-by-step negotiations to reform and liberalize the regime. Because of this dialectical relationship with the state, the elite sectors became an intrinsic part of the restructuring of the state itself.

Through the negotiations with key elite sectors of the opposition, the Brazilian state was able to continue the process of abertura without compromising the basic structures of political control or significantly altering the economic model. Thus the elite groups played an increasingly important role in the restructuring of the state, rather than in implementing its collapse. The elite opposition groups clearly established priorities that protected their class interests for negotiation with the military.

On the other hand, the working-class sectors, both in urban and in rural areas, were rapidly developing autonomous forms of base-level organization. Workers in rural areas organized widespread political movements among the migrant workers, the day laborers, and the landless peasants, that is, squatters seeking land title. In urban areas after 1978, the “new trade-union movement” succeeded in organizing within government-controlled unions as well as forming, for the first time, autonomous base-level organizations such as factory committees and workers councils. The development of two autonomous trade-union centrals, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and the Central Geral dos Trabalhadores (CGT), also marked an important step in the organization of working-class sectors. These forms of autonomous working-class organizations were complemented by the neighborhood committees and the *comunidades eclesiais de base* (basic Christian communities, or CEBs), which allowed working-class people to meet outside of the place of work. Engaged in “base-related” or grass-roots politics, these working-class sectors pressed for a different set of priorities within the opposition. They pressured for the transformation of the socioeconomic model as well as for political reforms to democratize the state (see Alves, 1984: 73-102).

The development of the base-level forms of organization of the working class placed them for the first time at the forefront of the political scenario of the country. They became important political actors, with a class-related set of priorities, and their level of organization—albeit still fragile—was sufficient to affect significantly the process of transition itself. The working-class sectors not only practiced a different style of politics, which promoted political discussion in the grass roots, thus developing a more and more clearly defined class referential; working-class organizations endeavored to consider alternatives to democratic participation that included the analysis of representational mechanisms to influence public policy.

A recent example was the widespread popular mobilization to force

the members of the Constituent Assembly, elected in November 1986,¹ to accept a proposal to allow organizations in civil society, such as trade unions and community associations, to present amendments to the Constitution. The proposal was accepted by the Constituent Assembly. According to this mechanism, each eligible voter had the right to sign up to three popular amendments. Any proposed amendment that received the support of 30,000 eligible voters automatically had to be discussed and voted on by the Constituent Assembly. This mechanism of direct popular participation in the Constituent Assembly was the only method by which working-class sectors could influence the organizational structure of the state in this period of transition.

However, even this channel of popular participation was in reality made ineffective because of the very makeup of the Constituent Assembly, which, almost in its entirety, represents the interests of the bourgeoisie and the landowners. The strength of such representation led the members of the Constituent Assembly to reject the Popular Amendment for Agrarian Reform signed by more than 1.5 million voters. The final composition of the articles dealing with land tenure reflected the interests of the landowners almost entirely, disregarding the alternatives proposed by the Popular Amendment for Agrarian Reform. The popular amendment presented by trade unions, suggesting, for example, a 40-hour week and job security guarantees, met a similar fate due to the organized pressure of capital owners and representatives of multinational corporations. In conclusion, the largely elite composition of the Constituent Assembly was responsible for almost entirely blocking attempts of social and political reform from those "at the bottom."

What is currently happening with the Constituent Assembly has its roots in the class difference between the two opposition sectors, which became more sharply defined with the inevitable demise of the National Security State. A significant turning point was reached with the "Campaign for Direct Elections" in early 1984. Congressman Dante de Oliveira, of the then-opposition Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement, or PMDB), presented in Congress an amendment to the military's Constitution of 1969. This amendment would abolish the system of choosing the president through an indirect electoral college. The election of Figueiredo's successor would then be through direct, popular, and secret ballot of all Brazilian citizens eligible to vote. In support of this amendment, and in order to sway the vote of recalcitrant members of

