

A Brazilian Congressional Representative Speaks Out

Márcio Moreira Alves

In Brazil, 1968 was marked by massive student demonstrations and their frequent repression by the police and military, events that showcased and fueled growing opposition to the military government. The death of a student at the hands of the police in March inspired an enormous wave of protests across the country. In June, a series of particularly violent police acts against student demonstrations led church officials, musical celebrities, and others to join students in Rio de Janeiro in protest. In August, when police in Brasília raided the University of Brasília campus, dragging students and professors out of their classrooms and destroying laboratories and libraries, Congressman Márcio Moreira Alves of the opposition Brazilian Democratic Movement denounced the repression. Alves had long been a thorn in the military regime's side, investigating and denouncing state torture in 1964 as a journalist, then running for and winning federal office in 1966. Following the events in Brasília, he delivered the following speech in the Chamber of Deputies, vehemently criticizing the police action and proposing that women take up a sexual boycott against military men, an idea that harkened back to the Greek comedy Lysistrata.

Although the speech generated little public commentary at the time, it led to a firestorm within the military. Copies of the speech quietly circulated within military circles, and soon thereafter Congress received a formal request that Alves's parliamentary immunity be revoked so that he might be tried for offending the armed forces. Congress voted against the measure on December 12, and Institutional Act No. 5 was announced the following day. One of its many provisions was the closure of Congress.

Mr. President, Fellow Congressional Representatives: Everyone recognizes, or says they recognize, that the majority of the armed forces do not agree with the militaristic leadership that perpetuates violent acts and keeps this country in a state of oppression. Since the events in Brasília, I believe, we have reached a great moment of unity for democracy. This is also a moment for boycott. Brazilian mothers have already staged protests; all social classes shout their repudiation of this violence. However, this is not enough. What needs to be established—especially by women; the wives of ARENA



Students being arrested at the University of Brasília in 1968. Courtesy of Acervo Última Hora, Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo.

congressmen are beginning to do this in this house—is a boycott of militarism. September 7 [Independence Day] is coming up. The militaristic leadership is seeking to exploit the people's deep sense of patriotism and will ask schoolchildren to parade alongside the torturers of students. Each father, each mother, will have to understand that their child's presence in this parade helps the tyrants who beat them and machine gun them in the streets. Therefore, may all of them boycott this parade! This boycott can also be extended—speaking again of women—to the girls, to those who dance with the cadets and date the young officers. It is necessary that today in Brazil the women of 1968 imitate the warlike Paulistas of the Emboabas and deny entrance to their homes to those who revile the nation. They must refuse to accept those who keep silent and thereby serve as accomplices. Disagreeing in silence accomplishes little. What is needed is to revolt against the abuses of the armed forces by speaking and acting in the name of the abused.

I believe, Mr. President, that it is possible to resolve this farce, this dictatorship disguised as a democracy [*democratura*], this false understanding, by a boycott. As long as those responsible remain silent, any and all contact between civilians and military personnel ought to cease, because only in that way will it be possible to force this country to return to democracy. Only in that way will we be able to make the silent ones, those who do not support their leaders' abuse of power, follow the magnificent example of the fourteen officials of Crete, who had the courage and the manliness to publicly demonstrate against an illegal and arbitrary act by one of their superiors.

Translated by Victoria Langland