

The Persecution of Political and Social Scientists in Brazil

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In recent issues of *PS*, American political and social scientists have been accused – by their colleagues – of *subservience* to the established order. Of equal concern to the profession should be the paradoxical plight of their Brazilian colleagues who, while pursuing much the same goals and utilizing many of the same techniques of inquiry, find themselves accused – by their government – of *subversion*, and very actively persecuted for this charge.

The following is a description of the situation of Brazilian social scientists since December 1968. Official censorship, self-imposed prudence and the understandable propensity for foreign journalists to concentrate on the more spectacular and horrifying aspects of Brazil's current regime, e.g. torture, assassination by "political police" or vigilante group, arbitrary arrest and loss of political rights by prominent politicians, make it difficult to obtain reliable documentation. Much of the information I gathered personally during a three week stay in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Porto Alegre in May of 1969. This has been updated with the help of Brazilian scholars resident in the United States. For obvious reasons I cannot recognize their efforts personally. I would, however, like to thank Mr. William Wipfler of National Council of the Churches of Christ and Professor Ralph Della Cava of Queens University who are preparing a comprehensive dossier on civil rights violations for proximate publication.

In April of 1964 Brazil experienced a military coup – to the immediate and obvious satisfaction of authorities in Washington.¹ Many regarded it as providing an expedient caretaker to correct the inflationary, "demagogic" excesses of the previous Goulart regime and pave the way for a rapid return of democratic normality. They were destined to be sorely disappointed as the military openly proclaimed their intention of exercising a much more prolonged, tutelary role. The first "Revolutionary Government" (Castello Branco, 1964-67) swept away the previous party system, deprived over eight hundred persons of all political rights for ten years² purged much of the civil service, periodically shut down the Congress and left in its wake an immense quantity of decreed legislation, not the least of which was a new constitution. There was widespread hope that his successor, General Arthur da Costa e Silva, the former War Minister, would "humanize" the policies of the "Revolution" and respect the new constitution which, while institutionalizing strong authoritarian rule, at least might have eliminated some of its more arbitrary manifestations.

The Fifth Institutional Act. This prospect was abruptly cancelled by the promulgation of the Fifth Institutional Act on December 13, 1968. The immediate "provocation" for the Act was the refusal of Congress to waive the immunity of one of its members who had dared to speak out against the military after their invasion of the University of Brasília and who was, therefore, accused of "publicly inciting animosity between the armed forces". But the resultant act was entirely out of proportion to the intensity of the Deputy's speech or the Congress' refusal to exorcise itself of him. It was in fact much less a specific counter-measure by the Government than a reaction by the "Hard Line" faction within the military to what they perceived as an alarming drift in Brazil toward political accommodation and liberalization. In the clearest language possible a determinant group of military officials announced to the Brazilian people that it would not tolerate even a return to the oligarchic, "bourgeois republican", norms of the post-war period, especially those concerning tolerance of civil and political liberties. Following its promulgation, the Government disbanded the Federal Congress and several state legislatures, retired from the Supreme Court several of its judges, suspended the political rights of dozens of politicians and former political activists, arrested still dozens more after summary procedures, and engaged in extensive censorship of mass media. It did not immediately attack members of the academic profession, but concentrated on purges within the "political class".

Ominous signs, however, appeared during the early months of 1969. The *Ato*, itself, removed constitutional guarantees concerning Federal employment and empowered the President of the Republic to "dismiss, remove, retire or make available (*disponivel*) any (federal, state, municipal, or territorial) employees . . . with salaries proportional to their term of service." Since a vast majority of Brazil's scholars are publicly employed, the potential threat to their tenure and freedom of expression was obvious. Even more ominous were the provisions suspending *habeas corpus*, judicial review of executive decisions made under the Act, and permitting the President to decree further *Atos* at his discretion.

In a climate of widespread apprehension – stimulated by rumors of dismissals of professors and personal vendettas at provincial universities (the censored newspapers carried no mention of these events) – the Government issued Decree-Law no. 477 (February 26, 1969) which "defines disciplinary infractions practised by professors, students, employees, and workers of public and private teaching establishments." Barring strikes and stoppages, the *organization* of subversive movements, parades, marches, etc. and the production, distribution, or storage of subversive material "of any type" as well as other activities, the decree added a particularly sinister innovation by making the director of the school personally responsible for installing a inquiry in the event of a complaint and for disciplining the accused within 48 hours

"by summary procedures". Punishments are to run from a five-year prohibition of employment in the case of teaching and administrative personnel to a three-year expulsion for students with fellowship aid to be denied for five years. "In the case of foreign fellowship students, immediate expulsion from the country" is the stated punishment.