Congress, the opposition groups, of both the elite and popular sectors, organized a campaign for the "right to elect the President." In the next few months massive demonstrations were held in every city with a population of more than 100,000. The rallies gathered, in virtually every city, the largest crowds to demonstrate in history. The campaign gathered momentum until the unprecedented demonstrations of Rio de Janeiro, with approximately one million participants, and São Paulo, where the police estimated a crowd of close to two million people who occupied most of the downtown streets of the metropolis. All in all, within a period of little more than three months, approximately 10 million people took to the streets to demand the right to vote for president. The "Campaign for Direct Elections" established certain precedents of symbolic political value. The slogan "I want to vote for President" was written on millions of shirts, buildings, trees, posters, records, outdoors, walls, and mountains of the country. The color of the campaign, yellow, became so widespread that the streets of major cities resembled fields of marigolds. The feeling of participatory citizenship was reinforced by the active recuperation of national symbols. Crowds held hands and sang the Brazilian national anthem. People embraced each other and wrapped themselves in huge Brazilian flags. The important political point was made that "the nation belongs to its citizenry, not exclusively to those in political power." This point also was not lost upon the members of the opposition, who came from the dominant classes. For the first time in Brazilian history great numbers of organized groups of working-class people expressed their political desire to enter the private universe of decision making. To make things worse, working-class sectors, during the "Campaign for Direct Elections," expressed not simply their desire to vote for president, but also, more significantly, the reasons. To the simple slogan "I want to vote for President" was added "Direct Elections Now: For Change." All opinion polls indicated the public awareness of what needed to be changed through the exercise of political power: the socioeconomic system.

That elite sectors of the opposition became as frightened as the military by the popular show of force implicit in the "Campaign for Direct Elections" is demonstrated by the events that followed. Almost immediately after the last huge rally in São Paulo, key elite leaders actively began to negotiate with the military a different strategy for the transfer of political power. For two months Brazilians watched in amazement a series of agreements and a 180-degree turnabout in the arguments presented by elite sectors of the opposition. Their major arguments ran as follows:

- (1) Brazilians reject a violent transfer of power through revolutionary means. The continuation of street mobilization of the masses could eventually escape leadership control and become violent.
- (2) The military will not step out of power without a fight, potentially violent. If the opposition groups insist, there will be another period of repression and a “closing” of the abertura policy.
- (3) The attempt to amend the Constitution in Congress and establish direct presidential elections failed. Albeit it failed by only 21 votes and there were two other similar amendments that had been proposed in Congress, the elite leadership considered it too risky to continue to mobilize the population to take to the streets.
- (4) Therefore, the only solution was a negotiated settlement for a peaceful transition, through the indirect electoral college, which would include large sectors of the civil-military coalition.

A definite change of strategy occurred: Tancredo Neves, a senator of the PMDB party (a mostly center-right coalition), was chosen as the “savior”—the only person capable of successfully carrying forth a peaceful transition government with the tacit agreement of the military. The major support party of the civil-military coalition, the Partido Democrático Social (Social Democratic Party, or PDS), was split. The majority of the members and leaders of the PDS, including its long-term president, José Sarney, joined the opposition to form the Democratic Alliance. Tancredo Neves became a candidate for president through the indirect electoral college. José Sarney became his vice president.

At this point it is useful to point out the extremely sophisticated use that the dominant classes made of television. TV Globo is the fourth largest television station in the world (right after NBC, CBS, and ABC), with a regular audience of 50 million Brazilians. It is virtually owned by one man, Roberto Marinho. TV Globo enjoys close to monopoly control of the electronic media through a series of open governmental concessions as well as semilegal mechanisms granted through political influence. The Rede Globo is a multinational corporation that owns over 40 companies. The conglomerate includes not only the ownership of television and radio stations, but also production companies, recording companies, electronic equipment, real estate, and agroindustries. In the area of telecommunications, the Rede Globo owns 7 TV stations outright, owns 6 others partially, and controls 36 affiliated stations throughout the territory of Brazil. The Rede Globo also owns 18 of the most important radio stations in the country, both AM and FM. The Rede Globo covers virtually all of Brazil’s 3,991 municipalities,

reaching an estimated 95 percent of the more than 17 million households that own a TV set. The ratings show that out of every 10 TV sets turned on, 8 are tuned to TV Globo. Of prime importance to political opinion formation is the evening news, which TV Globo places between the two most popular soap operas, thus guaranteeing a captive audience. It is estimated that the *Jornal Nacional* of TV Globo is watched nightly by 50 million Brazilians (*Variety*, 1987: 131, 132, 133, 136).

