

# Brazil: Assessing The Debate 10

## by Christopher Roper

The Brazilian ambassador's reply to the Dominican friars' 'Accusation from Prison' is a mixture of a competent parliamentary answer to a difficult question and the honest reaction of a great number of middle-class Brazilians, who genuinely feel that their country is the victim of an international propaganda campaign.

Before attempting any kind of summary of the present position, it is necessary to weed out the actual inaccuracies in the arguments put forward by the two sides (like the Brazilian ambassador, I am avoiding any discussion of the role of the Church in the world).

### *On the Dominican side:*

'The first signs of a change that endangered the privileges of the ruling classes produced armed forces in the streets. . . .'

This description of the events of 1964 is rather too generous to ex-President Joao Goulart, who was and is the playboy owner of an enormous fortune and vast estates, both equally ill-gotten within the system which the Dominicans so deplore. He certainly made substantial concessions—like his former patron and mentor Getulio Vargas—to certain organized sectors of the working class, but it seems very doubtful whether he could have been a harbinger of real change. He is now propping up the sagging economy of Uruguay, being that country's largest private taxpayer.

' . . . of every thousand children who start primary school, only one reaches university.'

This is an extremely imprecise statement, which the ambassador fastens on without giving an alternative figure, but to which generation of children does it refer? The ambassador's figures for university enrolment are less impressive when compared with the high proportion of Brazil's 90 million inhabitants under 15 years of age.

' . . . when there are no elections . . . '

The ambassador rightly points out that there have been congressional elections in November. He does not mention the fact that only the official ruling party ARENA and the official opposition party MDB are allowed to compete. The MDB is about as far left as the British Labour Party.

### *On the Ambassador's side:*

'If a trend can be detected, it is towards more State control in the so-called infrastructural areas of the economy.'

This, of course, begs the question because if the State is controlled by the industrialists and managed for the benefit of the middle class, then it becomes merely an extension of capitalist enterprise. An

ardent US advocate of 'free enterprise' said in Washington last week: 'One should remember that substantial public sector investments are in infrastructure which result in new investment opportunities for the private entrepreneur.'

'Brazil is a developing country that requires, to accelerate its "take-off", a massive inflow of foreign investment and know-how.'

This is just arguable, but it certainly shouldn't be set down as an incontrovertible fact. Some of the most respected, non-marxist and marxist, development economists argue today that foreign investment and know-how may actually impede a country's economic development.<sup>1</sup> Walt Rostow's 'take-off' economics are in fact thoroughly discredited in all but the most North American circles—take-off for where?

'To refer to preservation and stagnation in Brazil is a rather naïve technique . . .'

As far as I can discover, the Dominicans did not use either of these words. I am sure they would argue that the oppression and greed of the Brazilian middle class was extremely dynamic.

' . . . not more than 500 people arrested in Brazil for reasons that cannot in any circumstances be labelled as political . . .'

The ambassador does not mention the 4,000 arrests of lawyers, artists and writers during the week before the elections—presumably because they were released again a week or so later. Nevertheless, it does seem as though some abridgement of liberty was involved.

'The Press is free and critical when necessary; foreign newspapers circulate . . .'

As in England control over the media is almost inextricably involved with capitalist enterprises of one kind and another. Furthermore, the newspapers practise a form of self-censorship which goes even further than anything we manage in this country. Not even the ambassador can bring himself to say that 'all foreign newspapers circulate freely'. They circulate so long as they are not 'subversive'.

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All this may seem to be very hostile to the ambassador and in a sense it is easier to attack the ambassador than the friars. They are attacking a structure of society which has always existed, without really explaining what they would do in the face of Brazil's massive problems. He represents the government in power, coping with day-to-day problems according to their lights, morally no worse than any British government, and like any politician the ambassador is claiming benefits under his system which simply do not exist.

He is quite correct in saying that the government is concerned about torture by the police and unofficial 'justice' imposed by death squads. It is concerned, just as the British government was 'concerned' about Hola camp, and the French were 'concerned' about torture in

<sup>1</sup>See Jonathan Power's article in this issue. (Ed.)

Algeria. They are probably more concerned than they would have been if the 'subversives' had not succeeded in whipping up an international scandal.

However, I do think readers should be aware that if they reject the ambassador's arguments, then they are rejecting the way in which our own national strength and wealth were built up during the nineteenth century, and the way in which Japan's national wealth is being created today. They are rejecting the systems of social control, which have long been applied in almost every western educational and political system. The Catholic left in Latin America is very left wing indeed. A Chilean discussing his country's new government recently put the Christian Democrat splinter group MAPU to the left of its socialist and communist partners in the spectrum of the Frente de Unidad Popular. The Ambassador is not a Nazi-Fascist monster, unless you believe that every British Prime Minister this century has been a Nazi-Fascist monster.

## **Northern Ireland—Dismantling the Protestant State**

by Kevin Boyle

The past two years in Northern Ireland have been a time of intense political activity among its one-and-a-half million people. The frequency and intensity of street violence has ensured international publicity and attention. Yet the causes underlying the disturbances remain much misunderstood at home and abroad.

It is a trite but necessary beginning to emphasize that the Irish problem is not one of religion. It is true that religious denomination neatly divides the political positions. Unionists are Protestant, non-Unionists Catholics. But however compelling it is to see the intermittent guerrilla warfare in Belfast or Derry in terms of Catholics and Protestants it must be resisted. These confrontations may have little formal political character, but in a real sense they represent a clash of different political forces; the resistance of a complex post-colonial social structure to new economic and social influences from within and without.

Put another way, the Civil Rights campaign and the British Government's involvement in that campaign and its aftermath represent attempts to dismantle, what had, under strain, become a semi-fascist state, and to replace it with something approaching