A subsequent regulation of the decree gave a more prominent role in the initiation of accusations to the Division of Security and Information of the Ministry of Education, a quasi-military, secret police unit within the Ministry. It also invited "any other authority or person" to file complaints.¹³ All investigations are to pass through this Division, which will exercise, in conjunction with the Minister, ultimate authority over judgement and sentencing.

The Forced Retirement of Professors in Rio and São Paulo. In the midst of public relations campaigns intended to "tranquilize spirits," promote a "return to political normality," and appeal to Brazilian scholars abroad to repatriate themselves, the Rio de Janeiro newspapers of April 26, 1969 carried almost without comment a list of 44 "public employees" who had been (involuntarily) retired with pay proportional to their time of service. With few exceptions, these consisted of university professors. On this first list were such prominent professors as Florestan Fernandes, José Leite Lopes, Roberto Accioli, Manuel Maurício de Albuquerque, and Eulália Maria Lannayer Lobo.

Four days later (April 30) a second and much longer list was promulgated, this one containing mostly politicians and diplomats, along with 24 professors at the University of São Paulo (USP). Again the primary target seemed to have been social scientists, e.g. Caio Prado Junior, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Octavio Ianni, Paula Beiguelman and Paulo Singer, although it also contained a number of very prominent scholars in the physical sciences and medicine.

In neither case were any specific accusations levied against the dismissed professors and researchers, nor were they given the slightest opportunity to defend themselves before or after "sentencing". The decisions came abruptly and arbitrarily - without warning to those involved and without explanation to the public at large.

The analysis of the process, motives, and consequences - to say nothing about predictions of likely future behavior - is bound to be excessively speculative in an *ambiente* such as Brazil is currently experiencing. Fragmentary data, allusions, rumors, supposition, and pure guesswork substitute for the systematic juxtaposition of multiple observations. The almost complete censorship of the newspapers insures incomplete information on the part of Government officials, as well as the affected parties and outside observers.

From a series of informal interviews and what has been available publicly, I can offer the following

speculations as to process, motive, and consequences.

Process. There were significant differences in the way in which the two lists of "retirees" were elaborated. The first was, in the opinion of all, "badly done". In at least one case, the victim (Bolívar Lamounier, a Ph.D. candidate at UCLA currently working with the Candido Mendes Research Institute), was fired from a Federal position which he had never occupied. Others seemed to have been similarly irrationally accused or selected. The principal target, however, was the teaching and research staff of the Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais (IFCS) of the Federal University of Rio. (Formerly, when I taught there in 1965-66, it was called the Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade do Brasil.)

The initiative apparently came from the investigating commission inside the Ministry of Education composed of a General and two professors, one of whom is a retired colonel. Accusations were reportedly filed against their colleagues by various radical rightist professors within the Institute and the University who had the necessary contacts with military officials and could thereby eliminate their political and personal opponents within these institutions.

The second (São Paulo) list also bears the stamp of a personal vendetta rooted in faculty politics. The then Minister of Justice, Luiz Antônio da Gama e Silva, was the former rector of USP and the victims read suspiciously like a list of his personal opponents, a group of younger professors devoted to university reform. Whereas the first list appeared suddenly, a presidential decree with little or no prior collegial evaluation, the second issued from an elaborate and publicized meeting of the National Security Council (CSN) and followed what might be called the "normal" channels of repressive policy-making.

The point to be made here is that the decisional process in contemporary Brazil has become extremely erratic and unpredictable. In some cases to get a repressive decision it suffices simply to get the ear of a highly placed military official. In other cases an elaborate formal procedure is followed involving deliberation by the whole Cabinet, although inside information on the CSN meeting indicated that none of the civilian Ministers dared question Gama e Silva's list and that the meeting itself was a mere formality. It is widely believed that civilian ministers and state governors even within their specific policy sector or geographic area, are not capable or influential enough to prevent repressive initiatives emanating from military sources. The Minister of Education was reliably reported not to have known of the first list before it was published in the papers; the Governor of São Paulo was informed of the second list by the radio report.