The Rede Globo has an estimated annual profit of U.S. \$500 million and an estimated total worth of U.S. \$1 billion. It produces 80 percent of its own programs, which are exported to Europe, the United States, and Third World countries. Today the Rede Globo controls approximately 20 percent of all the programs in Latin America. Its worldwide reach has now become so powerful that one can say that, together with the three American giants, it can shape public opinion to a considerable degree (see Herz, 1987).

In Brazil its competence in shaping political public opinion was demonstrated by its ability to swing this opinion around to support the strategy of conciliation with the military through the electoral college. After the first round of negotiations between key elite opposition leaders and the military was over, TV Globo began a widespread and massive political marketing campaign. It utilized the symbology of the "Campaign for Direct Elections" in a most skillful manner: the slogan "Diretas Já: Para Mudar" (Direct Elections Now: For Change) was partially changed—to "Tancredo Já: Para Mudar" (Tancredo Now: For Change). One-minute to three-minute advertisements, completely financed by the TV Globo itself, were broadcast around the clock. The ads consistently carried an image pictured within the colors of the Brazilian flag. The involvement of the powerful telecommunications corporation in the public opinion marketing campaign was most evident in the presentation of daily news programs. Every newscast about the candidacy of Tancredo Neves in the indirect electoral college presented images bordered with the colors of the Brazilian flag. When Tancredo spoke, or when there was news about him, the national anthem could be heard in the background. When Tancredo Neves was interviewed by TV Globo reporters, the image transmitted also contained the colors of the Brazilian flag painted on the corner to one side of the screen. The music that had become most politically attached to the *Diretas Já* campaign played in the background. All of the political symbolism of the *Diretas Já* campaign was succinctly transferred to the newscast that covered the rallies organized to muster support for the candidacy of Tancredo

Neves through the indirect electoral college. The political rallies organized by the Democratic Alliance were portrayed as a continuation of the Campaign for Direct Elections. Political analysis and commentary in the news media emphasized that the change of strategy of the opposition, from demanding the immediate right to elect the president of the Republic by direct secret popular ballot to supporting a candidacy in the indirect electoral college, was perfectly coherent and made political sense. The political groups that dissented from this view were portrayed as irresponsible radicals that barely disguised their ulterior motives of promoting violent revolution. The TV Globo, in this manner, played an important role in legitimizing the indirect electoral college transfer of power and delegitimizing all other political alternatives. As Michael Parenti (1986) would say, in Brazil news media truly “invented reality.”

Soon the yellow shirts of the “Campaign for Direct Elections” were distributed by the thousands, with the replaced slogan “Tancredo Já: Para Mudar” written on the back crossed by a band of the colors of the Brazilian flag—exactly matching the images seen every minute on television. TV Globo aided with gusto the efforts to recreate the huge mass rallies called this time in support of the candidacy of Tancredo Neves. The making of a leader, of a symbolic myth, made widespread use of both national symbols and religious beliefs. It is not surprising that when Tancredo Neves became ill, people prayed and made promises, walking long distances on their knees in a pilgrimage to the hospital while comparing him to a saint.

On the other hand, those who insisted in pointing out that the “Emperor had no clothes,” so to speak, were branded “unpatriotic” and put to shame as “Malufistas”²—aiding and abetting the military. All alternative strategies were vetoed, censored out of television and the media. The TV Globo, in particular, aided the process of inventing reality to fit the desires of the dominant classes. At that point elite sectors of the opposition clearly identified their class interests and actively pursued a policy of national conciliation to retain the monopoly control of political power and to continue to exclude working-class sectors from influence in major decisions.

A brief crisis for elite opposition sectors erupted when Tancredo Neves became ill. Again the power of television in shaping public opinion became evident. The coverage of Tancredo Neve’s illness put emphasis on his martyrdom for the cause of democracy and compared him to saints as well as national heroes. The fact that he died on the

anniversary of the death of Tiradentes, the hero on Brazil's independence, was taken as a further indication of the significance of his leadership. The Rede Globo played its specific role in keeping the population praying, waiting for a political solution to be negotiated strictly between leaders of the elite sectors of the opposition and the military. The solution, the assumption of the presidency by vice president Jose Sarney, was hard to swallow, for he represented so clearly the sectors closest to military rule. The climate of institutional crisis, with veiled predictions of a possible new coup d'état and a new wave of state violence, however, soon silenced protests, and Sarney was accepted reluctantly as the only possible "savior" of democracy. It is possible to argue that this public acceptance, albeit recalcitrant, was the most important victory of the dominant class sectors, which attempted to "manage" a transition to a "democracy from the top." For the obvious alternative—direct elections held immediately, given the dangerous vacuum of legitimate political power—was abruptly and effectively eliminated from the spectrum of political choices available for public consideration.

The very concept of "democracy" at this point became elusive. Democracy for what, by whom, and for whom? To what extent would the political mechanisms of representation be transformed so as to allow the participation of excluded working-class sectors? Democracy is a concept subject to political praxis. By this statement I mean that a democracy is not automatically the result of proper democratic theory but of political applicability. The concept of representative democracy in a bourgeois society is necessarily limited by the influence of economic power upon representational institutions. In practice the theory of "one man, one vote" differs by the availability of economic resources and access to the voting public. The greater the inequality in the distribution of economic power, the less access to political representation is available to non-economically powerful groups. Political actors, in a bourgeois democracy, are constrained by a myriad of political and economic influences that are the direct result of an unequal distribution of wealth. As has been expressed by members of the Brazilian Catholic Church, the Brazilian form of "democracy from the top" marginalizes those who have been excluded from economic power, from knowledge, and from the political body. They make up the vast majority of working-class sectors, who, as a result, "do not have a voice."

A representative democratic government may be more or less open to the political influence of non-economically dominant groups in the

society, depending on the political measures taken to curb the economic control of dominant groups. Such measures as control of television advertising, limitations on financing political campaigns, equal access of all political parties to equal time on television, and subsidies of the state to guarantee the equalized financing of political campaigns all affect in large measure the possibility of groups with little economic power to be represented adequately at any level of government. Such social democratic regulations of bourgeois-democratic procedures, to guarantee a greater measure of participation of working-class sectors in matters of government, are more common in Europe (particularly in Scandinavian countries) than in the United States and are rarely present in Latin America.

A "democracy from the top" conceptualizes a regularized set of procedures designed to impair, if not to prevent outright, the possibility of working-class sectors from actually sharing political power to a degree sufficient to affect economic and social policy. The elections of November 1986 for the Constituent Assembly in Brazil provided us with some examples of how this exclusionary mechanism can be put to work so as to curb the influence of working-class sectors in political representation. Hardly any controls were placed on personal or corporate contributions to political campaigns. Political parties had access to state financing, but this was distributed unequally among them proportionate to their representation (at that moment) in the National Congress. Those with more representatives in the National Congress received more monetary support and other resources for their campaigns. The same rule applied to the distribution of free national television and radio time for presentation of political programs and candidates. In practice this meant that new parties, which had not existed, or were not legal, at the time of the 1982 elections for Congress, had no financial support and no television and radio time at all. Other smaller parties had a share that was smaller than their actual representation in civil society. This was true particularly of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party, or PT), and the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (Democratic Workers' Party, or PDT).³ Both parties, for different political and historic reasons, were more strongly inserted into the working-class social and popular movements than was reflected by their representation in Congress at that time. They therefore obtained very little access to financial support, as well as to television and radio time. On the other hand, the Democratic Alliance, which included two large parties, the PMDB and the Partido da Frente Liberal (Liberal

Front Party, or PFL), as well as numerous smaller left parties, such as the Partido Comunista do Brasil (Communist Party of Brazil, or PC do B), the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Brazilian Communist Party, or PCB), and the Movimento Revolucionário 8 de Outubro (Revolutionary Movement—8th of October, or MR-8), received in total enormous amounts of free television and radio time and could count on the largest share of government funding. The same was true of the parties to the right of the political spectrum. The result was an incredibly unjust and undemocratic system of access to governmental funding, as well as to free TV and radio time: the parties of the Democratic Alliance had a full 65 minutes every day and the military's PDS had 48 minutes, the PDT had 22 minutes, the PT had 5 minutes, and other smaller parties had one to two minutes each. The newest parties, such as the Partido Verde (Green Party, headed by Fernando Gabeira), had no time at all. These TV and radio minutes were broadcast daily on a national chain of every TV and radio station.