Motives. From the preceding description, it would appear that private objectives rooted in internal

faculty disputes played an important role. Nevertheless, certain interesting "coincidences" suggest other possible motives. The "retired" professors had two characteristics in common: (1) They were almost invariably among the most popular with students; (2) They were strongly committed to and active in university reform. As a group they certainly could not be (and indeed were not) accused of flagrant leftism or subversion. There is no evidence of any organizational links with opposition groups or radical ideological convictions on the part of the group as a whole. The presence of a certain number of scientists of well-known apolitical leanings but who "suffered" from their popularity with students and their interest in modernizing their respective faculties confirms in the minds of many observers what seemed to be the ulterior motives behind the repressive acts. Also many more obviously leftist professors who were less popular or active in university reform were unscathed by the purge.

The fact that social scientists were especially hard-hit has convinced many that the military are especially wary about undergraduate instruction in these disciplines. One informant reported knowledge of an internal report in the Superior War School which concluded that social science was too "intoxicating" for undergraduates and, therefore, should not be taught, although no objections were raised against research or graduate instruction.

The initial concentration of effort on the Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais in Rio de Janeiro was also a clear indication of the Government's intention to punish professors sympathetic to student protest demands. Students of the IFCS had been particularly active in the demonstrations of last year; its directory had been periodically harassed by accusation, military interrogation, and even a bomb explosion in front of their building in Botafogo, largely on the vague grounds of promoting student political activism. It was, not jokingly, accused of being the "Nanterre Carioca."

Consequences. Of course, the most immediate one, has been the stoppage of much of the country's important research in the physical and medical sciences, the complete collapse of the Social Science Institute in Rio de Janeiro, and the paralysis of the Faculty of Philosophy in São Paulo. In the latter case, students spontaneously went on strike (without, of course, calling it such). A Committee for the Defense and Autonomy of USP was formed with the ludicrously cautious assertion that it was "with apolitical character". In Rio de Janeiro the response has been less concerted and more anomic – a sort of diffuse feeling of anger, fear, and helplessness.

The Probable Future. The dreariest scenario suggested that these events were only the tip of an iceberg – the first move in a carefully calculated, "salami-slicing", tactic aimed ultimately at destroying the independent academic life of the country, especially in the social sciences, by eliminating one

group of scholars after another. Based on a meticulous "cost-benefit" analysis, the hard line military would single out a certain marginal set of victims, remove them while the others who remain relatively unaffected by the first slice simply wait their turn. Backing this interpretation were some of the ideological pronouncements and expressions of objectives put out by the military, the statement of the Justice Minister that "the punishments have no quantitative limit and are going to reach all sectors of national life"; the failure of the Governor of São Paulo to appoint as new rector of USP the name most voted on by the University Council as traditionally had been the case, and the strange notices that military officers have been insisting on their right to enter the universities to take courses and degrees without taking the usual entrance examination.

The second scenario depicted the Costa e Silva regime as exceedingly narrowly-based, vulnerable to military factionalism, hopelessly confused, following contradictory and self-defeating policies (e.g. publicly promoting an elaborate university reform bill and then expelling most of the professors interested in the reform; attempting to close the technological gap à la Servan-Schreiber and then forcing the most dynamic and original researchers to resign), and completely lacking a predictable, logical decision-making structure. Decisions emerged from a variety of sources based on a puzzling combination of individual initiative, personal vendetta, military support, and infighting between cliques within the regime – with no apparent method or madness. The President, Costa e Silva, was viewed as basically a weak figure who had to permit a great deal of delegation of decisional autonomy, (although the President must ultimately sign all decrees) and who was kept deliberately ill-informed by a tight circle of rightist military advisors and a bland, thoroughly censored press.

In either scenario, the future of academic freedom and original research in Brazil seemed grim. Whether they came as part of a careful plan or as the result of vengeful, isolated initiatives, everyone anticipated further "retirements" of university personnel. A sense of impending doom coupled with helplessness, but so far not accompanied by panic, penetrated all areas of intellectual endeavor. For a country with an enviable past record for tolerance and the protection of civil liberties, it was a sad tale. For a researcher who was returning to Brazil for the first time in three years, it had been a shocking experience.

Epilogue. The remaining months of the Costa e Silva regime⁴ unfortunately confirmed the pessimistic prediction that the April-May events of 1969 were only the beginning of an attempt to destroy independent intellectual inquiry in Brazil. As the President's grip on executive decision-making weakened steadily, the number and variety of repressive acts by the military and "political police" increased. The two major university centers spared in the first round of "retirements" were purged. In

Minas Gerais, over a dozen professors lost their positions, including Júlio Barbosa, head of the Political Science Department and director of the Ford Foundation's Minas project.⁵ In Rio Grande do Sul, twenty-eight were forcibly retired, again without charges or chance to defend themselves. In fact, the "crime" of eight of these was merely to have signed a letter expressing their solidarity with the twenty victims of the first purge list. Again, the director of the Ford Foundation sponsored political science program, Leônidas Xausa, was dismissed. Even the pattern of dismissal was similar: no warning, a politically heterogeneous list which included acknowledged conservatives and *apoliticals*, mostly promoters of university reform who had been popular with students and a heavy emphasis on social scientists.