In the New Republic political power remained as monopolized in the hands of the dominant classes as before. In 1985, the year prior to the November 1986 elections, there was a public debate on the question of the Constituent Assembly to consider the alternatives that could best represent the interests of all sectors of the society. Two major political proposals were introduced for discussion in Congress with the support of popular movement sectors. These proposals aimed at reforming political institutions by creating mechanisms for greater representation of working-class interests. The first proposal suggested that elections for executive posts (president, governors, and mayors) and senatorial positions should be held in two consecutive elections. The first poll would guarantee to all political parties the right to field candidates. It also would establish equal and free access to television and the media so all parties could present their government plans. Then, in the second election, only the two parties with the most votes would run and coalitions could be formally established. This suggestion would allow all alternative proposals to be seriously discussed and avoid the permanent problem of the *voto útil* (useful vote), whereby voters tend to choose “the lesser evil” and there is little space for alternative proposals.

The second proposal argued for a “*Constituinte livre e soberana*” (Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly), an autonomous Constituent Assembly. The proposal argued against the proposition that the newly elected Congress should simply double as a Constituent Assembly. The proposal explicitly suggested that in addition there should be

special elections for members of the Constituent Assembly to avoid confusing it with regular elections for governor and for members of Congress. This different electoral calendar would guarantee a greater amount of independence to the Constituent Assembly as well as make sure that all public attention was devoted to choosing appropriately those who would write the new Constitution.

There was a widespread campaign in support of the *Constituinte livre e soberana*, based upon the principle that a Constituent Assembly free of the influences and controls of the state expanded the possibility of representation of all sectors of Brazilian society. The Constituent Assembly should, first of all, be free of the direct political influence of the president. For that purpose it should be "sovereign," that is, independent of existing parliamentary procedures that give the president the special right to introduce specific proposals. It would also prevent the executive from having its own leader in the Constituent Assembly, for this *lider do governo* has enormous political influence in making decisions. Most of all, the sovereign Constituent Assembly should be free of congressional regulations, of internal rules that govern procedures, and of the regular congressional calendar. Elected for the exclusive purpose of writing a new constitution, it should present the final text to the population for approval in a plebiscite, and then immediately self-dissolve. Perhaps the most important aspect of the *Constituinte livre e soberana* proposal was that a special election would be governed by different regulations and allow members of working-class organizations to run with greater ease. It would be freed of such electoral party rules as the *candidato nato*, whereby active members of Congress have the automatic right to run on a party slate. It would be free of many of the tight regulations of regular elections that were holdovers from the authoritarian period.⁴

However, both proposals were defeated in Congress by a coalition of parties representing the elite (PMDB, PFL, PTB, and PDS).⁵ The rejection of the proposal to separate the election of the Constituent Assembly from regular elections for members of Congress and for governors resulted in a chaotic election in November of 1986 that included simultaneously the selection of members of the State Assemblies and the National Congress (which doubles as a Constituent Assembly), and election of state governors. The media concentrated so much attention upon the gubernatorial races that the public hardly knew who the candidates for the Constituent Assembly were. The exclusive attention that the media gave to the gubernatorial races was

intended both to deemphasize the importance of the election of members of the Constituent Assembly and to guarantee the control of state executive posts, which in Brazil play a crucial role in national politics. This was particularly true of the Rede Globo, which in Rio de Janeiro openly threw its full weight in support of the campaign of Wellington Moreira Franco (PMDB, PCB, PFL, PC do B, and other smaller parties that composed the Democratic Alliance). Roberto Marinho, president and owner of the Rede Globo, meant to defeat outgoing governor Leonel Brizola's PDT candidate, Darcy Ribeiro, so as to weaken Brizola's overall national prestige as a potential future presidential candidate. *Variety* magazine reported the following:

As the head of this empire, Marinho is obviously one of the most powerful men in Brazil, not only because of his vast holdings, but also because of the political clout he has by controlling the large majority of the country's listening and viewing audience. And, as is inevitable in a position of such power, he has his enemies, especially around election time when Globo has tended to take strong political positions in respect to candidates. One of his most outspoken opponents is Leonel Brizola, ex-political exile under the military regime, head of the opposition PDT, and ex-governor of the province of Rio de Janeiro, who has publicly gone on record as saying he would bring Globo to its knees if he were elected president in the future, a not at all far-fetched possibility considering his following in Brazil. It was largely due to Globo's influence that Brizola lost the last elections for governor of Rio. In a recent New York Times interview (January 12, 1987), Marinho was quoted as saying: "At a determined moment I became convinced that Mr. Leonel Brizola was a bad governor. He transformed the marvelous city that is Rio into a patio of beggars and peddlers. I came to consider Mr. Brizola harmful and dangerous, and I fought; I really used all possibilities to defeat him in the election" [Variety, 1987, 136].

Because the media covered the gubernatorial races almost exclusively, the election for members of the Constituent Assembly became a secondary political event. Some political polls indicated that a significant number of the population were not even aware that they were voting for members of a Constituent Assembly and not simply for members of congress and senators. In some places, as a consequence, the blank or null ballots for the Constituent Assembly (federal members of congress and senators) reached as high as 70 percent.

Another definitive influence in the results of the elections of November 1986 was the Cruzado plan. The Cruzado plan was enacted

without consultation with Congress as a series of decree laws that, among other economic measures, altered the currency and froze wages and prices. It should be pointed out that the price-freeze (at a time when inflation rates reached over 200 percent) was received with relief and widespread support by the population. Candidates fielded by the parties that supported the government of José Sarney used the appeal of the price-freeze to gain voter support. The PDT and the PT both openly criticized the Cruzado plan, pointing out that although the price-freeze was beneficial to workers, salaries had been frozen at a much lower level, and the government was quickly burning treasury reserves to keep the Cruzado plan artificially intact until after the elections. Both Brizola and "Lula" (Luis Inácio da Silva) publicly warned that the plan was generally prejudicial, would revert to galloping inflation after it was over, and was meant mainly to secure votes for the parties allied with the government. There was little media space for the critiques, and the population, through television, was urged to support the transition government of José Sarney and to vote for their candidates.

Four days after the elections of November 15, 1986, when the parties of the Democratic Alliance had secured a landslide victory and almost total control of the gubernatorial posts as well as the majority in the Constituent Assembly, the Cruzado plan was abandoned. José Sarney issued a total of 32 decree-laws that severely cut into working-class wages, altered the methodology of cost-of-living statistics used to negotiate salary levels, and freed all prices. The Cruzado II plan set off the worst economic crisis in the history of Brazil, with inflation levels reaching close to 40 percent per month during the first six months of 1987.

The reaction of the population was one of deep frustration, fury, and a general feeling of betrayal. A few days after the enactment of the Cruzado II plan, a demonstration of over 50,000 people in the streets of Brasilia ended in a violent explosion of anger, a riot that set fire to part of the city. Other violent demonstrations occurred in most major cities, perhaps the most important one being the riots of June 30, 1987, in Rio de Janeiro, when the population fought with the military for over nine hours and burned most of the public buses of the city. The population felt betrayed, angry, desperate. There were few channels for political representation left since the two major parties, the PMDB and the PFL, lost most of their credibility for voters.

The two most important political parties of the opposition, the PDT and the PT, both lack organizational capacity. Being fairly new parties

(founded in 1980), their potential to direct dissent to political channels is limited by their weak structures in terms of organized local directorates in the thousands of municipalities that exist in a country as vast as Brazil. They lack both the financial resources and the historical-political experience to organize public anger effectively to channels capable of lobbying for working-class interests. Their organizational potential was further weakened by the legislation that excluded them both from electoral financial sources and from media coverage. Thus, in effect, no party is seen as a primordial point of reference to working-class interests. The population, feeling that "politicians" had betrayed them twice (first with the "Campaign for Direct Elections" then with the Cruzado II plan), lost faith in political party organization, distrusting almost all "politicians," who are widely viewed as concerned mainly with their own self-interest.