Personal denunciations to military authorities again played a crucial role. In addition to these collective purges, individual scholars such as Rio sociology professor and labor lawyer, Evaristo de Moraes Filho, have been suddenly and involuntarily retired. Rumors of similar acts against professors at less accessible universities (e.g. Paraná and Goiás) are rife but difficult to document. Now that the faculties have been purged of their tenured dissidents, the subservient remainder have begun to refuse to rehire younger, non-tenured professors. All new hirings reportedly must be preceded by security clearances and several recently returned students with Ph.D.s from American universities have found these difficult to obtain, although at least two finally were appointed.

Nor did the Fifth Institutional Act put an end to new repressive decrees aimed at the academic community. One major source of initial ambiguity was whether or not the government would prevent "retired" professors from teaching in private institutions or doing research on projects with public funding. The Complementary Act No. 77 (October 22, 1969) put an end to uncertainty and barred them from all teaching positions, public or private, and from all projects which receive government support of which "concern national security". This apparently has had an impact on hiring at the supposedly independent Fundação Getúlio Vargas in Rio, although some private universities and research institutions continue to hire and contract "retired" scholars.

With the coming to power of General Medici in October of last year another wave of optimism swept the country. He initially promised an effort to return Brazil to democracy by the end of his term of office (1974) and publicly admitted what everyone knew privately, that police torture had become commonplace, and announced his intention to put a stop to it. Nevertheless, Medici refused to discuss an amnesty or to rescind the Fifth Institutional Act thereby restoring rights of *habeas corpus*, with the argument that "the coexistence of (the constitutional and exceptional) juridical orders is indispensable". Instead, he prohibited all comment and reporting on torture cases in December 1969 and decreed a very strict Censorship Law in February

1970. Although a later regulation of the Law exempted "philosophic, scientific and pedagogical books" from prior censorship it is not yet clear how effectively this distinction will be maintained. I can testify from personal experience that book publishers are very reluctant to take chances on social science texts and monographs. Finally, to put a definitive end to optimistic speculation about liberalization, after four months in office, he publicly retracted his earlier promise and announced that "The revolutionary state will last as long as it takes to implant the political, administrative, juridical, social and economic structures capable of raising all Brazilians to a minimum level of well-being".⁷

Since General Medici's ascent to office, there has been something of a lull in the persecution of academics. Of course, much of the dirty work had been done feverishly in the months before and the "revolutionary government" can now rely on the prudence and subservience of those left in senior positions to purge dissident *assistentes* and deny access to "unreliable" newcomers.⁸ Nevertheless, purged scholars have been permitted to work, provided they have no contact with students or refrain from tackling controversial national issues. In fact, their "collaboration" has been welcomed in such innocuous areas as city planning. Financially, one of them confided to me, they are better off in private *consultorias* than previously in poorly-paid university positions, but it was frustrating not to be able to work on the problems they wanted to.

A particularly portentous decision is currently (March 1970) shaping up over the trial, by military tribunal, of Caio Prado Junior, an eminent economic historian. For the first time, the regime is persecuting a university professor beyond "mere" loss of employment. He is being charged with a crime against national security not for his latest book, *A Revolução Brasileira*, but for an interview he gave to a student newspaper defending this work against ultra-leftist attacks! Dr. Prado, who is 63, could be sentenced to from one to three years in jail. A group of American social scientists has formed to defend him,⁹ as did a similar group when the purges began in the spring of 1969. So far, however, the Brazilian military have shown no sensitivity to such appeals from international public opinion.

Independent inquiry in the social sciences stands officially accused in Brazil of exerting a subversive influence on the minds of the citizenry. Its best practitioners have been persecuted; its emerging teaching and research capacity has been partially destroyed.¹⁰ Ironically, the military rulers are well aware of the need for the sort of data and analytical skills which only social scientists can provide in order to attain their twin goals of "national security" and controlled modernization. They have even commissioned a great deal of research to be done - while persecuting those who are best equipped to do it.