When government is impervious to the interests of the majority, when mechanisms of political representation are seriously blocked, tensions in civil society grow uncontrollably. Without proper channels to government, it is impossible to find alternative solutions to critical economic and social problems.

Unable to even discuss alternatives that directly affect their lives, blocked in their every attempt to create more flexible mechanisms for political participation, working-class sectors continued to organize, mostly *outside* of political parties. Having won, through past efforts, the *de facto* right to strike (not the legal right, for even that is still denied), workers increased their level of pressure to force the new republic to give greater priority to working-class concerns. Classically, a strike is a weapon of the working-class used to extract better conditions from owners of capital. In the case of Brazil, strikes are also becoming a weapon used to force the government to deal with crucial general interests of the working class as a whole. As such, a strike changes from being a pressure tool at the negotiating table and becomes politically important as a means to organize interest groups in civil society.

The argument that working-class pressures "destabilize fragile democratic governments," which are not able to cope with the explosion of socioeconomic demands (see MacEwan, this issue), assumes that the mechanisms for influencing government exist. The argument assumes that, in fact, there is a democracy, here defined as a set of governmental institutions that formalize channels of representation actually to influence public policy. To continue to block the formation of such channels, while at the same time blaming those who have been excluded

for the political instability that results, is a dangerous game that can lead only to political and institutional chaos. Brazil is at the brink of perhaps the most serious economic, social, and political crisis in its history. Serious debate must recognize the right of those “from the bottom” to participate in the discussion of alternatives. The working-class sectors are de facto political actors. To continue to marginalize them from political power—so as to avoid seriously dealing with the dramatic social and economic problems of the majority of the Brazilian population—prevents the democratic building of representational channels. The anger and frustration that results from a continued exclusion from society may indeed become manifest in a socially explosive manner. The conclusion, however, is *not* that the demands of popular movements are a threat to the stability of a new and fragile democracy, but that the monopolization of political power by elite groups—to the total exclusion of other class sectors—is the *real* threat to the consolidation of a democracy in Brazil.

A democracy from the top marginalizes the majority of the population. The consolidation of the transition to democracy in Brazil can occur only if a political pact can be discussed and implemented in dialogue with the organized sectors that represent the working class. This dialogue must necessarily take the demands of the marginalized seriously to begin to build mechanisms of representation that can lead to a participatory democracy. Consolidating democracy means accepting that working-class sectors are de facto important political actors. Consolidating democracy must begin with deep modifications in the economic, social, and political structures of society that, up to now, have been monopolized entirely by elite sectors.

NOTES

1. The elections of November of 1986 for the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies chose the new Congress, which was to act as the Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution to replace the Constitution of 1946, which was severely revised by the military regimes after 1964.

2. A reference to Paulo Maluf, who was appointed governor of the state of São Paulo by the military and was the PDS candidate for president in the indirect electoral college in January of 1985, against the candidate of the Democratic Alliance, Tancredo Neves. To call someone a “Malufista” was considered an insult.

3. The PT is a mass-based party whose president, Luis Inácio da Silva, “Lula,” was the most-voted member of the Constituent Assembly for the Chamber of Deputies,

representing the state of São Paulo. The PDT is headed by Leonel Brizola, former governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro and considered to be one of the strongest candidates for the presidency—assuming there will in fact be direct and free elections by popular vote.

4. In my book (Alves, 1986), I describe in detail the electoral mechanisms that were passed by the military to limit the possibilities of representation by working-class sectors.

5. The proposal for a two-turn election for executive posts was defeated, but a separate proposal that established a two-turn electoral system for choosing the president was passed by Congress in another vote.

REFERENCES

- Alves, Maria Helena Moreira
 1984 "Grassroots organizations, trade unions and the Church: a challenge to the controlled abertura in Brazil." *Latin American Perspectives* 11 (Winter): 73-102.
 1986 *State and Opposition in Military Brazil*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Herz, Daniel
 1987 *A história secreta de Rede Globo*. Pôrto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul: Tche Editora Ltda.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead (eds.)
 1986 *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Washington: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Parenti, Michael
 1986 *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Variety (International Broadcasting)*
 1987 "Globo has Brazil TV in its pocket." March 25: 131-144.