One possible way out of this dilemma, a way to obtain the information without incurring the political costs of training potentially non-subservient

scholars, is to hire outsiders, i.e. foreigners, to do it. It is in this light that one might interpret Decree No. 65057 (August 26, 1969) instituting for the first time in contemporary Latin America, *y compris* Cuba, a comprehensive system of controls over all research carried out in the country. All persons, national or foreign, must apply for permission to the National Research Council (CNPq) which in turn must seek the approval of the National Security Council (CNS) in all cases ambiguously related to "national security". Foreigners must make a very detailed application 180 days in advance, mentioning the project's objectives, research methods, persons to be consulted or interviewed, Brazilian collaborators, etc. If approved (and several applications have been stalled with demands for further information), the Research Council will designate a Brazilian national to "supervise" the project.¹¹ Final results of all projects must be turned over to the government.

Were this a different regime, one might applaud certain aspects of the decree as a means for curbing much of the excessive, unilaterally exploitive practices of many Americans who have mined Latin American data for export only. In the hands of this regime, it is likely to mean that whole areas of the country, e.g. the Amazon basin and other "zones of national security", will be placed "off limits" and that numerous topics of political or social sensitivity will be simply banned. Obviously, collaborative work with "retired" scholars is not likely to be tolerated. Until it becomes clear how Brazilian counterparts will be chosen, e.g. they may be selected from the country's large supply of "asesores pedagógicos" who act as police informers within the university, and what is meant by "final results", e.g. it might be extended to include confidential interview notes or survey questionnaires, not much research of social significance is likely to be initiated. I hope I am correct in assuming that there are few American scholars who would become party to a scheme designed to replace "national subversives" with "subservient foreigners".

1 For descriptive and interpretive material on the March 30-April 1, 1964 Coup see Richard R. Fagen and Wayne A. Cornelius (eds.), *Political Power in Latin America: Seven Confrontations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 155-227.

2 According to a recent article by Joseph Novitski in the *New York Times* (February 9, 1970) there were approximately 1,116 "non-persons" whose political rights had been suspended for ten years by the three "revolutionary" regimes.

3 This system of institutionalized denunciation within educational establishments operates somewhat independently of the other national security services - all of which also have their agents posted in classrooms. I was told of one professor in Sao Paulo who was fired when he publicly protested the frequent interruption of his classes by political police agents arresting students!

4 Costa e Silva suffered an incapacitating heart attack. After a tense and prolonged interregnum by *junta*, the Armed Forces High Command managed to agree on a candidate, General Emilio Garrastazu Medici, and imposed him as president on October 1969, constitutional provisions to the contrary notwithstanding.

5 Frank Bonilla of Stanford University was visiting professor at the Minas project. In solidarity with his colleagues he formally resigned his post, although he continues to reside and work informally with students in Belo Horizonte.

6 Verified and detailed accounts of torture began pouring out of Brazil in late 1969. For examples, see *The New Republic*, August 2, 1969; *Newsweek*, December 8, 1969; *Le Monde*, October 2, 1969 and October 16, 1969; *Der Spiegel*, December 15, 1969; *Mensaje* (Santiago de Chile), January-February 1970; *New York Times*, March 5, 1970. The latter incident occurred five months after Medici was inaugurated. By far the best single account of the intellectual climate in Brazil is José Iglesias "Report from Brazil: What the Left is Saying", *New York Times Magazine*, December 7, 1969. Iglesias specifically describes the repressive situation at the Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais in Rio.

7 *New York Times*, March 2, 1970.

8 An informant told me of one instance when the remaining tenured personnel were so afraid that no candidate was forthcoming for the post of the "retired" rector of the faculty. He had been such an acknowledged conservative that no one, regardless of his political views, felt safe in the job. The Rector of the University had to call them into his office and threaten them all with denunciation before they managed to come up with a candidate.

9 Stanley J. Stein of Princeton, Richard M. Morse of Yale, Charles Wagley of Columbia and Thomas Skidmore of Wisconsin have solicited support from other American scholars in an attempt to convince the Brazilian government of the injustice of the charge against Caio Prado Junior.

10 Partially, only because surprisingly few Brazilian intellectuals have gone into exile - unlike Argentines in 1965. Most have chosen to stay, working in private organizations and quasi-public research institutions where possible. Stepped-up support, especially from the Ford Foundation, has been very important in keeping research and teaching from collapsing completely.

11 The Decree instructs all government officials to denounce "to the relevant authorities" (read political police) all cases in which researchers deviate from their originally approved design.